



1994

Robert S. Abbott's Response to Education for African-Americans Via the Chicago Defender, 1909-1940

Charlesetta Maria Ellis
Loyola University Chicago

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ellis, Charlesetta Maria, "Robert S. Abbott's Response to Education for African-Americans Via the Chicago Defender, 1909-1940" (1994). *Dissertations*. 3431.

https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/3431

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#).
Copyright © 1994 Charlesetta Maria Ellis

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

ROBERT S. ABBOTT'S RESPONSE TO EDUCATION
FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS VIA THE CHICAGO DEFENDER, 1909-1940

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF
LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

BY
CHARLESETTA MARIA ELLIS

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

JANUARY 1994

Copyright by Charlesetta M. Ellis, 1993
All rights reserved.

To Mother, Vanessa, and Melvin

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author respectfully acknowledges the countless number of individuals who encouraged the research and writing of this dissertation. The task would have been impossible to complete without the facilitation of Dr. Joan K. Smith. Her guidance and patience are appreciated. Sincere gratitude is also extended to the remaining supportive members of the dissertation committee, Dr. John M. Wozniak and Dr. Seldon D. Strother. A special salute goes out to the staff of the Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Carter G. Woodson Regional Library, and especially to the late Edward Manney. The author also wishes to recognize the Reverend Charles Hoskins, Director of St. Matthews Episcopal Church, Savannah, Georgia for his valued assistance. To the staffs of the Joseph Regenstein Library, Special Collections; the archivists of the Archives and Manuscripts Department, Chicago Historical Society; and Loyola of Chicago libraries thanks for your splendid service.

Finally, it is with great affection that the author acknowledges her family and friends for their support.

VITA

Charlesetta Maria Ellis was born in St. Louis, Missouri. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree, With Honors, from the University of Illinois at Chicago in 1971. In 1977, she completed requirements for a Master of Science in Urban Education degree, with Endorsements in Administration and Supervision, from Chicago State University.

Ms. Ellis entered the field of teaching in 1972. During her sixteen years of service with the Chicago public schools, she has taught both intermediate and upper grade levels. She also was employed as an assistant principal and teacher facilitator. She has served as a graduate assistant for Loyola University's ELPS department, a coordinator for the institution's University Press Values and Ethics Series, and a lecturer (1991). She also has taught at Northern Illinois University.

Currently, she is an assistant professor for the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, School of Education, at Chicago State University.

Ms. Ellis is a member of Phi Delta Kappa, the Midwest Society of History, the Midwest Society of Philosophy, and the International Society for Educational Biography. She has presented one paper, "Robert S. Abbott: Town Crier, 1868-1940" in Toronto, Canada (1991) for the International Society for Educational Biography.

PREFACE

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine Robert S. Abbott's position regarding the societal problems that plagued the black community during his stewardship of the Chicago Defender. In particular, the researcher has focused on his response to and action on the issue of formal and informal education for African Americans. Within Chapter I, the reader will find a profile of Abbott's family members and his childhood days. Chapter II contains a vignette of Abbott's adult life. In Chapter III, the researcher has included information that explains Abbott's initial response to schooling for African Americans during the early years of the Defender. Chapter IV delineates Abbott's growing concerns regarding the problem of racial discrimination in education. This chapter also highlights Abbott's romantic life and his encounter with William Randolph Hearst.

The reader will find in Chapter V material that examines Abbott's vigilance relevant to "Jim Crow" and the American school system. Subsequently, in Chapter VI the researcher has concentrated on Abbott's philosophy of education.

This section also includes his ideas about cultural and morality training for the black community.

As a Chicago resident, the researcher's initial interest regarding the operation of the Chicago Defender began when she was a high school student. At the time, she wanted to know more about the investigative techniques of the newspaper's staff and their selection process for news worthy items. It was not until she entered graduate school that the researcher became intrigued with the character of the publication's founder. Hence, throughout the research and writing of this dissertation she has endeavored to capture Abbott's unique personality and style.

This task has been a difficult one because of the limited availability of primary sources such as diaries and personal papers. Nevertheless, the researcher was able to construct a viable treatise by utilizing the Defender as her chief origin of information. In so doing, she has applied the process of "criticism data." By employing this technique which involves the application of external and internal criticisms the researcher was able to confirm the authenticity of certain documents, validate the literal meaning of specific content of the subject's written

material, and document the truthfulness and reliability of the subject's spoken words. For example, the genuineness of Abbott's birth was validated through baptismal records from St. Stephens Episcopal Church (now called St. Matthews) of Savannah, Georgia. This event was also corroborated by the subject via a 16 March 1940 Defender autobiographical series.

The bulk of the remaining primary data such as the subject's personal comments and opinions were taken from articles, speeches, and editorials written for the Chicago Defender.

With regards to the researcher's use of internal criticism, after determining that the documents were genuine the researcher first applied the technique of positive criticism by interpreting the subject's opinions and ideas in an unbiased manner. In short, the subject's words were not taken out of context. The researcher also relied upon the literal meaning of the subject's writings to reveal his attitudes and emotions pertinent to his concerns. Because Abbott did not use fables or allegories to express his value judgments, it is the opinion of this researcher that there were no hidden meanings in the released writings of the subject.

Under the heading of negative criticism, the test of truthfulness and reliability of the subject's written word bears scrutiny. For instance, the researcher found that not all information contained in the subject's medium of communication, the Defender, could be relied upon for accuracy. One classic example relevant to this circumstance involves the subject's method of assessing the popularity of his publication over the years through claims of increased sales. Similarly, many incidents of racial strife and/or acts of discrimination reported by the subject's media were obtained via secondhand information.

Despite, these shortcomings the writer of this dissertation hopes that the reader will be able to gain valuable information from her research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ii
VITA iii
PREFACE v

Chapter

I. THE FAMILY HISTORY OF ROBERT S. ABBOTT 1

A Look At Father Thomas Abbott
and family

A Glimpse of Mother Flora Butler
and Family

A Profile of the Marriage and Life of
Thomas Abbott and Flora Butler

A Portrait of Stepfather
John H. H. Sengstacke and Family

A Profile of the Marriage and
Life of John H. H. Sengstacke and
Flora Butler Abbott

The Childhood and Young Adult
Memories of Robert S. Abbott

II. A VIGNETTE OF THE ADULT LIFE OF
ROBERT S. ABBOTT 47

Abbott's Choice of Careers

African Americans Recognize the Need
for the Black Press

Abbott Starts the Chicago Defender

A Look at Black Press Competition

John H. Smiley Becomes an Agent of
Change for the Chicago Defender

III. ACADEMIC REPORTING (1910-1915) 76

School News Becomes Important

Abbott's Role in Politics and
His Selection of Politicians

Abbott Explains His Views on
Morality Training

Abbott Establishes His Philosophy
of Education

The Philosophy of Change Through
Education as a Component of Equal
Opportunity

Robert S. Abbott is Overtaken
by Death

EPILOGUE	233
APPENDIX A	246
APPENDIX B	247
APPENDIX C	248
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	249

CHAPTER I

THE FAMILY HISTORY OF ROBERT S. ABBOTT

Robert S. Abbott founder, editor, and publisher of the Chicago Defender has been acclaimed by many African-Americans as the crusading journalist of the black press. As an ardent champion of human rights and a dauntless fighter for equality and justice, Abbott felt compelled to devote his life to the cause of freedom for the oppressed. For thirty-five years he used his newspaper as an instrument to eliminate racial discrimination. There were no social, political, or educational issues pertinent to the black community that escaped his scrutiny.

A Look at Father Thomas Abbott and Family

Robert S. Abbott was born 28 November 1868 in the town of Frederick, St. Simons Island, Georgia. However, he believed throughout his life that his birth date was 24 November 1870.¹ His parents, Thomas Abbott and Flora Butler Abbott, were former slaves. Thomas Abbott and his family were direct descendants of Ibos. This tribe had at one time inhabited a large area of Africa known as Ibo country:

The Abbotts evidently were of Ibo stock. Newspaper

¹Baptismal records from the St. Stephens Episcopal Church (now St. Matthews) Savannah, Georgia indicate his date of birth as 28 November 1868. St. Stephens Episcopal Church, "Record of Baptisms," (Parish Record, 1859-1872), 64.

advertisements of slave auctions indicate that the slave cargoes arriving at St. Simons Island came mainly from the West African areas, and contained mostly people of the Ibo country (now part of Nigeria), who were noted in Africa for their independence, initiative, political sense and love of travel--characteristics Robert displayed.²

The Abbotts arrived in the New World shortly after their future slave masters, the Stevens, had acquired land on St. Simons Islands. This arrival occurred some thirty-four years after the passage of Georgia's Slave Act. Beginning in 1738, Georgia had unsuccessfully petitioned England twice for the right to introduce alcoholic beverages and black slaves into the colony. "Thanks to the agitation of men like the Reverend George Whitefield and his friend, James Habersham, the third petition in 1749 brought the repeal of the hated prohibition against Negroes in 1750."³ The colony adopted its slave code in 1755.

While in bondage, Thomas labored as a house servant for the Stevens' plantation. The ancestral origins of the Stevens are obscured. Most of the planters on St. Simons Island were of English, French, Irish, or Scottish extraction. The Stevens had settled on the island in 1784. In 1840, Young Master Charles married Lady Sarah Dorothy Hall of England and returned with her to his father's plantation. The early

²Roi Ottley, The Lonely Warrior: The Life and Times of Robert S. Abbott (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1955), 20.

³John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans, 3rd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, Inc., 1967), 84.

settlers of St. Simons Island were described as a cosmopolitan lot whose commonalities went beyond their European ancestry. Many were graduates of prestigious English universities such as Oxford. Before leaving the Continent, some had held impressive positions such as statesmen while others had been high ranking military officers. However, once they settled on the island their prime concern became agriculture. The settlers shared joint interests in the arts, philosophy, and religion. Although, the island's aristocrats were few in numbers those planters who were successful with their sea cotton harvest made a handsome profit. The Stevens were among this minority. Their wealth allowed them to enjoy the comforts of southern gentility.

Thomas Abbott was the Stevens' chief butler. He was described as a stately well proportioned ebony man who as "headman" in charge of the male house servants ruled his black charges with a tyrannical hand; and yet he possessed an instinctive social understanding of the intimate subtleties of white southern gentry. "He had complete charge of the male servants, waiters, coachmen, gardeners, body servants, handymen, and errand boys. His manners were always courteous, dignified, sometimes even elegant."⁴ The plantation's master, Captain Stevens, valued Thomas' loyalty and considered him as the most trusted member of the Stevens' household.

Fortunate in the sense that their master was a gentle

⁴Ottley, 19.

hearted man, Thomas and the majority of his relatives lived a pampered existence as privileged house servants. Robert S. Abbott's biographer Roi Ottley, former historian for the Chicago Defender, revealed that the only member of the Abbott clan to suffer the hardships of slavery was Thomas' sister Charlotte. She was relegated to the "demeaning" position of field hand:

Service in the Big House, as distinguished from field labor, was a family privilege conferred on Robert's folks, positions descending from father to son, from mother to daughter. Thus, his uncle Randolph was the body servant of Captain Stevens and was held accountable for his master's safety, whether he was hunting, fishing, gambling, or involved in drinking bouts; his uncle George was the coachman and doubled as gardener; his aunt Celia was Mrs. Stevens' personal maid; his aunt Mary was the nurse; and his youngest aunt Charlotte, intriguing to men as she was disturbing to women, was capriciously banished to the fields.⁵

Unlike many slaves during this era, Thomas and his relatives were allowed to attend church. Captain Stevens even encouraged their desire for formal education. Ottley's comments on this unusual master/slave relationship suggested that: "Captain Stevens, perhaps had observed early that mild indulgences, such as permitting them to attend church services and to learn to read and write was the only method for dealing with slaves, especially those with Robert's folk's sort of background."⁶ Captain Stevens acknowledged the service given to him by Thomas in many ways. Among them was providing his

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., 19-20

"headman" with more than the rudiments of schooling. "His master, during bondage and after emancipation, taught him surveying."⁷

At the onslaught of the Civil War in 1861, the master of Stevens' Manor in keeping with the tradition of southern gentry joined the Confederate army:

Like all affluent Southerners, he took along his body servant, Robert's uncle Randolph, to wash his clothes, polish his swords and boots, cut his hair, oil guns and groom his horse. Between chores, Randolph even had a fling at the fighting.⁸

While the Civil War raged in the South, Thomas believed that it was his duty to remain loyal to the Stevens. On more than one occasion, he was called upon by Mistress Sarah to protect the manor's valuables at the risk of his demise from marauding Union troops.

Captain Stevens was captured early during the war and died of pneumonia while he was held prisoner in a Virginia Union internment camp. After the War had ended, the surviving members of the Stevens' family were so impressed with the Abbotts' valor that as a gesture of appreciation they gave them land and several cabins which had belonged to the Stevens for a generation. Many years later during the 1930s Great Depression Thomas's son, Robert S. Abbott, after gaining fortune and fame as a successful newspaper entrepreneur

⁷Robert S. Abbott, "Quest for Equality: An Autobiography," 1st Installment, Chicago Defender, 16 March 1940, p. 1.

⁸Ottley, 20.

repaid this debt of gratitude incurred by his father's family by responding to an urgent plea from the descendants of Captain Stevens for financial assistance. This support continued for several years after the Great Depression. According to Ottley:

The family comprised six persons a mother, two daughters, and two grandchildren, plus a husband. During the depression, they appealed to Abbott for financial help. Not only did he respond generously, but afterwards helped to educate their children. For like his father, Thomas, he felt a loyalty and sense of responsibility to these people when they were faced with extreme difficulties.⁹

On the day of the United States' slave liberation (1865), Thomas Abbott was in his fortieth year. He had been a slave since birth, but he was now restless and yearned to travel. As a freed man, he left St. Simons Island for the city of Savannah. There were several family members who followed Thomas' lead in relocating. However, Thomas' brother, Randolph who had accompanied his master to war, married and chose to remain on the island. "He had three sons Joseph, Thomas and Bristol."¹⁰

Thomas' sisters Mary and Charlotte also relocated to Savannah. Mary decided to live with her "spinster" sister Celia who had moved to Savannah in 1853 after purchasing her freedom from the Stevens. Celia was now the operator of an exclusive hair salon on "fashionable" South Broad Street.

⁹Ibid., 362.

¹⁰Ibid., 22.

Celia's hair salon serviced only white customers. Charlotte's husband and two daughters, Anna and Charlotte joined her in Savannah. The two girls were born while Charlotte was still in bondage.

A Glimpse of Mother Flora Butler and Family

The mother of Robert S. Abbott, Flora Butler Abbott, was the offspring of Portuguese West African slaves who were brought to the shores of North America while in their teens. Flora was born in Savannah, Georgia, 4 December 1847. Her father, Jacob Butler, was the property of an undistinguished but industrious family who managed a paint store in the Savannah area. Like the master of his future son-in-law, Thomas Abbott, Jacob's master also taught his prized slave a trade. However, unlike the Stevens' and Abbotts' master/slave relationship, Jacob's skill as a house painter and decorator helped to supplement his master's income. Master Butler would lend Jacob to various Savannah families for the sole purpose of his trade. Earnings from his labor generally netted his master between two hundred to four hundred dollars annually. John Hope Franklin has said of this kind of master/slave arrangement:

Many owners realized the wisdom of training their slaves in the trades, for their earning power would be greatly enhanced; and if the slave was ever offered for sale he would perhaps bring twice as much as a field hand of a similar age would

bring.¹¹

Jacob Butler earned a handsome income for his master, but he was not allowed to keep the bulk of his earnings. However, in appreciation for his labor his master gave him a small weekly allowance. From this allowance Jacob was able to save enough money, over a period of years, to purchase his freedom and that of his wife and children. As a freedman, he applied the trade he had learned from his master to support his family. Although, Jacob had earned his freedom by way of his skills this freedom did not gain for him the social acceptance of the black servant class. Because he was not a house servant his trade as a painter was deemed as lacking prestige. The black servant class, especially the Abbott clan, considered him nothing more than a "common" field hand.

Jacob's wife, Harriet Butler, and the couple's six children before he purchased their freedom did not live with him. Harriet and the couple's brood which included, Flora, Jacob Jr., Priscilla, Abram, Harriet, and Levester were in bondage to the Falligant family. Harriet Butler's duty as a slave was to serve as the Falligant family's "mammy."

In 1859, when the couple's daughter, Flora, reached the age of twelve years, she was taken from the plantation of the senior Master Falligant and given by him to his married son, young Master John Falligant. While in bondage to young Master John, Flora served as "nursemaid" to his three children

¹¹Franklin, 196.

Electa, Fannie, and Isabelle. Young John Falligant's plantation occupied a parcel of swamp land which after the Civil War became the site for Savannah's State College for blacks. Flora, enjoyed serving the Falligants. "A warm personal relationship developed between Flora and the family which survived until her death."¹² Before assuming her duty as the family's "nursemaid," Flora had worked as a delivery "copy girl" for Savannah's first newspaper. Her job included carrying "news copies" from the editor to the newspaper's print shop and returning the finished proofs to the editor. She acquired the job through the kindness of the paper's editor who was a neighbor of the Falligants.

Unlike the Abbotts, Flora's family while enslaved were not given special privileges nor were they allowed the opportunity to receive formal schooling. But, this obstacle did not alter Flora's desire for learning. Because there was no one to teach her how to read or write, Flora attempted to teach herself. "By painstaking, personal effort, she learned to read and write by putting tissue paper over the name plates of the town residents' doors and tracing the outline in pencil."¹³

When she was granted her freedom, Flora sought to improve her reading and writing skills by attending a clandestine slave school which had been established for those Africans

¹²Ottley, 25.

¹³Chicago Defender, 16 March 1940, p. 1.

still constrained.

Because slavery had not been abolished, at this time, her decision to attend the school was a precarious undertaking. "The instruction of one or two slaves, though a violation of the law, was not regarded as serious, and there was hardly any danger of prosecution."¹⁴ However, to instruct a group of slaves in an educational facility did have grave consequences for many. Persons responsible for teaching slaves to read or write could be punished. Freed persons of color who attended such schools, if suspect, would be sold into or returned to slavery. Flora averted suspicion by camouflaging her activity:

Flora left home at five o'clock in the morning, and always carried a bucket of some sort to make it appear she was working or attending an errand; for the slightest suspicion that she was receiving schooling would have been cause enough to return her to slavery.¹⁵

In spite of the personal risk the school's only teacher, Mrs. Dellamorter, provided her students with primary instruction. She also taught music to those students who showed an interest in the subject. Of his mother's schooling, Robert S. Abbott recalled in later years: "In this manner my mother acquired an education equivalent to a high school rating."¹⁶

¹⁴Franklin, 202.

¹⁵Ottley, 26.

¹⁶Chicago Defender, 16 March 1940, p. 1.

As a young adult in the years prior to her marriage, Flora worked as a coiffeur at the Savannah Theater. Her quiet and unassuming life was spent in the company of her parents. In contrast, her future husband Thomas Abbott chose to indulge in a frivolous life style which eventually branded him as one of Savannah's "playboys" in the black community.

A Profile of the Marriage and Life of Thomas
Abbott and Flora Butler Abbott

Thomas Abbott and Flora Butler were married in 1867. To this union was born two children, Robert S. Abbott (1868) and shortly there after a girl who died at the age of two months. Before Robert's birth the newlyweds had resided in Savannah. Thomas struggled to support his wife by applying the trade his former master had taught him during his days of bondage. For awhile his meager income as a city surveyor, helping to build the first streetcar line along Broughton and Whitaker Streets, sufficed the couple's needs.

Their life was simple, yet somewhat financially unstable. When the streetcar line was completed Thomas found it difficult to secure another surveying position, or any job that paid enough to support himself and his young bride. Being black in the late nineteenth century impeded his efforts for decent employment. Historian Lerone Bennett Jr. made the following remark relevant to this kind of economic and racial discrimination directed toward blacks during the nineteenth

century: "The economic restrictions were parts of an orchestrated attack that limited the movement and aspirations of blacks."¹⁷

Unemployed and disillusioned, Thomas relocated with his wife to the place of his enslavement. "So small were their possessions when they left that they were able to cram them all into one box."¹⁸ After arriving on St. Simons Island, the couple moved into one of the old cabins that had been given to the Abbott clan by the Stevens' family. Thomas and Flora supported themselves by operating a small grocery store which serviced local ex-slaves who had chosen to remain on the island after the Civil War.

Robert S. Abbott, was born one year after his parents moved to the island. According to his biographer: "He who was destined to become the founder and publisher of the Chicago Defender, gave his first wail in his father's absence, Thanksgiving Day, November 28, 1868."¹⁹ During the birth of her son, Flora was not attended by a physician or midwife. Her husband's relatives, who were the couple's closest neighbors, refused to assist with the baby's delivery because of their intense dislike of the mother.

The Abbotts were disappointed with the marriage. Because

¹⁷Lerone Bennett Jr., Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., 1988), 180.

¹⁸Ottley, 23.

¹⁹Ibid., 24.

they thought of Flora as a "field" hand, the Abbott's declared that she was an inferior compared to their "social" status. Ottley surmised that the Abbotts held this negative attitude of Flora and her family, the Butlers, because:

The Abbotts, as house servants whose ancestry dated back to 1784 and beyond, drew the line against field hands. Not only did the distinction of domestic work give them a feeling of superiority over field Negroes, but it even made them feel superior to poor whites.²⁰

Thomas Abbott was not the ideal father. He often left his young wife alone for weeks while he pranced off to Savannah on the pretense of attending to business. What little money he and Flora earned from the store was squandered in the big city. The island's black community considered him as the town's "rogue."

In 1870, Flora Abbott's husband died in Savannah after contracting tuberculosis. After his death, Flora returned to Savannah. Alone and penniless, she found employment with a group of German shopkeepers. Working for these shopkeepers gave her the opportunity to learn their language. By the same token, being able to converse in German altered her life and the destiny of her son.

Immediately, after Thomas's death the Abbott clan who had showed nothing but open hostility toward Flora since the onset of her marriage embarked upon a custody battle for young Robert. Because he was an Abbott, the family of the deceased

²⁰Ibid.

believed that the infant should be raised by his father's relatives. When Flora refused to surrender the boy to her late husband's family they instituted legal proceedings against her on the grounds that she was an "unfit" mother.

It was during this turbulent period that John H. H. Sengstacke, a newly arrived "mulatto" of German descent, wandered into Flora's life. By all appearances, John H. H. Sengstacke was a Prussian. His white skin, aquiline nose, thin lips, straight black hair, and "Teutonic" styled mustache led many white southerners to believe that he was "Caucasian." Their attitude toward and treatment of him did not change until they discovered his parental identity. Sengstacke was immediately attracted to Flora because of her command of the German language, intellect, and wit. Thus he set out to rescue her from the Abbott's vise. He retained and paid for the legal assistance of a prominent white attorney from Savannah, W. W. Paine, to aid in her defense.

A Portrait of Stepfather John H. H. Sengstacke and family

John H. H. Sengstacke was the son of a German immigrant father, Herman Sengstacke, and an African slave mother, Tama. The elder Sengstacke, Herman, was born 6 January 1815 in the village of Fagenbacke, Germany. Tama had been captured in Africa and brought to the United States in the 1840s. Ironically, Herman Sengstacke had immigrated to North America

the 1840s after retiring as a sailor. Armed with a keen sense for business, he opened a general store in Savannah. Within a few years he had become one of the city's more successful merchants.

Herman Sengstacke met Tama under peculiar circumstances. While out for his usual stroll one evening, after closing the general store, he wandered along Savannah's waterfront. There he happened upon a local slave market where the auctioning of several young African females, ranging from ages fifteen to twenty years, was in process. The scantily clothed women were being offered to the highest male bidder. The bidders showed no remorse as they callously inspected the black girls' bodies. Tama was among these youngsters. Still unaccustomed to the business of slavery, Herman was saddened by and took special notice of the terrified and shy Tama. Herman purchased the slave girl and took her to his home.

Before the Civil War, in many southern states, it was not unusual for white men to live openly with black women. But, it was strange and in many cases illegal for men of European descent who lived in the South to marry women of color. Despite, these legal complications after several months of cohabitation Herman decided to marry the slave girl. Ottley has said of the legalization of their relationship: "He later escorted her to Charleston, S. C., where marriage between the races was lawful and formally married her in 1847."²¹ The

²¹Ibid., 29.

couple returned to Savannah and established their home in the rooms above the general store.

There were two progenies as a result of their marriage. John Herman Henry born 27 January 1848 and Mary Elizabeth who was born the following year (1849). Tama died giving birth to the couple's second child, Mary Elizabeth. Afraid that his children might be taken from him and forced to live as slaves, Herman took the children to live with relatives in Germany. In his autobiography Robert S. Abbott wrote: "My stepfather was also born in slavery, but his father, who did not want his son reared in such an atmosphere, took him out of the country and educated him abroad."²²

While the children lived in Germany, Herman Sengstacke provided for their education and welfare. The father appointed his sister, Conrad, and her husband Martin Schmidt, as care givers. Conrad attended to the children's personal needs. Both relatives were responsible for their informal and formal education. John and Mary Elizabeth Sengstacke grew to adulthood in the small village of Marechal. They shared a pleasant and comfortable existence away from the cruelty of slavery.

John attended the German Latin Academy and graduated from Friederichsdorf Institute. While attending school he studied five different languages, one of which was English. He also studied music. He became proficient in all five languages and

²²Chicago Defender, 16 March 1940, p. 2.

became an excellent organist, as well as pianist. Mary Elizabeth was given the "proper" schooling befitting a middle-class fraulein of that era.

Their father, Herman, returned to Savannah and prospered as a merchant. But, after the death of his wife he never remarried. Ottley has stated of Herman's desire to provide for his children even after death:

Before he died in 1862, he made a will. For safekeeping he lodged it in Savannah's Chatham County Court house, and a copy in the Central Railroad Bank. He appointed two white men, Dr. Richard D. Arnold and David R. Dillon, as executors and left his entire estate to his two Negro children.²³

At the time of his demise, according to Herman's Last Will and Testament, his property was to be liquidated and monies received from this transaction were to be sent to Conrad and Martin Schmidt in Germany. As the children's guardians, the Schmidts were to establish a trust fund for John and Mary Elizabeth. They also were to serve as trustees of the late father's estate. From the fund, monies were to be spent for the support and education of the children until they reached their twenty-first birthday. Then the remaining estate was to be equally divided between the two young adults.

The children also were to inherit Herman's two slaves, Ansel and Rose. The slaves were to be sent promptly to Germany for John's and Mary Elizabeth's "joint" use. A portion of the father's Last Will and Testament that bequeaths

²³Ottley, 30.

the two slaves to the Sengstacke children stated:

I give, devise and bequeath unto my children so soon as they shall arrive at and attain to the age of twenty-one years, my Negro slaves Rose and Ansel, with the future issue and increase of the said Rose to have and to hold the same to them, as slaves, and to their heirs and assigns forever.-HERMAN SENGSTACKE²⁴

When Herman Sengstacke died in 1869 his son John was approximately twenty-one years of age. Neither the monies received from the liquidated estate, nor the two slaves bequeathed to the Sengstacke children reached them or their aunt and uncle, the Schmidts.

Thus John decided to return to Savannah to claim his inheritance. Upon his arrival in the city, he discovered that there was a discrepancy regarding his late father's estate. The inheritance which was suppose to consist of several parcels of valuable North Oglethorpe land, railroad property, bank stocks, unsold store merchandise, and "Joachim Street" houses, that when liquidated should have totaled approximately fifty thousand dollars in currency, was far less in value. As appraised and filed in 1862 by Herman Sengstacke's two appointed executors, the assets only totaled a mere ten thousand dollars. John further discovered that not only was the remaining estate embroiled in litigation, but also that the two slaves Ansel and Rose had been freed as a result of the Emancipation Proclamation.

²⁴Herman Sengstacke, Last Will and Testament of Herman Sengstacke, 1860, citing Ottley, 28.

Unfamiliar with the American system of justice, especially the South's peculiar treatment of blacks in matters concerning litigation between the races in 1869, John and Mary Elizabeth lost all but "several" thousand dollars in currency plus a few parcels of real estate. One of these parcels happened to be the general store which was located in the western section of Savannah's black Yamacraw community. Yamacraw was established some two hundred years earlier by a native American, Chief Tomochichi. After the relocation of these individuals the area became the residential home to free blacks. "Before the Civil War, free Negroes moved in and established the area as a Negro community. The educated and progressive, plus the social elite, resided here in comparative comfort."²⁵ At the end of the War, the Yamacraw community quickly became home to a curious mixture of poor ex-slaves plus the establish black "elite."

As a citizen of the United States, John's legal rights were protected under the Fourteenth Amendment of 1866, but the institution of slavery had formed a schism between the races. Charles S. Johnson, former professor of Sociology at Fisk University after studying the state of social affairs that directed the legal system pertinent to blacks and whites, especially in the South, during this era remarked:

In a social order in which difference in race implies differences in quality and social prerogatives, a legal structure defining expected

²⁵Ibid., 32.

behavior in race contacts is a response on the part of the dominant group to the threat of disorganization of the traditional social order. The emancipation of the Negro slave, followed by the sudden theoretical assumption of the full status of citizenship, occasioned a profound disturbance of the social equilibrium. Freedom, with the implication of equality, introduced a new and formidable program into the still immature democratic concepts of a large part of the nation.²⁶

Despite, his legal defeat John remained in Savannah. "He never was to see the place of his rearing again, though he often talked nostalgically about Germany in Robert's presence and urged him to one day see the country himself."²⁷ Mary Elizabeth, who was described as more "Negroid" in appearance chose to stay in Germany. She married a German of Aryan stock, Friedrich Bodeker, and settled in St. Magnus. Friedrich and Mary Elizabeth became the parents of three children, Hennie, Fritz, and Georg. In the next century, their children became well acquainted with their wealthy step-cousin, Robert S. Abbott, and relied upon him quite heavily for financial support.

A Profile of the Marriage and Life of John H.
H. Sengstacke and Flora Butler Abbott

John established residence above the general store:

²⁶Charles S. Johnson, Patterns of Negro Segregation, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1943), 156.

²⁷Ottley, 30.

When the Yamacraw property was handed over to Robert's stepfather, the tree-dotted area was undoubtedly a pleasant place to live. Next door to the store was a frame dwelling he had also inherited, in which Flora lived with her mother and infant.²⁸

Flora Butler Abbott had left the employment of the German shopkeepers and now was employed as a "nursemaid." Because they were neighbors, John had daily contact with Flora. Impressed with her longing for knowledge, he took great joy in acquainting her with the many things that he had learned while living in Europe. Eventually, he persuaded her to abandon her job as a "nursemaid" and become his assistant manager.

After working in close proximity for several months, Flora's and John's platonic relationship turned romantic. Hence, they became inseparable. John and Flora attended St. Stephens' Episcopal Church together on a regular basis and frequently dined together. They also attended all social functions as a couple. "When Robert was baptized in 1872, Sengstacke, along with two white persons, a Mr. Joseph Mindledorff and a lady named De Loche, stood as the child's godparents."²⁹

Although, John H. H. Sengstacke and Flora Butler Abbott enjoyed each other's company because he was a mulatto there were individuals in both the white and black communities who frowned on their relationship. Upon his arrival in Savannah,

²⁸Ottley, 32.

²⁹Ibid.

he had been labeled by whites as a German citizen. But, after they had become aware of his parental identify he was branded as a "Negro" and thus became the blunt of many jokes. "Now, whenever he and Flora walked the streets, they were victims of obscene jibes from white hoodlums."³⁰ John found the reaction of blacks to his mixed heritage even more disconcerting. The "color line" that blacks imposed upon each other was an enigma to him. This color distinction was more prevalent in the social interactions of light and dark complexion blacks. For example, the "color line" was so intense at St. Stephens' Episcopal Church where John and Flora attended that he decided to join the newly established St. Augustine Mission. St. Stephens, originally known as the Savannah River Mission, had been established in 1854 with the aid of whites belonging to the parishes of Christ and St. Johns. Celia Abbott, Flora's former sister-in-law, had help organize the original mission and was one of the church's most staunch supporters.

After the Civil War, St. Stephens membership dramatically increased with an influx of ex-slaves from the rural areas that surrounded Savannah. It was not long before friction between the old and new congregation erupted as a result of color consciousness. This phenomenon was, especially, prevalent among the church's lighter complexion blacks. These African Americans believed that their distant European

³⁰Ottley, 34.

ancestry gave them a particular "social" excellence. Many of these mulattoes held the distinction of being pillars of the black business community. In part, their elitism was a result of acquiring wealth and European names via marriage between prominent white families and a few such blacks. The rich white families who had settled in the South went by such prestigious names as the Toomers, De Veaux, Scarboroughs, Desverney, Spaulding, and the Scotts.

The mulattoes of St. Stephens were an "elitist" group who relished the traditions and aristocratic demeanor of the Old South. Within their ranks were a small number of more extremists that had migrated from South Carolina. This group referred to themselves as the "Blue Vein" society. St. Stephens' mulattoes were clannish and treated their darker brethren with disdain. In 1872, the church's mulatto "vestrymen" embarked upon an effort to totally exclude darker members of the congregation. Their plan included replacing these excluded members with whites. After several months of bitter agitation, the church's newly installed minister from the West Indies, the Reverend J. Robert Love, who was described as an ebony hued "fire and brimstone" preacher, resigned.

Upon leaving, Reverend Love also persuaded many of the church's disgruntled darker members to follow and assist him in organizing St. Augustine's Mission. John and Flora were among his followers. Celia Abbott and a few of her relatives

remained with the congregation of St. Stephens. The remaining Abbotts were thus jokingly referred to by the now fair skinned congregation as the church's "black mulattoes."

It was not unusual for Savannah's mulatto aristocrats and the common black folk to engage in business transactions, but they drew the line when it came to socializing. Robert E. Perdue, historian of southern black culture lends the following comments regarding the southern mulatto:

After the Civil War, the free mulatto class continued to hold itself aloof from the masses of freedmen. In some Southern cities, hostility of some members of this class toward the newly emancipated blacks was so great that they opposed even political rights for the freedmen. But generally the free mulatto class and its descendants assumed, as much as possible, positions of leadership among the black masses. This did not break down the traditional barriers to easy socializing and marriage, however. In their religious affiliations, descendants of free mulattoes held themselves aloof from the Negro masses. In Savannah, they generally affiliated with the Episcopal, Congregational, Presbyterian, and Catholic churches, while most freedmen joined the Baptist and Methodists churches.³¹

Although, John H. H. Sengstacke endeavored to become a part of Savannah's business community he did not prosper as a merchant. As a result, he was forced to seek additional employment. To supplement his income, he first worked as a translator for the Savannah Morning News. John's excitement about his impressive translator position was short lived. He was immediately dismissed from the job when the firm's

³¹Robert E. Perdue, The Negro in Savannah, 1865-1900 (Jericho, New York: Exposition Press, Inc., 1973), 92.

supervisor discovered that he was half black. John was devastated. It was not easy for him to comprehend the firm's logic behind his dismissal. He had earned a degree from one of Germany's most prestigious institutions. He had studied and mastered five languages. He was an accomplished musician and had studied theology. He was familiar with the great works of literature and had an appreciation for the arts. He had traveled the European continent, extensively. John believed that to be dismissed simply because of one's ancestral origins was absurd. "But he was a Negro, and this fact made it nearly impossible for him to secure employment congenial with his abilities."³² Bennett has suggested that nineteenth century America, especially the South, made a clear distinction between the types of employment that blacks were allowed without repercussion. "Negro jobs were dirty, hot, and heavy. White jobs were clean, light, and well paid."³³ John's second supplemental job was that of tutor for a child from one of Savannah's most prominent white families. However, it was not long before he abandoned the position. He decided to leave the job after an unpleasant incident involving an "unidentified" person and his employer's wife. "He soon overheard the mother being scolded for having a 'nigger' in her house."³⁴ John pretended to be unaffected by

³²Ottley, 33.

³³Bennett, 258.

³⁴Ottley, 33.

the comment. However, he was offended.

Despite, his shaky financial situation John H. H. Sengstacke and Flora Butler Abbott were married 26 July 1874. Their marriage took place approximately five years after their initial meeting. In his autobiography, Robert S. Abbott has stated of John's employment status at the time of their marriage: "When he married my mother he was teaching at the Mill street school in Savannah and holding church services in the classroom on Sundays. He owned the property on which he taught and preached."³⁵ John began teaching in Yamacraw after realizing that the community needed teachers and a school. Thus he converted one room of his living quarters into a small classroom. There he taught reading, writing, and arithmetic. "He received ten cents a week for each pupil."³⁶ On Sundays, the one room classroom doubled as a Sunday school.

One year prior to the marriage, during the depression of 1873, John had sustained heavy financial loses because of unwise investments. But, he had somehow managed to recover from his losses. However, shortly after the marriage John had again injudiciously become involved with a questionable venture. After joining and being elected as an officer of a chapter of Georgia's black Order of Masons, he signed over a parcel of real estate to a Savannah bank for the order as collateral to ensure a loan for the erection of a "fraternal"

³⁵Chicago Defender, 16 March 1940, p. 2.

³⁶Ottley, 40.

house for the chapter's lodge.

When the order defaulted on the loan, John's parcel of land was seized and auctioned. But, revenue received from the liquidation did not satisfy the debt. There was still an outstanding balance of five hundred dollars. Through his acquaintance with one of Georgia's wealthiest mulattoes, Joseph Scarborough and his mulatto wife, both of whom lived just outside of Savannah in the regional area of Woodville, John was able to meet his financial obligation. Joseph Scarborough had acquired his wealth as a result of an interracial marriage between distant relatives. When his wealthy ex-slave owning white relatives, the prominent Scarboroughs of Savannah died, Joseph inherited a vast amount of properties. John and Joseph had met as a result of their attendance at Savannah's St. Stephens' Episcopal Church. Joseph, without hesitation, gave John the money. Within several months John was able to repay Joseph. As a result of their business encounter a lasting friendship developed. Hence, the newly married Sengstackes and the Scarboroughs began to socialize on a regular basis.

In 1875, John was concerned about Savannah's growing black population and especially the continued lack of educational facilities for Yamacraw's poor blacks. Consequently, he enlarged the Mill School. He also increased the school's population. This was accomplished by adding both adults and more children to the student body. Pertinent to

his school curriculum in addition to teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic, he also taught German to any local resident who was interested in broadening his or her education. It was not long before the citizens of Yamacraw, as well as other sections of Savannah, came to realize that John was the only multilingual teacher in the area.

While visiting the Scarboroughs one day, John was informed by Joseph that the residents of Woodville also needed a school and a teacher. Upon his return to Savannah, John immediately wrote to Savannah's superintendent of public schools informing him of the educational plight of the small rural black community. His letter fell upon deaf ears. When it became clear that the superintendent had no intention of responding to his letter, John appealed to the American Missionary Association (AMA). The association was a philanthropic group affiliated with the Congregational Church.

Although, John did not expect much in the way of a reply he was more than delighted when the association answered his letter. However, the association was more interested in securing young African Americans for the ministry and not for the sole purpose of providing them with a proper education.

When the association learned of John's credentials they were pleased. With his academic background, the young intellect was topnotch "ministerial" material. The association did not immediately furnish him with a school. But, in 1876 after two years of seminary training he was

ordained as a Congregational minister. The association then sent him to Woodville as a missionary for the area's Pilgrim Congregational Church. In commenting on the primary aim of missionary societies relevant to blacks and the ministry, during the latter half of the nineteenth century, noted historian James D. Anderson asserted:

Missionary philanthropists held that slavery had generated pathological religious and cultural practices in the black community. Slavery, not race, kept blacks from acquiring the important moral and social values of thrift, industry, frugality, and sobriety, all of which were necessary to live a sustained Christian life.³⁷

It was only a matter of months after his appointment as minister to Woodville's Congregational flock that Savannah's superintendent of public schools offered John a position as school master of that rural community. Without hesitation, John accepted the superintendent's offer. The Savannah School Board agreed to a salary of thirty dollars per month for Woodville's new school master. John maintained both positions for twenty-five years. John H. H. Sengstacke and Flora Butler Abbott Sengstacke remained married for thirty years.

The Childhood and Young Adult Memories
of Robert S. Abbott

In 1876, Robert was eight years of age when his family

³⁷James D. Anderson, The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935, (Chapel Hill, N. C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 241.

moved to Woodville. As the years passed, the Sengstacke family increased. The couple produced seven children, John Jr., Alexander, Mary, Rebecca, Eliza, Susan, and Johnnah. Of the seven offsprings only John Jr. and Susan did not survive to maturity. "With the marriage, Robert became known as 'Sengstacke's boy,' and afterwards carried the name Robert Sengstacke."³⁸ The financially pinched Sengstackes provided a comfortable, yet humble home environment for their children. They also introduced them to a barrage of cultural experiences. Part of their training included respect for the Puritan work ethic. It was also important that the children's informal education included moral training, as well as survival skills. The skills were to be obtained, basically, through the development of responsible work habits.

Robert had began working at the age of five years. His first job was that of errand boy to a local grocer in the neighborhood where he lived. Flora saw nothing wrong with insisting that her son learn the value of work at such a tender age. In recalling the experience, Robert stated:

The earliest recollection I have of my childhood is in Savannah with my mother and stepfather. Mother was firm in her teaching of self reliance. When I was five years of age, I got my first job working at the grocery store of Mr. J. P. Daily whose son still owns the store in Savannah. My wages were 15 cents per week and mother taught me that 10 ten cents of my weekly earnings must be paid to her for room, board, and laundry.³⁹

³⁸Ottley, 37.

³⁹Chicago Defender, 16 March 1940, p. 1.

When Robert's earnings increased so did his financial responsibility. His mother not only required a raise in pay for his maintenance, but also demanded that he save half of what was left of his meager salary for "emergency" days. Flora believed that diligence and self reliance were two entities needed for developing moral responsibility. Frugality and hard work were also necessary for building good character. When he became an adult, Abbott declared of this kind of upbringing: "This training proved to be one of the greatest influences of my life and one of the greatest blessings."⁴⁰

Sheltered by his family against the South's open hostility toward African Americans, young Robert grew into manhood amid the rolling green hills of Woodville's scenic rural black community. The eight room "parsonage" where the Sengstackes lived was built by his stepfather with the help of paid workers. The dwelling was described as an unpretentious two story frame structure surrounded by a white picket fence. It was located on a tree lined street not far from the Savannah River. Adjacent to the Sengstackes' home stood the church provided by the AMA. The structure was an unassuming white frame building that contained a steeple with a belfry. The church seated approximately two hundred people and was always filled to capacity with Sunday morning worshippers. The grounds upon which the house was erected were also large

⁴⁰Ibid., 2.

enough for a sizable vegetable garden.

One of young Robert's responsibilities was to help his stepfather seed and harvest crops from the garden. The produce after packing was sometimes sent as far away as New York city for distribution. English peas were the Sengstackes' prize crop. The family spent their winters and early springs in Woodville while their summers were spent in Yamacraw. As Robert matured, so did his responsibilities. For instance, by the time he had reached early adolescence he was encouraged to secure employment with one of Savannah's oldest newspapers, The Echo. This newspaper was the same one that his mother had worked for as a young girl while in bondage. The experience was his initial encounter with the world of journalism. In the second installment of his autobiography, he wrote of his early job experiences:

My summers spent in the city made it possible for me to hold odd jobs as soon as I was big enough to run errands. First I worked as an errand boy in a grocery store. When I became larger I got a job on one of the oldest newspapers in Savannah. "The Echo." This was my first contact in the field to which I devoted later my entire attention.⁴¹

Although, Robert enjoyed working for The Echo the experience was a disaster. The lad was so ambitious and eager to please his employer that shortly after being hired, he attempted to perform an unassigned task. After watching several of the plant's experienced printers manning the

⁴¹Robert S. Abbott, "Quest for Equality: An Autobiography" 2nd Installment, Chicago Defender, 23 March 1940, p. 28.

machines, Robert decided that he could also operate the machines with ease. But, his lack of training with the "printer-type" resulted in damage to a valuable machine. For his over zealous behavior, he was harshly admonished by the plant's supervisor and threatened with bodily harm. Years later, he reminisced about the incident with humor:

I worked there until a misunderstanding with the foreman made it imperative that I "hot foot" it home to my mother. My ambition, one day, overpowered me and I set out to perform a more complicated assignment than was my duty. As a result I scratched up the imposing stone on which the printer made up types, and dug holes in it with an awl. The foreman started after me when he saw my handiwork, intending to "give me the works," but I beat it and took the nearest exit and the shortest cut home to mother.⁴²

Shaken, yet undaunted by the incident Robert surrendered his position with The Echo. Although, brief his encounter with a major newspaper had left a lasting impression. The work had been laborious and the punishment for his ignorance severe, but in later years Abbott believed that the experience had been rewarding. When the fear of repercussion for his misdeed subsided, he quickly realized that he was afflicted with the "fever" of the press.

Robert S. Abbott's relationship with his stepfather was also rewarding, contrary to the fact that at times the stepfather's moodiness was hard for him to understand. Ottley tells us that despite John H. H. Sengstacke's often moody nature, lack of demonstrative affection, and feelings of

⁴²Ibid.

persecution, he was a caring parent. "His distant manner, perhaps a result of his stern German rearing, made him a difficult person for Robert to reach and to know deeply."⁴³ Because of his admiration for his stepfather in later years Robert would come to imitate the positive qualities of his stepfather's personality, as well as a few of his idiosyncrasies. As evidence, individuals who were the closest to Robert attested to certain behavioral patterns picked up by the lad, especially that of his stepfather's persecution complex. Thus Robert's acquired peculiarities were a result of proximity and indoctrination by the Reverend Sengstacke. Nevertheless, there was a bonding between the stepfather and stepson. The Reverend was also well loved and admired by his wife and all of his children. In his role as Congregational minister and teacher, he was revered by the African Americans of both Woodville and Savannah. Robert S. Abbott remarked of his stepfather's ability to inspire his followers:

The leaders of the community in those days were the ministers and teachers. My father who served in both capacities was probably the leading personality of Woodville. He had been educated abroad and had travelled widely. His contacts and experiences gave him a vastly different outlook on life, and he endeavored to lift the minds of the people above the soil. He showed them a world outside of Savannah.⁴⁴

When it came to the secular world, the Reverend Sengstacke was a fundamentalist at heart. He neither womanized, drank

⁴³Ottley, 45.

⁴⁴Chicago Defender, 23 March 1940, p. 28.

liquor, or smoked tobacco. However, he kept abreast of world affairs. He also, rarely, forfeited the opportunity to make use of his interpretive, as well as analytical skills in keeping his congregation informed of world issues. Abbott further wrote of his stepfather's mission to keep his flock well informed:

He came to be known as the "book" preacher, for during regular prayer meeting time it was not unusual for him to read the newspaper on world events to his church group. The people were soon educated to appreciate such services, and prayer meetings became a forum at which world events were discussed.⁴⁵

Confronted by the racist ideology that engulfed nineteenth century America, the Sengstackes took special care in preparing their children for the difficulties that would befall them as African Americans in a "whites only" dominated society. Despite, the prevailing racist attitude that saturated American society they were armed with optimism. The Sengstackes also taught the children to appreciate the many positive aspects of both European and American culture. For example, the Reverend Sengstacke insisted that the children learn a foreign language; German was his preference. Robert's stepfather also maintained a large library in the family home. It had a variety of books many of which were great works of literature. He also persuaded the children to acquaint themselves with the paintings of the masters, as well as the music of Europe's most innovative geniuses. In the third

⁴⁵Ibid.

installment of his autobiography, Robert S. Abbott said of his parents' socialization process:

He was one of the dominating influences in my life. It was his teachings that gave me a lust for travel, that developed in me an avid desire to know more than just what appeared on the surface. He fed my cultural nature while my mother endowed with practical common sense, kept my feet on the ground.⁴⁶

Abbott never quite mastered the German language, but he excelled in music.

When it was time for the Sengstacke children to enter primary school, John and Flora's thoughts turned to ways of providing for their college education. But, lack of adequate financial resources for the Sengstacke family kept the Reverend Sengstacke in a state of heightened anxiety. As a result, he was plagued by worry that he might not meet the costly demands imposed by institutions of higher learning. Abbott's stepfather firmly believed that African Americans needed a college education to expedite their assimilation into the dominant culture. In later years, Abbott echoed his stepfather's sentiment.

Robert S. Abbott began his formal education at Woodville's West Broad Elementary School and received a portion of his secondary education from Beach Institute. Savannah's Beach Institute, during the nineteenth century, was a college preparatory school primarily for the sons and

⁴⁶Robert S. Abbott, "Quest for Equality: An Autobiography," Chicago Defender, 30 March 1940, p. 6.

daughters of Georgia's black elites. Concerned with providing a proper college education for Abbott, the Reverend Sengstacke placed a higher value on the type of secondary school that the young man would attend. But, despite his concern good preparatory schools for African Americans during this period were scarce. "He finally decided upon Beach Institute, a small Congregational institution located at Price and Harris Streets in Savannah, about four miles from Woodville."⁴⁷ The land upon which Beach Institute stood was initially owned by Alfred E. Beach, former editor of New York's Scientific American. The school was established by the Freedman's Bureau after the emancipation. In 1868, the AMA assumed financial control of Beach Institute and operated it as a public institution for blacks residing in the Savannah area.

By the time Abbott entered the institute, its faculty and clientele had changed. The faculty had become a racially mixed group that were not afraid to fraternize and the attending students were now mostly mulattoes. These students were progenies of the "clannish" congregation that attended St. Stephens Episcopal Church. Imitating the conduct of their parents, they too imposed a "color line" against the minute number of darker skinned African American students that attended the school. Because Abbott was extremely dark of color he was often the brunt of their ridicule. Like the other darker hued blacks, he also was ostracized from their

⁴⁷Ottley, 61.

social gatherings. "The youngsters, aping their elders, were cruelly unkind to the black boy from Woodville. His only friends at school were Joseph and Catherine Scarborough."⁴⁸

However, the Scarborough youngsters' friendship was not enough to appease the lonely boy's pain of rejection. Nor did the elementary instruction furnished by the school's teachers interest, or motivate the homesick lad. Abbott never informed his stepfather of the discriminatory practice imposed by the lighter hued blacks. He simply asked to leave the institute before graduation. Reverend Sengstacke was against the boy's decision, but consented to his request. Abbott's biographer in commenting on the situation wrote:

Had Robert's stepfather grasped the profound nature of color distinctions among Negroes, he never would have sent Robert to Beach. Perhaps the nuances of color prejudiced escaped him, but Robert nevertheless felt the heavy hand of this color conscious environment. It is a period he omits completely in his Defender autobiographical series, but this very omission suggests that he wished to forget the episode.⁴⁹

Abbott's parents made arrangements for him to attend Claflin University. Still strapped for finances his stepfather appealed to several close friends for money. This appeal was made for the sole purpose of helping to subsidize the young man's tuition. Claflin was a black institution financed by Methodists. During the nineteenth century, as did many colored schools, the institute offered little more than

⁴⁸Ibid., 62.

⁴⁹Ibid., 61-62.

elementary learning. However, the school did provide Abbott sanctuary from the harsh "color line" that he had experienced at Beach.

At age nineteen, Abbott entered Claflin University in 1887. When Abbott enrolled, he had not decided upon a profession. Nevertheless, Abbott was sure that he wanted to procure a good education. He pursued his studies with vigor. Abbott also believed that he was accepted by his fellow classmates. In addition, he found enough leisure time to indulge in his favor past time which was singing. Thus he was invited to join the glee club and accepted the invitation with gusto. In gathering information on Abbott, Ottley reported: "No record of his grades exist, but his classmates remember him as an average, although talkative student."⁵⁰

If Abbott's stepfather had permitted him to attend Claflin with the desire of preparing the boy for the ministry, the Reverend Sengstacke quickly discovered that his stepson had plans for a secular career. Six months after entering the university, Abbott returned to Woodville with the idea of securing a trade. His decision in part resulted from observing his "senior cottage" roommates work themselves into a frazzle while attempting, unsuccessfully, to sell books to Orangeburg residents. The youngsters were hoping to earn enough extra monies for their tuition. Abbott quickly realized that these fellows harbored a disdain for any trade

⁵⁰Ibid., 63.

vaguely connected with manual labor. Greatly amused at their behavior, he later described the situation in the third installment of his autobiographical series as such:

While in the senior cottage I came in contact with two college men who, unbeknown to them, influenced my decision to learn a trade. They were trying to work their way through school by selling books, because they felt that menial labor was unbecoming their station. Their circumstances were tragic. They would come into the cottages looking like tramps and only through the kindness of their schoolmates were they able to get suitable attire to attend classes. Their lot discouraged me, for I learned that these two men had not been trained for work with their hands and that they did not care to do anything that would soil their hands. I was determined then that I should not fall into that category.⁵¹

On 6 June 1888, Abbott sent a letter to the principal of Hampton Institute asking his permission to enroll at the school. Although, he did not have the necessary financial resources to attend he was willing to work at any available job provided by the facility to pay for his schooling.

While awaiting the principal's reply, Abbott reapplied at the Savannah Echo for his vacated apprenticeship position. Again, his decision and his stepfather's immediate plans appeared to be in conflict. In part, this conflict stemmed from the following situation. For a number of years, the Reverend Sengstacke had made a concerted effort to have printed in the Savannah Tribune, black owned newspaper, a news column detailing what he believed to be important events which had transpired in Woodville. But, the editor of the Tribune

⁵¹Chicago Defender, 30 March 1940, p. 6.

for some unknown reason had on a continuous basis refused his articles. Disappointed with the actions of the editor Abbott's stepfather decided to establish his own newspaper, the Woodville Times. Thus Abbott was needed, at this time, to assist his stepfather with the new enterprise.

Besides, this development Abbott did not know that the Reverend Sengstacke also had sent a letter to the principal of Hampton Institute, General Armstrong, one year prior to Abbott's request inquiring about the possibility of enrolling the boy in the institute. The Reverend Sengstacke's letter to General Armstrong reads as follows:

My son Robert is anxious to attend your school this year. He is willing to work all day and study at night. He is willing to do any work, but prefers the printer's trade.-Rev. Sengstacke⁵²

But, the reply letter received by the Reverend Sengstacke from General Armstrong informed him that there would be a delay in all enrollments because of the school's overcrowded condition. Hence, Abbott remained at Claflin University for two more years.

During these two years, he assisted his stepfather with the Woodville Times. The newspaper made its appearance November, 1889. The paper consisting of four pages and containing only four columns sold for a nickel. The Woodville Times was devoid of any regional or national news that spotlighted political or social issues concerning racial

⁵²Reverend John H. H. Sengstacke, to General Armstrong, Hampton Institute, 16 September 1887, citing Ottley, 61.

discrimination. In essence, the publication's primary focus was to cover educational topics deemed important by its editor. Despite, the newspaper's short comings its mere presence gave Abbott the opportunity to grasp the "printer's trade." By working in close proximity with his stepfather, he was able to learn more about the technical aspects of running a newspaper than if he had remained in apprenticeship with the Savannah Echo.

Consequently, Abbott was now obtaining valuable experience as a journalist. However, this training did not stop him from thinking about other careers. A few months prior to his enrollment at Hampton Abbott's closest boyhood friend, Joseph Scarborough, informed him that he was planning to attend Atlanta University. The university offered educational courses of a "classical" nature for students desiring to enter the field of teaching. Because he wanted to be near his friend, Abbott desperately tried to persuade his stepfather to let him attend the university. But, the Reverend Sengstacke denied his stepson's plea. He was bent on Abbott pursuing the "printer's trade." Thus the Reverend Sengstacke made preparations to send him to Hampton. Abbott entered Hampton in 1890, one year after the birth of the Woodville Times.

Established by Congregationalists, Hampton Institute was initially located at Fortress Monroe. The school also was originally staffed by white missionaries and supported by

northern philanthropists. After the Civil War General Armstrong, who became one of the institute's principals, a former Union officer relocated the school to Hampton, Virginia. Armstrong desired to continue the artisan trade acquired by many black slaves before the emancipation. Hence, he implemented a curriculum at the institute geared toward agriculture and trade. Although, a few native Americans were enrolled at the school the majority of the student body was African American. At the time of young Abbott's arrival no one could have guessed that he would become the publisher and editor of the Chicago Defender. "The general's most famous pupil was Booker T. Washington, but he could hardly have imagined that Robert S. Abbott would become the school's second most distinguished alumnus."⁵³

Anxious to please his teachers and at the same time attempting to assimilate within the school's population, Abbott tried to shed his rural image. But, instead he unintentionally came across as overaggressive thus creating a multitude of problems for himself. One former classmate, Charles H. Thornton, remembered Abbott as causing a stir when he refused to serve his six months "devilship." The "devilship" was a hazing process designed for all new students entering the "printer's trade." Being overly sensitive about his ebony complexion also hampered his integration within the student body.

⁵³Ibid., 67.

It only took a few months for his classmates to realize that Abbott was extremely sensitive about his color. His sensitivity quickly prompted less humane persons to razz him. One particular cruel individual, Isaac Peake, described as being extremely light of complexion became Abbott's "nemesis." The fact that Isaac was also related to one of Virginia's most distinguished black families whose input was instrumental in the creation of Hampton Institute only made the situation worst.

Peake constantly teased Abbott about his dark complexion and often frustrated his attempts to socialize with the young women who attended the school. Without reservation, Peake constantly informed Abbott that he was too dark in color to associate with the light skinned female students. Once Peake invited Abbott to his home in Newport News, Virginia only to insult him upon arrival by refusing him admittance through the main entrance. Severely humiliating the lad, Peake publicly ordered Abbott in front of the other guests to enter his home like other "darkies" through the back door.

Although, Peake later informed him that he was jesting Abbott was deeply hurt. Charles H. Thornton, who allied himself with Abbott, often tried to shield him from Peake's crude actions and remarks. Thornton and the young man from Woodville soon became friends. When Abbott became the successful owner of the Chicago Defender, he repaid Thornton for his kindness by providing him with permanent employment

with the newspaper. Thornton remained on the job until his retirement and was given a life time pension.

In his autobiographical series, Abbott never mentioned the Peake incidents. He described his stay at Hampton as laborious, but rewarding. Abbott also wrote that he was popular with Hampton's faculty and students. In addition, he reminisced of his invitation to join the institute's travelling singing quartet. He also commented about the offer made in New York by Dr. Walter Damrosch for a four year scholarship to study voice at Julliard and of his "mentor's" advice to forfeit the offer. That mentor was Dr. Frissell of Hampton Institute.

His mentor, he reported, "discouraged my acceptance, saying that the time was not ripe. I was not otherwise prepared to earn a living, and if after years of sacrifice and study preparing for music, the field was closed to me because of my racial identity, I should be hopelessly lost."⁵⁴

Abbott believed that while at Hampton, he was a hard working student. "The first semester, when he was morbidly resigned to defeat, he had a below 'C' average in all subjects; but in his triumphant final year, he received a 'B' plus average in all subjects."⁵⁵ Years later in 1939, as he justified the paternalistic attitude of Hampton's faculty and the curriculum offered, Abbott wrote:

What impressed me most at Hampton was the relentless vigor with which the institution carried out its

⁵⁴Ibid., 72.

⁵⁵Ibid., 73.

educational commitments. The stressing of industrial training for a race that had just emerged from slavery was to my mind a very important and necessary step. Hampton's primary objective was, and so far as I know still is, to prepare the Race for the economic responsibilities of its newly won freedom.⁵⁶

After receiving his "printer's trade" training at Hampton Institute in 1893, Abbott continued his academic studies there and graduated in 1896.⁵⁷ One year later in 1897, he enrolled at Chicago's Kent College of Law.⁵⁸ Impressed with the grandiosity of the metropolis, he chose Chicago as his place of residence after visiting the city while touring with Hampton's singing quartet. Abbott declared of his graduation, his Kent College interlude, and decision not to make law his permanent vocation: "Upon graduating from that institution, I wandered my way West, entering Kent College of Law of this city, graduating in 1900, but I soon learned that the legal business was not as prolific for a beginner as I had thought."⁵⁹

⁵⁶Robert S. Abbott, "Quest for Equality: Autobiography," Chicago Defender, 4 April 1940, p. 10.

⁵⁷Hampton University Archives, "Archival Records," (Alumni Records, 1893-1896).

⁵⁸Robert S. Abbott's biographer, Roi Ottley, has written that Abbott graduated from Chicago's Kent College of Law in 1899, Ottley, p. 77. However, Chicago's Kent College of Law, "Archival Records" (Public Affairs Office) has no record of attendance or graduation for Robert S. Abbott, 1897-1900).

⁵⁹Robert S. Abbott, "Robt. S. Abbott's Story of My Struggles and Success of The World's Greatest Weekly," Chicago Defender, 3 May 1930, p. 1.

CHAPTER II

A VIGNETTE OF THE ADULT LIFE OF ROBERT S. ABBOTT

Abbott's Choice of Careers

In 1900 Robert S. Abbott was thirty-two years of age. His inability to actively pursue a career in law could be interpreted in two ways. First, as suggested by Abbott's biographer, he may have been handicapped by his dark skin color. Edward H. Morris who was considered to be one of Abbott's closest associates had callously alluded to his darkness. Morris, a fair skinned African American, was a successful Chicago attorney who frequently broasted of his large predominantly white clientele. He advised Abbott that he was too dark to make any real impression on Chicago's court system.¹ Morris had been on the roster of the State of Illinois Attorney's Role Card as a practicing lawyer in Chicago since 12 June 1879.² Secondly, perhaps, was Abbott's desire to become an independent and successful journalist. Of his desire for self-employment, Abbott had stated: "When I left Hampton, I did look for a job and I did work for someone else. I knew and expected that I knew, too, that in due time I should be in a position to have my own shop and do what I

¹Roi Ottley, The lonely Warrior: The Life and Times of Robert S. Abbott (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1955), 77-78.

²State of Illinois, "Attorney's Role Card," (State of Illinois Supreme Court Clerk), Illinois Attorneys Record, Springfield, Illinois.

wanted to do."³ While working as an apprentice with the Savannah Echo, during his adolescent years, Abbott had recognized that the "fever" of journalism had become embedded in his blood. The youth had also conveyed his ambitious plans to enter the field of journalism in 1896 to his college chum, Charles "Bung" Thornton, while attending Hampton. Said Abbott of his future career plans: "I want to run a newspaper someday!"⁴

According to Ottley, because Abbott was unable to find the type of employment he wanted in the Chicago area he left the city for Gary, Indiana. Upon arriving there he tried to establish a law practice, but was not successful because he was not familiar with the area. During the early 1900s the only qualifications required to practice law in the state of Indiana were: a signed certificate by a county circuit court judge of the county where the practitioner so desired to engage in law; or a signed certificate by the president of the bar association of the county depicting that the attorney possessed decent moral habits and was in good standing with the state's bar.⁵ Despite, the lenient requirements Abbott

³Robert S. Abbott, "Quest for Equality An Autobiography," Chicago Defender, 20 April 1940, p. 7.

⁴Roi Ottley, The Lonely Warrior: The Life and Times of Robert S. Abbott (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1955), 85.

⁵In July, 1931, the Indiana Supreme Court adopted rules regulating the admission of persons to practice law in the state. "Rule of Supreme Court Requiring Applicants to Practice Law to Take Bar Examination: Enacted July, 1931," November Term, 1934, p. 171, (Executive Director, State Board

believed that his dark appearance also impeded his ability to secure clients.

Powerless to gain an economic foothold he then migrated to Topeka, Kansas. It is not clear why he chose this city. Again he tried unsuccessfully to practice law, but had trouble getting clientele. On the advice of a friend, Nick Chiles, who informed him that the prospect of finding profitable employment as a black attorney in Topeka was unrealistic Abbott left the city. Accepting this bit of information, Abbott reluctantly returned to Chicago. At the time of his brief stay in Topeka, Chiles was the editor of a black publication called the Topeka Plaindealer. Although, he knew that his friend was in need of employment and possessed a "printer's trade" certificate, it is thus unclear why Chiles did not offer the struggling young man a job with his newspaper, or why Abbott did not ask him for one.

During the next five years, Abbott shuffled between Chicago and Gary. First, he worked as a printer for a number of "unnamed" white Chicago establishments from the years 1901 through 1903. But, he often found himself on the list of the unemployed. The discriminatory practices of Chicago's trade unions against African Americans, during the twentieth century, frequently contributed to this dilemma.⁶ In

of Law Examiners), Indianapolis, Indiana.

⁶Enoch P. Waters former executive editor for the Chicago Defender suggested that Abbott decided to start a newspaper because he was unable to get a job as a printer because of a

recalling the unfairness of these union practices, Abbott remarked in later years via his autobiographical series: "It was not often that I found work. Prejudice in the very union in which I held a membership card had cut my working days to one week a month."⁷ Thus in 1904, at age thirty-six, he returned to Gary, Indiana in hopes of successfully applying his "printer's trade" by establishing his own daily newspaper. But, after only three editions the publication folded. Hollowed in spirit, Abbott went back to Chicago. With the aid of his close friend, Louis B. Anderson, Abbott was finally able to obtain a job with a Chicago Loop printing firm. Anderson had graduated from Chicago's Kent College of Law in 1897.⁸ He had also applied for and had passed the Illinois State Bar 15 June 1897.⁹ In later years, he became a prominent Chicago south side Second Ward Alderman.

However, working as a railroad time table "type-setter" was dull and non profitable. Therefore within a matter of months, Abbott had decided to vacate the position. He expressed his gratitude to both Anderson and the firm's owner

union color bar. Enoch P. Waters, American Diary: A Personal History of the Black Press (Chicago: Path Press, Inc., 1987), 113.

⁷Robert S. Abbott, "Quest For Equality: An Autobiography," Chicago Defender, 11 May 1940, p. 5.

⁸Chicago's Kent College of Law, "Alumni Graduates," (Archival Records, 1897), Chicago, Illinois.

⁹State of Illinois, "Attorney's Role Card," (State of Illinois Supreme Court Clerk), Illinois Attorneys Record, Springfield, Illinois.

for their assistance, but notified them that the job neither stimulated his intellect nor satisfied his urge to employ his "printer's trade."

It was also within this same year that his beloved stepfather died. Death came to the Reverend John H. H. Sengstacke 23 June 1904. His final transition was sadly mourned. With his death, Abbott had lost an intellectual confidant and advisor. In later years as he reminisced about his spiritual reliance upon his stepfather's love and wisdom, Abbott commented: "He was not only stepfather, but was my adopted father. And no father could have done more to assist his own child than he did."¹⁰ What pained Abbott the most about his stepfather's death was the fact that the Reverend Sengstacke died before he could witness the outcome of his labor in molding Abbott into a productive member of American society. Abbott, bemoaned this sad twist of fate:

You see, he passed away in 1904, just a year before I was ready to launch my newspaper. Upon my return to Chicago after attending his funeral I made immediate plans to begin my life's task, and it was with the vision of my father constantly before my eyes a beacon showing me the way that I launched upon the project of which I had dreamed so long.¹¹

The year was now 1905 and at thirty-seven years of age, Abbott began to put his choice of careers in motion. Back in Chicago, he founded his own newspaper for and about African

¹⁰Robert S. Abbott, "Gave Editor Start," Chicago Defender, 3 May 1930, p. 2.

¹¹Ibid.

Americans. He called it the Chicago Defender.

African Americans Recognize the Need
for the Black Press

Robert S. Abbott's idea for creating a black newspaper targeted for African Americans in an urban metropolis the size of Chicago was by no means a new phenomenon. The first newspaper published by blacks in the United States, the New York Freedom's Journal, surfaced weekly between 16 March 1827 and 28 March 1829.¹² The Journal which was co-edited by two black northerners, John Russwurm and the Reverend Samuel Cornish, focused on issues of concern to free blacks who lived in the United States. Events pertinent to the slavery question, the maintenance of self esteem among these free blacks, as well as the continued colonization of the world's darker nations by Europeans were prime topics.

As blacks struggled, after the Civil War, to assimilate into American society the black press grew in size and numbers. Unfortunately, for blacks the abolition of slavery did not bring with it a guarantee of equality in the American social order. Nowhere, was this more evident than in news coverage by the white press about black alleged acts of

¹²The New York Freedom's Journal a weekly was co-edited by Samuel Cornish a Presbyterian minister and John Russwurm, one of the first blacks to graduate from a college in the United States (Bowdoin, 1826). Donald M. Jacobs ed., Antebellum Black Newspapers (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976), 3.

lawlessness. Immediately after the emancipation, and well into the middle of the twentieth century, African Americans often found it impossible to receive unbiased news in matters concerning the "races" via many white dailies. This fact appeared to be valid whenever there were declared exploits of violent crime perpetrated against the country's white citizenry by blacks. As a result, biased reporting in more than a few instances led to mistrust of white dailies in affairs relevant to the black community. "As Roi Ottley has explained, the white press and news service earned the suspicion of black citizens in the first half of this century because they could not be trusted to tell the truth about blacks."¹³

Alleged unsavory acts were most certain to receive negative front page coverage regardless of the guilt, or innocence of the black perpetrator. Many of these white dailies tailored the news to suit their own racist views and that of their owners.¹⁴ Biased news coverage was blatantly unfair in both the northern and southern sectors of the United States. For example, the northern based Chicago Daily Tribune, and other major city newspapers during the height of

¹³Roland E. Wolseley, The Black Press, U. S. A. 2nd ed. (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1990) quoting Ottley, 10.

¹⁴Wolseley believed that because these white agencies favored whites over blacks they designed their news coverage to fit the publications' prejudices or at least those of their owners. Ibid.

the "Jim Crow" era were often guilty of "race bating." This action occurred mainly through its unfair coverage of crimes associated with the African American community. Founded in 1847 the Chicago Daily Tribune's initial "prospectus" did attempt to address policy fairness pertinent to racial issues. As asserted by its first editors:

Our view, in all probability, will sometimes be coincident with the conservatives; sometimes we may be found in the ranks of the radicals; but shall at all times be faithful to humanity--to the whole of humanity--without regard to race, sectional division, party lines, or parallels of latitude or longitude.¹⁵

Despite, the Tribune's "prospectus" when it was necessary to boost sales, especially during the earlier half of the twentieth century, insensitive coverage of racial incidents that frequently strained race relations became the norm. Of grave concern also to African Americans, during this era, was the white media's lack of attention to matters concerning the progress of blacks as an ethnic group. Instead, coverage depicting black citizens' disregard for law and lack of morality often took precedent over the group's achievements. In fact, most publications in both the North and South were guilty of identifying only African Americans by race while ignoring anything, but unfavorable news about them.

Along with biased reporting was the enigmatic persistence of callous attitudes directed toward blacks by white

¹⁵Lloyd Wendt, Chicago Tribune: The Rise of a Great American Newspaper (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1979), 24.

reporters. Attitudes as such helped to foster the "Jim Crow" system which in some cases pushed the races toward physical confrontation. These attitudes also served to preserve the "status quo" in American society.¹⁶ Thus the need for the black press to address the issue of racial discrimination was crucial when Abbott established the Chicago Defender in 1905. Unfortunately, the little publication was not large enough to reflect the mood nor the extent of the problem at that time.

Abbott Starts the Chicago Defender

On 5 May 1905, with very little money and no financial backing, Robert S. Abbott produced the first issue of his publication. The launching of the newspaper took place in his tiny cramped bedroom. At the time, Abbott was one of several boarders at the lodging house of Mrs. Henrietta Lee. He began his labor of love with only a borrowed quarter, a one cent pencil, and a nickel writing pad. According to the Defender's editor and publisher: "The first edition of the Chicago Defender appeared May 5, 1905, issued from 3159 State St."¹⁷

¹⁶Historian Carolyn Martindale has suggested that besides reflecting a white outlook and values, white journalists may also, as some researchers have claimed, tend to act as preservers of the status quo. Carolyn Martindale, The White Press and Black America (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 47.

¹⁷Robert S. Abbott, "Editor Robt. S. Abbott's Story of My Struggles and Success of the World's Greatest's Weekly," Chicago Defender, 3 May 1930, p. 1.

The publication got its name by mere coincidence. An associate of Abbott's, James A. Scott, suggested that the title "Defender" was a suitable name for Abbott's newspaper since blacks residing in the state and the nation were in critical need of a vigorous defender of their rights.¹⁸ When Abbott established his four page paper and adopted the name the Chicago Defender, he had no way of knowing at this particular time that his creation would become one of the nation's leading African American newspapers. Thus Abbott commented in later years on the precarious birth of the little publication:

It was a very inauspicious beginning, for the small room in which I slept was, at the same time, office, composing room and parlor combined. Here under the feeble, flickering light of a kerosene lamp; with an oil stove that gave off more carbon monoxide than heat, I edited and printed my weekly.¹⁹

While alive Abbott's stepfather, the Reverend Sengstacke, had also seen the need to create an organ for the dissemination of news to black folks. But, he had chosen the small rustic town of Woodville to establish his newspaper, the Woodville Times. In contrast, Abbott preferred the vast metropolis of Chicago as the birth place of the Defender. The city that was once called "Eschikagou" and was also home to

¹⁸James A. Scott, subsequently was appointed to and served as an Assistant States Attorney for the State of Illinois in the early 1900s. Arna Bontemps and Jack Conroy, They seek a City (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1945), 84.

¹⁹Robert S. Abbott, "Looking Back," Chicago Defender, 2 March 1940, p. 8.

the first outside settler who ironically was a black man, Jean Baptiste Pointe DuSable, held great promise.²⁰ In 1905, many blacks viewed Chicago as the economic mecca of American society. Chicago had become the transportation hub of the country mainly as a result of its massive railway system. More than a hundred trains per day railed their way into and through the city from every section of the nation.²¹ Abbott decided to utilize Chicago as the Defender's headquarters because of the city's large black population. Its openness to blacks with regards to economic opportunity also was a factor. Stated the Defender's owner: "I could have gone East, or further West or back into the deep South where the opportunities for practicing my trade as a printer were yet alluring. But I was not interested merely in printing as a trade."²²

Five years prior to the inception of the Chicago Defender there were an estimated 85,078 blacks living in the state of

²⁰Jean Baptiste Pointe DuSable (1745?-1818), a trapper, businessman, and founder of Chicago was said to have been born in St. Marc, Saint Dominque (now known as Haiti since 1804) of a French mariner and an African slave woman. He settled in what is now know as the city of Chicago around 1779 according to an official report written by Col. Arent de Peyster, a British officer, 4 July 1779. Rayford W. Logan and Michael R. Winston eds., Dictionary of American Negro Biography (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1982), 207.

²¹A fabric of steel rails made Chicago the nation's prime transportation crossroad and elevated the city into a commercial and industrial giant. Waters, 136.

²²Robert S. Abbott, "Quest for Equality: An Autobiography," Chicago Defender, 4 May 1940, p. 3.

Illinois.²³ When Abbott introduced his newspaper to black residents of Chicago's south side there were approximately forty thousand African Americans residing in the city.²⁴ The south side of town was not only an appropriate section to start a business because he lived there, but it was also the side of town that he relished. He enjoyed the local color of his neighborhood, and especially the personal contact with the common black "folk." In fact, his concept of a swell time was strolling the streets of the city's south side conversing with and watching the people he came to regard as the "Race."

Believing that the time was right for him to give black readers what they demanded, Abbott was once quoted as having said: "The time was ripe . . . to give this race a real organ with which to fight its battles."²⁵ Unfortunately, in the beginning Abbott spent more money than he had or received from the sales of his newspaper. Nevertheless, he was inspired by the notion that all he really needed was courage and fortitude. At this interlude in his life profit was of

²³Census Report information collected in 1900 indicated that there were 85,078 blacks living in the State of Illinois. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, Statistical Abstract of the United States, [Washington, D. C.]: (U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, 1930), 13.

²⁴Former Chicago Defender historian Roi Ottley has stated that there were nearly 40,000 blacks living in the city when Abbott conceived his idea for publishing the Defender. Ottley, 81.

²⁵Dewey Roscoe Jones, "World's Greatest Weekly Reviews Its Progress," Chicago Defender, 4 May 1935, p. 1.

secondary importance. Long after the venture had become a success, he poignantly declared: "I wanted to create an organ that would mirror the needs, opinions and the aspirations of my race. I saw clearly that if I would succeed, Chicago was the place."²⁶ However, getting this mammoth operation rolling was by no means an easy task. Abbott labored endlessly to keep the paper from folding. Besides the burden of being a one man operation, he also had to contend with those individuals who lacked faith in his ability to operate an enterprise for the sole benefit of the black community. Critics and friends alike often scoffed at his ingenuity. There had been others before him who had tried to run a black owned newspaper and failed. Wasn't he aware of the financial plight of such brilliant African American publishers as T. Thomas Fortune and John T. Mitchell? Their constant lament had been that it was nearly impossible to turn a profit simply by reliance on the readership of the black community.²⁷

Not only did many of his contemporaries doubt his ability, they approached his endeavor with skepticism and scorn. Bewildered by their attitudes, Abbott unhappily remarked:

I have never been able to understand to this

²⁶Chicago Defender, 4 May 1940, p. 3.

²⁷Former staff writer Dewey Roscoe Jones printed an article in the Defender disclosing T. Thomas Fortune and John T. Mitchell's, both black publishers, disappointment over not being able to earn enough money from their enterprises. Chicago Defender, 4, May 1935, p. 1.

day the basis for the caustic criticisms that were leveled at me when I began publishing my paper. The people and the intelligentsia from whom I expected a great deal of encouragement, were the most actively opposed to my plans. They ridiculed me; they made fun of me; and they refused to buy my paper.²⁸

To Abbott, this absence of faith in his journalistic ability was an enigma. It was not that the energetic editor lacked journalistic experience. Of his skills, he recalled:

My preparation for the newspaper business had its inception in my home town in Savannah, Ga., through my connection with the Savannah Tribune, Jonathan Stern, and Cookoow and Seaman, both newspaper publishers . . . gave me an opportunity as a reporter to learn something of the business.²⁹

The reluctance of Chicago's black community to recognize and embrace his journalistic talent to him seemed absurd. Thus he confided in his closest friends that the posture taken by his fellow journalists was most disconcerting. Was it plausible that they sensed a fierce competitor and thus sought to dissuade the editor? Or was it because they had not yet recognized his innovation nor his talent for collecting gossip and spinning it into tales to create news? These doubters only saw that he was a country "bumpkin" who was no master of the English language.³⁰

When Abbott started his newspaper amid the giggles of

²⁸Robert S. Abbott, "Quest for Equality: An Autobiography," Chicago Defender, 11 May 1940, p. 5.

²⁹Chicago Defender, 3 May 1930, p. 1.

³⁰Abbott's biographer has stated that when he spoke, he split verbs, fumbled his tenses, and dropped his final consonants. Ottley, 86.

many of his contemporaries there also were a number of events transpiring across the nation that in some way affected the lives of most African Americans. For instance, southern whites were lingering in a state of shock as a result of Booker T. Washington dining at the same table with Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt. In the city of Atlanta, young W. E. B. DuBois seemed to be studying the "Negro" with what many African Americans thought of as "detached" interest. However, of these events the most significant appeared to be the educational and economic gains of blacks throughout most of the nation.³¹

The year 1905 had been a tedious one for the new editor and publisher of the Chicago Defender. He had single handedly labored as "office" boy and main distributor for his little newspaper. However, with the coming of the new year things were about to change. In 1906, with the help of his half sister, Rebecca Sengstacke, his one man venture received a much needed boost. Rebecca had remained in Woodville, Georgia working as an elementary school teacher. Upon receiving word from Abbott that he was in desperate need of assistance with his newspaper, she immediately left her position and came to his aid. As the struggling new editor's assistant she took

³¹In 1905, blacks had advanced from utter poverty since 1885 to the ownership of fifteen million acres of land. Of the nine million blacks living in the nation during the same year, forty out of every one hundred of them were literate. Horace Mann Bond, "From 1905 to 1935," Chicago Defender, 4 May 1935, pp. 18-20.

over many of the routine tasks associated with the publication's daily operation. These duties included "proof" reading and becoming an "errand" runner. Although, Abbott publicly boasted of his ability to run a newspaper, at this time, he privately confided in his close friends about the uncertainty of his venture. In fact, he was so unsure of the Defender's direction that when Rebecca's school principal contacted her and asked her to return to Woodville to assume her teaching position, Abbott insisted that she accept the offer. Before, the year had ended Rebecca heeded Abbott's advice and returned to Woodville. Upon her departure Abbott's landlady, Mrs. Henrietta Lee, became his closest confidant and helper. In 1907, when he was able to hire a small band of workers Mrs. Lee became "mother" to the staff. Hence, Abbott spoke of her loyalty and encouragement in later years:

As the force grew, Mrs. Lee was a "mother" to each of them. Her kindly advice and words of encouragement often caused a cub reporter to resolve to "carry on," and many today, who occupy prominent niches in the fourth estate owe their successes to the encouragement given them by "Mother" Lee.³²

Despite, his initial blurb to focus on matters of consequential interest to the black community by 1907 the Chicago Defender, as it had done for the previous two years, printed low keyed articles. Abbott had not yet begun to "wholeheartedly" respond to black issues; instead the Defender only supplied the African American community with

³²Robert S. Abbott, "Mother of Defender," Chicago Defender, 3 May 1930, p. 4.

noncontroversial news. Ottley has stated of the publication's early years:

If Negroes had problems of a social or racial character, they were not apparent in the Defender; nor were there any accounts of accidents, suicides, murders, trials, or incidents of racial discrimination, lynching or conflict sensational news which was eventually to distinguish Abbott's journalism. Political news and editorials were ignored.³³

From the onset, Abbott attempted to pack his four page publication with social events as they pertained to the black community's prominent leaders and socialites. But, the articles were poorly written. Although, many historians would come to view his early journalistic style as a weakness that was characteristic of this epoch Abbott was accused by his competitors of using "clumsy" diction and improper sentence structure in conveying his news to his readers. Perhaps, to offset this flaw occasionally he printed stories under such captions as: "Africa The Land of Milk and Honey."³⁴ Despite, their crude narrative these types of reports did attempt to give his readers a bird's eye view of African culture and history. However, in contrast to his competitors who appeared to personalize their featured stories the Defender as viewed by many of his contemporaries gave the appearance of "impersonal" journalism. For example, there

³³Ottley, 90.

³⁴Sidney H. Arnett, "A True History of Our Fatherland," Chicago Defender, [Special Edition: 3 May 1930, p. 18.], 16 September 1905, p. 1.

were no "columns" or "bylines" followed by stories that presented the human element.

From 1907 through 1909, Abbott continued to side step many meaningful issues of interest to the black community . These were concerns that directly related to the policy of social, political, and economic discrimination, as well as problems associated with equality and quality education. Ironically, the opposite approach was taken by the city's leading "traditional" newspapers, especially the Chicago Daily Tribune.³⁵ While the Chicago Defender had not yet found its voice in 1909, the Tribune recognized the educational concerns of its readers and brought to their attention problems that existed within the Chicago Board of Education and between its suppliers. Among other things, these matters involved the educational needs of the children served by the city's public schools. For instance, the Tribune carried the story of the dispute between the Chicago Board of Education and one of its major textbook suppliers. This dispute involved the elimination of geography and other textbooks published by Tarr, McMurry, and Macmillan from the classrooms of Chicago's public schools by the board because of what they deemed as unfair pricing.³⁵

³⁵Under the superintendency of Edwin G. Cooley and the Chicago Board of Education presidency of Otto C. Schneider all textbooks published by the Macmillan company, including the Tarr & McMurry's elementary geography books series and others were to be eliminated from Chicago's public schools. The reason being that the Macmillan company refused to reduce the price of the series as set forth by the two companies to that

In 1909, the Tribune also carried articles that focused on the overcrowded conditions that prevailed in many of Chicago public school classrooms. However, the Chicago Defender had no comment regarding the problem.³⁶ Likewise, when the Chicago Daily Tribune began to feature articles that spot lighted the debate over the role of the nation's educational system and its perpetuation of industrial exploitation of children, once again the Defender remained mute.³⁷

A Look at Black Press Competition

When copies of the Chicago Defender first hit the streets of Chicago there were already in existence, at least, three major black owned newspapers in the state of Illinois vying for Negro readership: Julius C. Taylor's Chicago based Broad Ax, Ferdinand L. Barnett's Conservator, and S. B. "Sandbags"

which was charged in Indiana. "Board of Education Will Eliminate Them from Schools," Chicago Daily Tribune, 6 January 1909, p. 2.

³⁶The article described the Tribune report on a meeting between the principal of the Clarke Elementary School, Henry G. Clark, and the Chicago Board of Education's Trustees in reference to the problem of overcrowding at Clarke. "School For 1,400 Packed With 1,700," Chicago Daily Tribune, 9 January 1909, p. 7.

³⁷This 1909 article reported on an educational conference whereby members of the New York delegation chastised other educational leaders for allowing the nation's school system to prepare working class children for the factories. "Child Labor Sin of School," Chicago Daily Tribune, 23 January 1909, p. 5.

Turner's Illinois Idea. A fourth Illinois black owned publication, the Illinois Record (1897-1899) had proceeded the Broad Ax and had briefly captured the state's black circulation market. Of the three main newspapers, the syndicated Broad Ax had the widest readership. Perhaps, this was the result of its efforts to operate from both an Illinois and Minneapolis headquarters. In addition to these publications, Chicago area blacks also had access to T. Thomas Fortune's New York Age and George L. Knox's Indianapolis Freeman. Both of these newspapers were black owned and edited.

During their heyday, the three leading publications circulating out of Illinois made no attempt to alienate the white populace with controversial issues associated with racial discrimination nor did they seek to titillate their black readers with sensationalism. They were, basically, instruments for their editors to explicate their convictions, discipline their adversaries, and promote their "personal" political agenda. Abbott did not follow his competitors' pattern of advancing their own ambitions, nor did he adhere to one of his major objectives for embarking upon the path of journalism: to give his readers something different for their money. In a personal disclosure of this chief intent, Abbott wrote:

I entered the field of journalism with a determination to take the Negro newspaper out of the soap wrapper class; to give the people a paper which they would not be ashamed to read on the street

cars, and which could not be put away like a dime novel in an inside pocket.³⁸

However, it was not until 1909 with the hiring of John Hockley Smiley, a black Chicago resident, and his subsequent promotion to that of managing editor for the newspaper in the proceeding year that Abbott succeeded in accomplishing his goal. This action was, mainly, achieved through a change in the publication's format and its newly assumed radical posture in terms of addressing the educational aspirations of African Americans, as well as their social, economic, and political interests.

John H. Smiley Becomes An Agent of Change
for the Chicago Defender

John Hockley Smiley the son of a popular black Chicago caterer, Charles Smiley, became Abbott's first paid employee. Hired at the bottom of the organization's hierarchy within one year, he had advanced to a position of importance.³⁹ Although, he had only a high school education Smiley gained recognition as a journalist through his innovative reporting style. It was true that he possessed limited experience in the field of journalism and was even considered by Abbott as

³⁸Chicago Defender, 2 March 1940, p. 8.

³⁹John H. Smiley remained with the newspaper until his death 10 October 1915. "The Defender's First Managing Editor," Chicago Defender, [25th Anniversary Special Edition] 3 May 1930, p. 18.

a non prolific writer. But, he managed by utilizing ingenuity and flare to turn the Defender within a matter of months into a scintillating publication. He accomplished this feat by employing five major action plans. But, first he had to convince Abbott that his newspaper lacked news scoops that focused on the human condition.

Smiley believed the Defender needed articles and editorials that defined and explored national issues of a social nature that were relevant to the African American experience. Accordingly, these interests involved discrimination, persecution, and the lack of educational opportunity. Thus having gained his employer's confidence, Smiley proceeded to place plan one into action. The prime objective of this plan was to get the attention of prospective readers. This was to be executed by reporting with dramatic flare news which focused upon incidents of murder, mayhem, and accidental death. Of course, such stories were to initially take center stage. After reeling in new readers, it then became the Defender's responsibility to keep them by zeroing in on life issues of primary interest to blacks. Abbott saw nothing wrong with Smiley's first plan of action. Indeed, he agreed with him that the publication in its present state depicted a lack of social commitment to African Americans. However, Abbott contributed his neglect of such matters as a non intentional oversight. Thus he acknowledged with shame that in his over zealousness to start a newspaper, he had

inadvertently overlooked these major concerns of the black community.⁴⁰

Enthralled with his managing editor's ideas about changing the publication's appearance, Abbott immediately pounced upon Smiley's second action plan which focused on the conversion of the Defender from a "hit" or "miss" operation to a regular weekly edition. Smiley had lifted this idea from the Chicago Tribune. Hence, it was under Smiley's gleeful eye that the little publication added to its title the claim that it was now: "The World's Greatest Weekly."⁴¹ With this change came the adoption of the term, the "Race." While Smiley was the first person to use the term in reference to African Americans, Abbott was the first journalist to publicly endorse its usage. After he sanctioned the term, its appearance was first noticed in the Chicago Defender in 1910. The label was employed by Abbott as a substitute for existing racial terms such as "Negro" and "Afro-American" which were extensively, during this particular era, used by other members of the black press.⁴² However, Abbott was equally guilty of

⁴⁰Abbott's biographer has suggested by way of conversation with Henry D. Middleton, a former part time Defender correspondent, that although Abbott possessed a passion for the rights of his people, which at times bordered on fanaticism, he was so eager to embark upon his goal that at the beginning he had no precise plan of action for his publication. Ottley, 105.

⁴¹Chicago Defender, 4 May 1935, p. 1.

⁴²As stated by Abbott's biographer, the labels of "Negro" and "Afro-American" were universally used by the black press during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

the frequent misuse of terms like "Afro-American," "Negro," and "Colored" as he reported stories in the Defender apposite to black participants.

Smiley's third plan of action sprang into motion with the appropriation of Abbott's recommendation to further attract the public's eye by copying the front page format of Chicago's most popular white dailies. This was definitely the case with regards to those prominent newspapers which belonged to the Hearst chain. In so doing, Abbott had his new managing editor duplicate William Randolph Hearst's technique of "yellow journalism."⁴³ Still not completely satisfied with the newspaper's new look, Abbott then requested that Smiley spruce up the publication's "banner headlines." Smiley accommodated this request by printing the Defender's "banner headlines" in red ink.

This fourth plan gave the newspaper's front page an eye catching three dimensional appearance. Thus headlines printed in red ink such as the following now greeted new and old

However, they were considered as meaningless to the Defender's owner. He believed that these racial terms held negative connotations in connection to the black experience. Although, Abbott capitalized the word for expediency throughout the remainder of this dissertation the term when used will appear in the lower case. Ottley, 109.

⁴³In 1896, William R. Hearst increased circulation by publishing droll comics, along with other antics, that began with the depiction of a nameless street urchin dressed in a triangular yellow gown. This urchin was later referred to as the "Yellow Kid." He soon lent his name to an entire era and style of publishing called, "yellow journalism." Lloyd Wendt, Chicago Tribune: The Rise of a Great American Newspaper (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1979), 352.

Chicago Defender readers: "WHITE MAN TURNS BLACK IN ST LOUIS."⁴⁴ More sinister headlines and stories also draped the pages of the newspaper. With no holds barred, the Defender now reported that in the United States approximately a hundred blacks per week were killed by whites.⁴⁵ According to the editor, this heinous injustice could be eradicated by means of education for both races in lieu of segregation. Smiley, who was hence satisfied with the publication's new look having previously acquired his boss's permission to incorporate sensationalism in the Defender's coverage of the news, now believed that it was time to attack with a vengeance those controversial social, political, and educational issues that haunted the "race." With the impetus of these four major changes the publication finally began to gain momentum. However, it was the fifth and final plan that witnessed the accession of the newspaper to national prominence.

The fifth action plan included brainstorming sessions to procure ways to expand news coverage on the national level. Of course, Abbott cautioned his managing editor that expansion of such coverage had to be accomplished within his limited financial constraints. Smiley was the first of the two men to seize upon an ingenious idea that could expedite the publication's marketability. Accordingly, Abbott was to

⁴⁴Ottley, 106.

⁴⁵"100 Negroes Murdered Weekly in United States by White Americans," Chicago Defender, 19 March 1910, p. 2.

organize a loosely knit group of volunteers that included pullman porters, restaurant and train waiters, as well as barbers, and traveling musicians. These individuals were to gather news from across the nation. In essence, they were to become Abbott's army of non paid Defender correspondents, as well as distributors. In the months and years that followed the entire "corps" assumed responsible for helping the publication gain national recognition.

Then unbeknown to Abbott, however, it was the pullman porters who were the most active in securing public acceptance of the newspaper. Thus stated Enoch P. Waters, in recalling the effort:

Impressed by the paper's quality and Abbott's militancy, the porters took copies with them on their runs to read during their moments of leisure. These began to fall into the hands of Negroes in the cities and towns through which the trains passed. They liked what they saw, the pictures, the news stories, and editorials that expressed their thoughts.⁴⁶

In 1910, Abbott boasted through his improved Chicago Defender that: "25,000 PEOPLE READ CHICAGO'S ONLY WEEKLY."⁴⁷ It now appeared that the five step plan to increase national circulation within the black community was a success. Not everyone, however, shared Abbott's excitement.

Because the publication had begun to capitalize on racial incidents involving violence and discrimination, in particular

⁴⁶Waters, 136.

⁴⁷"25,000 People Read Chicago's Only Weekly," Chicago Defender, 12 March 1910, p. 1.

white on black hate crimes, the newspaper's owner was immediately accused by members of the white press of indulging in racist "propaganda." Much to his surprise, many of his black contemporaries sided with the white press. Certainly, not because of the nature of the crimes reported, but more out of envy. To their exasperation, Abbott with his new style of reporting the news had managed to out sell their product. Somewhat aggravated with his journalistic colleagues, but not disheartened, Abbott viewed his new stringent stance as a necessary annoyance. At the moment, his primary concern was to attract the black masses and with John Hockley Smiley's assistance that is exactly what he attempted to accomplish.

As Abbott sensed the new defiant mood of black America, he played to their emotions by magnifying every instance of violence, bigotry, and debasement directed toward the nation's black citizens.⁴⁸ Basking in the surge of their new found defiance, Abbott took on the role of gladiator thus making the prevailing theme of the Chicago Defender one that declared: "American Race Prejudice Must Be Destroyed!"⁴⁹ In establishing his theme, Abbott created a nine point platform

⁴⁸According to black historian Lerone Bennett Jr., in 1910 Abbott had created a different kind of newspaper. Instead of appealing primarily to black intellectuals his new journalistic form, which was similar in some respects to black militants like W. E. B. DuBois and William M. Trotter, spoke the language of the black masses. Lerone Bennett, Jr., Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, 1987), 341.

⁴⁹Robert S. Abbott, "American Race Prejudice Must Be Destroyed," Chicago Defender, 11 July 1936, p. 16.

which became a continuous component of the publication.' This platform urged white America to make accessible to blacks, as well as whites, all trades and trade unions. It also called for African American representation in the president's cabinet. It demanded that black engineers and firemen be placed on all national railroads, as well as government controlled industries.

The nine point platform also pushed for African American representation in all law enforcement agencies throughout the country. It demanded that government schools open their doors to all American citizens in preference to foreigners. It also insisted that black conductors be employed on all railroads in every section of the United States, as well as the hiring of black motormen and conductors on "surface," elevated, and "motorbus" lines throughout America. Finally, and perhaps more importantly, the platform requested that federal legislation be enacted to abolish lynching while at the same time guarantying full enfranchisement of all American citizens.⁵⁰

' What Abbott wanted to accomplish through his nine point platform was total eradication of America's policy of racial segregation. Of course, this would include full equality for the "race" in every sphere of American society.' With his insistence of complete assimilation, it became clear in 1910

⁵⁰Robert S. Abbott, "Defender's Platform for America," Chicago Defender, 11 July 1936, p. 16.

that his position on the "race" issue went far beyond the ideology of Booker T. Washington and in time would supersede that of W. E. B. DuBois.⁵¹

⁵¹In summarizing Robert S. Abbott's position on complete integration of blacks into American society his biographer has asserted that Abbott's systematic policies which supplanted the ideologies of both DuBois and Washington gave African Americans a rallying point for action thereby thrusting him into a leadership position. Ottley, 127.

CHAPTER III

ACADEMIC REPORTING (1910-1915)

School News Becomes Important

By 1910, the Chicago Defender was in its fifth year as a public commodity. Because of Abbott's attention to issues that were of primary interest to African Americans, the publication had begun to gain the confidence of blacks. African Americans across the nation now turned to the publisher and editor from Chicago for guidance. One such concern of the community was that of education. Upon public recognition of the educational disparity which existed between black and white Americans, Abbott thus made a concerted effort to cover related problems pertinent to "Negro" schooling. However, he was by no means the first black journalist to examine these problems. Educational concerns relevant to the group had been a major source of interest for Africans residing in the United States since the days of slavery. For example, the first journalists of African descent to focus public attention germane to the educational aspirations of blacks in American society were John Russwurm and Samuel Cornish. Both men via their newspaper, the Freedom's Journal, had commented on the importance of education for free persons of color some seventy-eight years prior to the inception of Robert S. Abbott's publication. Declared these two gentlemen in 1827:

Education being an object of the highest importance

to the welfare of society, we shall endeavor to present just and adequate views of it, and to urge upon our brethren the necessity and expediency of training their children while young, to habits of industry, and thus forming them for becoming useful members of society.¹

As guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment (1866) after the Emancipation Proclamation blacks were free to receive schooling, although often segregated, in both the northern and southern sectors of the United States without fear of state or federal reprisal.² However, this freedom did not guarantee quality schooling or equality of educational opportunity for blacks. Abbott was cognizant of this dilemma as he assumed his new role at age forty-two as public leader and advocate for the black community. Thus he began attacking those obstacles which impeded the educational progress of this minority group. On rare occasions, he even turned his attention to educational matters that affected other minorities such as Chinese immigrants and the indigenous population, known as native Americans.

In the beginning, his frontal assault upon educational

¹Freedom's Journal, 16 March 1827, quoted in Lena Boyd Brown's, "Black Newspapers and Black Education in America, 1960-1970: A Study of Editorial Opinion on Education in Three Black Newspapers" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Rutgers University of New Brunswick: New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1979), p. 24.

²The Fourteenth Amendment is one of the most significant and foresighted amendments to the Constitution because it not only gave citizenship to African Americans, it also for the first time gave to the American people a constitutional definition of citizenship. Harold H. Eibling, Carlton L. Jackson, and Vito Perrone, Two Centuries of Progress, 2nd ed. (River Forest, Illinois: Laidlaw Brothers Publishers, 1977), 320.

inequities appeared tempered. But, despite their inadequacies, they were deliberate. Starting with a weekly column called "Schools and Colleges," the Chicago Defender featured a "hodge podge" of gathered information that included local and national school news. One such column appeared on 22 January 1910.

It provided data and give notice that native American educators from across the United States were holding a meeting in the nation's capital to discuss methods of improving public schooling for their people.³ Accompanying this information was news of Bryn Mawr College's acceptance of a financial gift from one of its alumnae, Cynthia M. Wesson. The amount was seventy thousand dollars. Also listed was a congratulatory note intended for a former 1906 University of Wisconsin graduate, Miss Rhoda M. White. The note recognized her appointment as Dean of Women at Vermont's Middlebury College.⁴ Abbott also offered his readers a bit of humor in his "Schools and Colleges" weekly column. For example, in covering a North Dakota Spelling Bee he reported: "North Dakota is going to learn to spell, if the plans worked out by the educators of the state for a revival of interest in correct spelling works

³Educators who were entrusted with providing formal education for the native American constituted this group that met in Washington, District of Columbia. "Schools and Colleges," Chicago Defender, 22 January 1910, p. 2.

⁴Although, Wesson gave the university a large monetary gift the Defender did not list her societal importance. Ibid.

out."⁵

Other such "Schools and Colleges" columns of the same year covered news items involving the academic achievement of African Americans on a national level. One column in particular praised George W. Scott's performance at Columbia University. Scott had won the Curtis Medal of distinction for oratory.⁶ Locally, via the Defender, Abbott urged Chicago's black residents to seize the opportunity to attend the city's "Evening Schools." As announced in a 1910 issue:

The evening schools of the Chicago Public Schools system will be opened next Monday night. Tonight is registration night for all prospective pupils. Evening courses will be taught in thirty-five schools. In the South you are not given a chance to go to night school, so those of you who can't read nor write should take advantage of this chance to get something for nothing. Few other cities can make this offer.⁷

In his attempt to cover all educational matters of concern to black Americans, Abbott also vowed to expose any hint of racial discrimination in the nation's public schools no matter how controversial. For example, in 1910 he published an article attacking Chicago Fifteenth Ward alderman, A. W. Bellfuss, for his part in attempting to persuade the Chicago Board of Education to engage in the

⁵"North Dakota's Plan to Get School Children Into County Contests," Chicago Defender, 28 May 1910, p. 2.

⁶"Schools and Colleges," Chicago Defender, 28 May 1910, p. 2.

⁷"Evening Schools To Open," Chicago Defender, 8 October 1910, p. 1.

redistricting of boundaries for four elementary schools, Wells, Columbus, Mitchell, and Hayes.

The redistricting was ordered in an effort to halt the transfer of white students from the Wells and Columbus schools to the predominantly black attended Mitchell and Hayes. Thus Wells and Columbus would be reserved for whites only. Angrily denouncing the alderman's actions, Abbott declared that the practice of "southern" racial prejudice had finally emerged in the Chicago Public Schools' system.⁸ Ironically, during this particular interval his dismay regarding the matter was not personally directed toward Superintendent Ella Flagg Young, nor did he appear too concerned with the board's decision to honor Bellfuss's request. His gripe appeared to focus on the insensitivity of the alderman and his group of white constituents who had demanded the "redistricting." He half heartedly trusted the board's decision, at this time, because he knew that the city had been more tolerant in its efforts to keep its public schools integrated which was more than many northern cities had done. This trust stemmed not only from his knowledge of Illinois' law which mandated that there be no racial discrimination in public places of service, but also because the State had on record a school law which prohibited the practice of "Jim Crow" in public institutions of learning.

⁸Robert S. Abbott accused then Fifteenth Ward Alderman A. W. Bellfuss of orchestrating the redistricting. "Southerners After Separate Schools-Lookout," Chicago Defender, 17 September 1910, p. 1.

By the same token, Chicago's track record of not excluding black children from its public school district since the 1800s had been better than other Illinois' school districts. Likewise, the Chicago district as compared to national scene was more liberal in its approach to integration.⁹

Abbott was also aware that Chicago's public schools had to comply with an Illinois' revised school law which decreed an integrated system.¹⁰ Notwithstanding, he considered in 1910 the city's superintendent of public instruction, Mrs. Young, as an ally rather than an adversary. This was mainly because of her democratic philosophy of education which encompassed fair and impartial schooling for all students who attended public schools. In addition, Mrs. Young had expressed her faith in the character of the country's public schools before and during her tenure as Chicago's custodian of

⁹According to historians Katznelson and Weir, Chicago's public schools were integrated as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century and remained so except for a brief period of segregation during the Civil War. Largely at the request of Chicago's Irish community, the Chicago city council in 1863 enacted a "Black School Law." However, black parents refused to remove their children from the white schools in question. Their action resulted in a quiet repeal of the Law in 1865. Ira Katznelson and Margaret Weir, Schooling For All: Class, Race, and the Decline of the Democratic Ideal (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1985), 195.

¹⁰As stated by historian Herrick, in 1889 the Illinois General Assembly amended the State's school law to make boards of educations subject to a fine of from \$5 to \$100 if found guilty of excluding a student from a public school in Illinois as a result of race. Mary J. Herrick, The Chicago Schools: A Social and Political History (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1971), 400.

public education.¹¹

Of course, Abbott was more than adamant in his position on the issue of integrated schooling. For instance, his public stance against a black female who had circulated a petition at the request of a few disgruntled white citizens for segregated schools in the Chicago area was evidence of this posture. Angrily denouncing the woman, Abbott retorted via his newspaper: "Slam the door in her face. If such Negroes of Georgia are satisfied with Jim Crow schools and theaters and being black wenches for ignorant white crackers and rich ones as well, let them keep it south."¹² In another article of a similar nature, but in a different tone he exposed "Jim Crow" conditions as they existed in Washington D. C.'s public schools. This time, however, he praised the lone "race" female member of that district's school board, Mary Church Terrell, for courageously going against black male members who had aligned themselves with whites. These individuals had refused admittance of a seven year old black girl to an all white public elementary school. Smugly, Abbott

¹¹McManis had surmised that Ella Flagg Young's position pertinent to equity in public schooling for all students was so strong that she frowned on the invasion of sectarian, political, or social issues upon the system. As American citizens all students regardless of color, religious affiliation or ethnicity were to be allowed access to public schooling. John T. McManis, Ella Flagg Young: And a Half-Century of the Chicago Public Schools (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Company, 1916), 164.

¹²"Jim Crow Schools in Chicago," Chicago Defender, 12 November 1910, p. 1.

reported: "Were it not for Mary Church Terrell, this seven year old girl would have to walk two miles to school, instead she demanded her Civil Rights and the white school accepts the little colored girl."¹³

Abbott's Role in Politics and His Selection of Politicians

Not only was 1910 the initiative year of educational concerns for the Chicago Defender, it was also the paper's year to take an active role in the realm of politics. As a strong advocate of political equality for the African American, Abbott had no trouble in assuming a leadership position in the promotion of a few political careers for black and white candidates. His assistance in the launching of these careers took place both locally and nationally. In fact, the publication carried a "Politics and Politicians" column which covered national-wide political news.¹⁴

Abbott beseeched black Illinois voters to keep an African American man in the state's legislature.¹⁵ Within the same year, he also pushed black south side residents of Chicago's Second Ward to help elect an independent candidate of African

¹³"They Have Jim Crow Schools," Chicago Defender, 18 June 1910, p. 1.

¹⁴"Politics and Politicians," Chicago Defender, 12 February 1910, p. 2.

¹⁵"Keep A Colored Man in the Legislature," Chicago Defender, 4 March 1910, p. 1.

American descent. That Second Ward candidate was Edward H. Wright.¹⁶

Not shying away from backing white individuals who were in favor of racial tolerance, Abbott's support of such candidates seeking political office included that of Illinois' second term governor, Charles S. Deneen. He favored Deneen for his "iron hand" posture against lynching. As Governor of Illinois, Deneen won Abbott's praise because of his successful effort in foiling the lynching of a black man in Cairo, Illinois.¹⁷ On the national scene, Abbott supported the efforts of men like President Theodore Roosevelt. As reported by his managing editor, Roosevelt was seen as a "remarkable man" of extraordinary character and sound judgment.¹⁸

Politically speaking, during this particular period in American history, Abbott was not unlike many ethnic individuals who had preceded blacks to America's urban industrial centers. Thus his desire as a political leader was to select, elect, and keep political candidates in public office for the sole purpose of accommodating the needs of

¹⁶W. A. W., "Do You Want a Colored Alderman?" Chicago Defender, 29 January 1910, p. 1.

¹⁷"Gov. Chas S. Deneen," Chicago Defender, 19 February 1910, p. 1.

¹⁸John Hockley Smiley, "Our First Citizen," Chicago Defender, 30 April 1910, p. 1.

African Americans.¹⁹

With the assistance of his managing editor, John Hockley Smiley, by 1911 Abbott's newspaper had succeeded in capturing the political and social interest of his readers by titillating their senses with articles under glaring "banner" headlines printed in red ink that simply read: "The North The South The Negro."²⁰ In essence, the purpose of the articles that followed such headlines was to examine the existing social and political conditions in American society that related to the black experience.

Blacks Take Charge of Their Educational Destinies

School news as covered by the Defender during 1911 included reports of a growing national movement by African Americans to take control of their educational destinies.

¹⁹Noted political historian Harold F. Gosnell has surmised that when blacks initially came to northern cities in the beginning they exercised their right to vote and then started to entertain the thought of running their candidates for elected offices. Having one's own candidate was significant for a number of reasons. First, as a group African Americans had issues which historically had not been recognized by either political party. Secondly, like other minorities that had preceded them blacks became aware of their power as a pressure group. Finally, they recognized that when a member of their ethnic group was elected to a political position of importance the entire group stood to benefit. Harold F. Gosnell, Negro Politicians: The Rise of Negro Politics In Chicago (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 63.

²⁰J. Hockley Smiley, "The North The South The Negro," Chicago Defender, 2 December 1911, p. 1.

Hence, Chicago Defender readers were frequently besieged with a deluge of media announcements which detailed events of educational organizations like the National Association of Teachers for Colored Schools. In an effort to spark interest about an assembly put together by these educators, whose main concern was that of the academic progress of black Americans, Abbott notified his readers of the group's St. Louis conference by placing an announcement under what appeared to be an eye-brow raising caption which read: "Tell Them We're Rising"²¹

In fact this defiant statement was meant to serve notice on white America that blacks were assuming control of their lives and were on the move toward self determination. This self direction included meeting the educational needs of black Americans. The actual conference, however, was not as sinister as Abbott had led his readers to believe. On the contrary, the main goal of the conference's organizers was to examine elementary, secondary, and higher education programs which were already in existence for "colored" institutions of learning. However, for those blacks who dared exhibit a lack of interest in attending the conference, a bit of chiding was in order. Thus the publication's owner proclaimed in an audacious manner: "Teachers From all Parts of the South to

²¹"The National Association of Teachers of Colored Schools," Chicago Defender, 4 February 1911, p. 1.

Gather at St. Louis to 'Show Them' How to Do Pedagogy."²² The statement appeared to have reflected Abbott's concern about the needs of blacks to address issues of schooling for their community.

As evidence of this growing movement by African Americans to show that they were quickly becoming the guardians of their own educational destinies, the paper carried a statistical comparison of Atlanta's, "educational advantages" for the city's black and white student population. Included in the article were several ratios. Two of these data reports represented the number of children enrolled in that city's public school system plus the ratio of hired teachers, black to white, for the city's public schools. Regarding the former, for example, to every one black child enrolled in the system there were three white children. Relevant information on the hiring of teachers also showed the ratio to be lopsided. For instance, compared to every black teacher hired in the Atlanta public educational sector there were five whites hired to counter-balance.²³

²²"The Wise Men and Women Gather in St. Louis," Chicago Defender, 22 July 1911, p. 1.

²³The report which was secured from Atlanta's superintendent of public education's office showed the number of elementary schools in the city were 38 for whites and 11 for blacks; there were 4 high schools for whites and 0 high schools for blacks; 2 night schools for whites and 0 for blacks; 420 teachers for whites and 80 for blacks; the average salary per white teacher was \$77.62 per month as compared to \$41.03 per black teacher per month; and that Atlanta's total public school student enumeration equaled 15,324 for whites and 4,778 for blacks with an out of school student aged

The Atlanta report also illustrated that there was a definite lack of educational commitment on the part of the city's public school administrators for its black residents. When Abbott first reported the situation the article came as no surprise to most Defender readers mainly because they were aware of the nation's "Jim Crow" policy, especially as it existed in most southern states. As a matter of fact, in 1911 most African Americans knew that there were more white children enrolled in schools than blacks. Furthermore, they were also cognizant of the fact that white schools offered more courses than blacks ones, were better constructed, and white teachers who taught in the same southern region as African Americans earned on average 60 percent more salary wise.²⁴

By 1912, priority reporting of school news had begun to focus on the need for a healthy classroom environment. With one eye centered on the national scene while at the same time keeping abreast of the educational interest of Chicago's black population, Abbott pressed Chicago's board of education to make public school classrooms hygienic, safe, and appealing. Reporting through the Defender on a study that correlated

population of 5,000 for blacks and a "not given" for whites. There were also no provisions made for the 5,000 out of school blacks. "Negroes of Atlanta Rising Despite Prejudice," Chicago Defender, 5 August 1911, p. 1.

²⁴Thomas F. Gossett, Race: The History of an Idea In America (Dallas, Texas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963), 277.

sound health practices with academic growth, Abbott recommended that these classrooms be as sanitary as humanly possible. He clearly added to this recommendation that: "The surroundings of pupils in the classroom should be as bright, cheerful, and attractive as they can be if the children are to make the best progress with their educational work."²⁵

In its role as informer, the newspaper also reported on the opening of "Social Centers" that were sponsored by the Chicago public schools. Regarding the opening of these centers, Abbott disclosed that for the first time in the city's history its board of education would allow school buildings to be used by the public for the benefit of all neighborhood residents.²⁶ Luckily, for these city dwellers the decision by some board members to abolish the Committee on Social Centers the following year because they wanted them supervised by the board's Committee on School Management had little, if any, effect on the centers' operation.²⁷

There was also praise for Superintendent Ella Flagg

²⁵"Make The School Room Sanitary," Chicago Defender, 2 November 1912, p. 1.

²⁶"City Schools to be Social Centers," Chicago Defender, 9 March 1912, p. 7.

²⁷In 1913, a motion was made by members of the Committee on School Management to abolish the Committee on Social Centers and to place the management of these Social Centers and all work related to them under their supervision. No objections having been made by members of the Chicago Board of Education the recommendation was adopted. City of Chicago, Proceedings for the Board of Education, 1 October 1913, p. 260.

Young's participation in community/school related affairs which involved the black community during 1912. In one such event mentioned in a March article, Abbott proudly announced that Mrs. Young would participate in the city's African American sponsored "Criterion Club's" efforts to foster academic excellence among the city's black youth. Elated with her willingness to work with the community, the Defender proclaimed: "Principals of All High Schools Ask to Select Eligible Candidates for Contest--Miss Ella Flagg Young, Superintendent of Public Schools, Heartily Approves the Efforts of Criterion Club, and Is Giving Them Most Valuable Aid."²⁸ In another article the paper explained in detail what the club would do for the winners. The club was to provide a four year scholarship to Fisk University for the lucky students. This honor would be awarded to the high school graduate who received the highest score for oratorical and literary competence.²⁹ Because of their attention to improving the academic skills of black children, the "Criterion Club" appeared to be one of Abbott's favorite educational organizations.³⁰ One item worth mentioning with

²⁸"Scholarship Contest Progressing," Chicago Defender, 23 March 1912, p. 1.

²⁹"Brighten Up Your Intellect," Chicago Defender, 16 March 1912, p. 1.

³⁰The Club was comprised of sixteen young adults who had organized to encourage African American students to study and practice those principles that were of paramount importance in the social development of all people. The club also had as its sponsors a vast array of black business, religious,

respect to Superintendent Young's commitment to Chicago's African American community; on a grading scale ranging from superior to poor during the previous year, Abbott had given her a superior rating.

In a continued effort to encourage the city's black residents to take full advantage of "night schools," advertisement after advertisement was placed in Abbott's newspaper expounding their merit. Notwithstanding, he placed their importance under the subject of quality education. Not only did Abbott illustrate their usefulness, he also gave his readers valuable statistical information on the number of students enrolled in such schools.³¹ Chiding those blacks who needed schooling, but who refused to take advantage of this opportunity Abbott contended under the caption of "Foreigners Take Advantage of Night School:"

There is little or probably no excuse for any one to grow up in Chicago in a state of ignorance, as there are all sorts of facilities offered for the advancement and education of our citizens. And above all, the advantages to colored people seem to be greater here than anywhere in the United States because of a minimum amount of prejudice and the

political, and educational leaders who were interested in facilitating the study of great works of literature. Ibid.

³¹The Chicago Defender reported in 1912 that there was a total enrollment of 27,652 students in attendance in the Chicago public schools' system during that school year. Of these students approximately 14,609 attended "night school." These "night schools" were in 1910 referred to as "Evening Schools." "Helpful Lectures In Public Schools," Chicago Defender, 12 October 1912, p. 1.

broadmindedness of our educators.³²

Regarding the same article, Abbott also rendered a listing of the most popular classes offered at these "night schools." This listing took into consideration many of the well attended classes for the years 1909 through 1912.³³

Abbott Discusses Learning and the Color Line

In 1912, Abbott's determination to confront America's racial intolerance of African Americans had intensified. Nowhere, was this more evident than in his outrage toward the system for its sanction of violence, intimidation, and discrimination against black Americans. Articles which were meant to strike at the core of the nation's social fabric for such conduct became a weekly occurrence. Whether pleading with the Democratic Congress to reconsider casting their votes

³²Ibid.

³³According to the Defender, classes that offered vocational subjects increased from 20 per cent in 1909 to 50 percent in 1910. Classes that offered electronics enrolled 300 students city-wide during the 1909-10 school year. By 1911 the enrollment had increased to 481 and enrollment for 1912 in these same electronic classes had dramatically increased to 751 students. Classes which offered commercial subjects such as bookkeeping, stenography, typing, and special business courses showed an enrollment from 1909-1910 of approximately 2,300 students. From 1910-1911 the enrollments for commercial subjects classes increased to 2,972. By 1912 there were 3,649 students enrolled in commercial courses. The number of students who pursued courses of study of a vocational nature had a significant enrollment totalling 10,389. Ibid.

for the repeal of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, or praising the incumbent President William Howard Taft for his display of courage in publicly announcing his intent to veto all impending "Jim Crow" legislation, Abbott had thus vowed to fight to the death against discrimination and injustice as experienced by his racial group.³⁴ Despite, his outrage he still found it easy to associate with persons of European descent. This was especially true with regards to those individuals who believed that blacks were entitled to the same amenities as white Americans.³⁵ In so doing, Abbott held dear the friendships of both Carl Sandburg and Clarence Darrow. He also cherished the close association of Jane Addams and Mary McDowell.

Amid the clamor for separate schools for Chicago's black and white students as reported by the Chicago Daily Tribune 17 February 1912, Abbott stood steadfast behind the city's public schools' superintendent and announced to his readers that neither Mrs. Young nor the Chicago Board of Education would

³⁴Regarding this article, the Defender had reported that any attempts made by the 1912 Democratic Congress to disenfranchise the black vote would be counteracted with a prompt and angry response by the President. "Pres. Taft Will Veto All Jim Crow Bills," Chicago Defender, 6 April 1912, p. 1.

³⁵In his equality quest for African Americans during this time it was not unusual for Robert S. Abbott to publicly acknowledge the commitment to justice displayed by individuals like Jane Addams of Hull House, or a man of the cloth such as Chicago's Hyde Park Rabbi Hirsch, or Julius Rosenwald. "Jews Come to Assistance of Negroes," Chicago Defender, 20 January 1912, p. 1.

segregate this city's public institutions of learning. Much to the horror of the black community, the Tribune had printed an article in which it was alleged that the "Protective Improvement Association of Hyde Park" had advised the city's mayor and the Chicago Board of Education that whites residing in the Hyde Park area wanted separate learning facilities. The article also reported that these same white residents were also vehemently opposed to black teachers instructing white students.

When a rumor began circulating throughout the predominantly white Haven Elementary School that a "Negro" teacher had allowed a black boy to hold a white girl's hand at a school dance the demands made by these parents escalated. Although, the alleged incident was later proven to be no more than a vicious lie the association's president, Henry T. Davis, retorted: "You never can tell when it will happen."³⁶ Further adding to his comment, he declared: "I don't think there are any white people who want their children taught by negroes."³⁷ Abbott directly responded to an open letter to the public from board member William T. Mulvhill. Accordingly, he applauded the board's decision to keep Chicago's public schools integrated. Angry over Davis' insulting conduct while gloating over the board's decision,

³⁶"Urge Jim Crow' Rule In Schools," Chicago Daily Tribune, 17 February 1912, p. 1.

³⁷Ibid.

Abbott thus stated:

Mr. H. T. Davis is well known in the neighborhood for his antagonism against the Negro. His present effort, however, meets with little sympathy and less support. He evidently imagines that Chicago, Illinois is in Georgia. But before long, he will wake up and find out different.³⁸

Within the same article, Abbott also chided Davis for his statement regarding the lack of discipline exhibited by black boys. In surmising the situation, Abbott suggested that boys will be boys and are prone to play rough. Accordingly, he enuciated that all boys are apt to have scuffles regardless of their ethnicity. However, this does not mean that such boys should be segregated for such jostling. Instead, Abbott added: "Rather let Negroes and white boys study and play together as children and they will grow to a better understanding and live more peaceably side by side as neighbors when they grow to be citizens for the Negro is here to stay."³⁹ The Hyde Park Association, its president, and its members were more than annoyed with Abbott. Earlier that same year, he had investigated their attempt to oust black residents from the Hyde Park area.⁴⁰ Although, Abbott tried to address this problem with dignity the issue of separate schooling for blacks and whites in the year 1912 continued to haunt him.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰"Fight Home For Negresses," Chicago Daily Tribune, 16 March 1912, p. 3.

By the beginning of the September new school year, rumors of segregation attempts had surfaced this time in connection with Wendell Phillips High School. Abbott again announced to his readers that there would be no separation of public education in this city for blacks.⁴¹ Meanwhile, in December of the same year while Chicago's Superintendent Young was on an inspection tour of the District of Columbia's public schools when asked by reporters if Chicago's public schools were soon to be segregated, Abbott reported that Mrs. Young declared: "I am opposed to segregation of the races in public schools. How could I be otherwise and be consistent? I cannot align myself in opposition to segregation of the sexes and favor separate schools for the whites and blacks."⁴² Jubilantly responding to Mrs. Young's comment, Abbott proclaimed in bold caption: "Superintendent of Chicago Schools Declares Against Separate Schools--Famous Educator Upholds The Chicago Defender's Contention That There Must Not Be Any 'Jim Crow' Schools"⁴³ Again, his faith in Superintendent Young had been renewed.

⁴¹Confronting rumors by Chicago's black community that the board of education by way of request from the principal of Wendell Phillips High School and white parents intended to segregate African American students within the facility after a thorough investigation, Robert S. Abbott proved the rumors to be false. "No Jim Crow Schools In Chicago," Chicago Defender, 28 September 1912, p. 1.

⁴²"Board of Education Against Segregation in Public Schools," Chicago Defender, 28 December 1912, p. 1.

⁴³Ibid.

Abbott Looks at the Catholic Church and the
Issue of Segregated Schooling

The year was 1913 and Abbott began to address the issue of segregated religious education. In years past, he had concentrated more on the public school sector. But, now he felt compelled to confront the problem wherever it emerged. Thus Abbott began his attack upon the Catholic church for its intent to indulge in racial segregation of its educational facilities, especially those in the Chicago area. Although, this discriminatory practice was by no means a new phenomenon starting in 1913 such conduct by the Church began to irritate the Chicago Defender's owner. Initially, Abbott's opinion of Catholicism and the Church's interaction with the black community had been at best one of tolerate. But, with his new found mission to eliminate racial discrimination from all portals to American society and culture Abbott became more radical.

Directing his questions to the Church while indirectly pushing for answers from Chicago's local Archdiocese, Abbott demanded to know why it was necessary to have separate schools for white and black Catholic students. He further insisted that the city's black residents would no longer tolerant such practices. At the same time, Abbott expounded that many disgruntled African American parents had contacted the Defender to take up the banner against segregated Catholic schools. Hence, he demanded that these "Jim Crow" schools be abolished. With this insistence Abbott ushered forth an

appeal for all black citizens to join the fight.⁴⁴

The white parish of St. James was the first to be targeted by Abbott for imposing the "color line." However, the African American parish of St. Monica's Mission was for the moment spared his tirade. Incidentally, the segregation pattern of both parishes was more the result of residential segregation than the intent of the Catholic church to impose "Jim Crow." Nevertheless, Abbott publicly questioned the motives of the Church via St. James' parish priest for allowing discrimination to exist within the halls of its elementary school. Although, he had praised St. Monica's priest for his good work in the past Abbott also wanted the black community to know that he personally condemned the Church for not pushing integration at St. James. By way of an editorial, he asserted:

It is not a religious matter in the least. We are fighting for a principle, and believe we have the hearty support of all unbiased and liberty loving people. There is no better man in every sense than the Rev. Father John Morris, who has for a great many years devoted his life to the uplift and welfare of the colored race . . .⁴⁵

One month later, Abbott printed a follow up article regarding the problem of racial segregation and the Catholic church. However, this time his commentary on the good priest

⁴⁴Abbott and black Chicagoans were concerned with the Archdiocese refusal to let Catholic black students attend St. James School. "Jim Crow Schools Must Go," Chicago Defender, 8 March 1913, p. 1.

⁴⁵"Jim Crow School," Chicago Defender, 29 March 1913, p. 4.

of St. Monica's Mission was not so kind. First, he chided the Catholic church for pushing segregation upon its African American parishioners. In essence, he complained that it was appalling to witness the practice of "Jim Crow" in the city's Catholic schools when Illinois' state law prohibited such practices in public education. After considering the situation, Abbott declared:

We are of the same tongue, having no desire to be anything other than Americans. Then what is the cause of that grand church (Catholic) [sic] which has in the past stood by true principles of brotherly love and recognized of the Negro long before any other church in this land that they were and are men . . .⁴⁶

Next, he called upon Father Morris to explain by whose authority was he given the right to impose the "color line" upon St. Monica's black students. Finally, he assured the priest that if this separation of the races continued he would contact the city's archbishop to investigate the matter.

But, for some unknown reason Abbott failed to make good his threat. Thus for the time being the problem of Chicago's segregated Catholic schools, especially at the parishes of St. James and St. Monica's Mission was neither pursued by the Defender's owner nor was it addressed by Archbishop George William Mundelein during that year.

⁴⁶"Catholics Must Not Separate Races In Schools," Chicago Defender, 5 April 1913, p. 1.

Abbott Accuses the Chicago Board of Education
of Further Discrimination

With no resolution in sight relevant to the Catholic matter, Abbott again turned his attention to the unpleasant business of "redistricting" within the Chicago public schools to achieve racial segregation. Now the controversy involved the Carter Elementary school. Apparently, one of the city's district superintendents had ordered the "redistricting" for the sole purpose of separating white and black students. With a change in district boundaries, black students would be forced to attend the predominately black Sherman Elementary school and white students would thus enroll at Carter. Much to Abbott's surprise and annoyance, the vast majority of black parents whose children were involved in the Carter and Sherman matter humbly accepted and obeyed the edict. But, Abbott was not about to let "Jim Crow" rule the city's public institutions of learning. Angrily calling the board to task for permitting such nonsense while at the same time declaring the Hyde Park Association to be the culprit behind the "dastardly" deed, Abbott threaten:

Wherever it comes from let them assure themselves that they have a lawsuit on their hands if they attempt to enforce this plan of separate schools in Chicago. These outrages and unjust discriminations will not be tolerated or submitted to without a hearing in court.⁴⁷

⁴⁷The "redistricting" ordered by the district superintendent changed the school boundaries of the old Carter Elementary School and its annexes at 61st and Wabash Avenue which served an integrated territory between 55th, 61st, South Park, and Wentworth Avenues. Blacks students were no longer

By December of the same year, Abbott allowed the Chicago Defender to be used as an outlet for Chicago residents who were irritated over the "ill" treatment of Superintendent Ella Flagg Young by board members. What resulted in part from this harassment of Mrs. Young was her subsequent decision to seriously consider resigning from the city's public schools system. These disgruntled Chicagoans poured out their indignation via letters to Abbott. The editor accommodated his readers by giving their complaints front page coverage. Many of the letters were from women in the Chicago area who protested the harassment of the superintendent by board member John C. Harding. As can be seen by the following portions of one letter, Harding was viewed by many of the city's African Americans as not only the main instigator behind Mrs. Young's harassment, but also as a racist. In expressing her anger over the Young affair, P. X. Johnson wrote:

Editor of The Defender:

Allow me space in your valuable paper to express my indignation at the conduct of the Chicago Board of Education in ousting Mrs. Ella Flagg Young.

I may be a little fiery, but you may publish all my letter. I regret to see Chicago lose the greatest superintendent she has ever had . . . Mrs. Ella Flagg Young, the world's greatest superintendent has resigned because four designing Catholic members were opposed to Mrs. Young's honorable and straightforward methods of running school affairs, because she believed in merit and fair play, equality, and democracy . . . J. C.

permitted to attend schools in this district. Instead they were required to attend only the Sherman School which was located at 57th and Princeton Avenue. "The Old Carter School," Chicago Defender, 11 October 1913, p. 1.

Harding, who bitterly opposed Mrs. Young, is a rabid hater of the colored race.

P. X JOHNSON⁴⁸

John C. Harding had become an adversary of the superintendent, a decision of his choice, as a result of an accusation made by Mrs. Young which involved high handed pressuring by Harding, Henry Huttman, and James Plunkett to influence her decision about purchasing certain textbook spellers.⁴⁹ On 10 December 1913 when the Chicago Board of Education convened to take up the reelection of the superintendency for the Chicago public schools, John C. Harding voted against Mrs. Young in favored of John D. Shoop.⁵⁰ Apposite to the racial issue, Harding was seen by many black Chicagoans as their enemy because of his treatment of black workers while he held a position of authority within Chicago's trade unions. Thus it was then alleged by black workers that Harding while directing the selection of union workers had persistently refused black men who contracted for

⁴⁸"Mrs. Ella Flagg Young 'Lynched' By Board Of Education," Chicago Defender, 13 December 1913, p. 1.

⁴⁹When it came time to purchase new spellers for the Chicago public schools there appeared to be the involvement of too many special interests. James Plunkett was hawking spellers that were cheap and inferior. After much harassment, Superintendent Young brought to the attention of the board of education the pressuring antics of Plunkett, J. C. Harding, and Henry Huttman. Harding, immediately accused Young of defamation and thus became an adversary. Joan K. Smith, Ella Flagg Young: Portrait Of A Leader (Ames, Iowa: Educational Studies Press and the Iowa State University Research Foundation, 1979), 193-94.

⁵⁰Ibid, 198.

union jobs to work more than three days per week. However, he gave white workers the opportunity to work five to seven days per week.⁵¹

Abbott Confronts "Jim Crow" Schooling Nationally

In 1913, Abbott also launched his attack at the national level on the issues of learning and the color line for black America. The first gauntlet to be tackled were comments made by two white southern Episcopalian bishops. These gentlemen had given their opinions on how blacks should be educated and what they should learn. By way of two Columbus, Ohio correspondents, Abbott had learned that Bishops Nelson and Gailor were not pleased with the moral progress of the "race." As reported by one correspondent, Minnie B. Mosby, the bishops believed that book learning for blacks had "overshot" their moral development and "ownership" of property. Therefore they suggested that less attention be paid to schooling, especially those courses which advocated the classics, and the arts and sciences, in approbation of religious and moral training.

Correspondent Mosby was so upset that she did not wait for the owner of Chicago Defender to respond. Thus in reference to the property question she alluded to lands seized from the country's native Americans by the white settlers

⁵¹Chicago Defender, 13 December 1913, p. 1.

Hence, Mosby stated in a rebuttal to Gailor: "We wish to ask the bishop if he thinks the example of morality which the whites set for his emulation is the equal of the ability which the white man displays for the acquiring of property?"⁵² She further added to the rebuke as a means of refuting the morality question pertinent to blacks while at the same time attempting to call the bishop's attention to the problem of racial discrimination in American society:

Would the bishop imply that the greater death rate among the colored race is due to immorality? In nearly every city of any size in this country, the Negro is forced to live in undesirable, unhealthy localities and in houses that are not sanitary; he is proscribed against in most public parks, recreation grounds, bathing beaches, schools etc.; he is underpaid for his labor, overcharged for his purchases, and rents, etc.⁵³

Hence, in a concluding comment Mosby proclaimed that it is the white man instead of the black who is in need of more moral education.⁵⁴ Gleefully, Abbott printed every word of his correspondent's tirade in his newspaper.

By the year 1914, the concerns of African Americans about learning and the "color line" had mushroomed. Likewise, articles carried by Abbott's publication relating to the problem also became more frequent. For example, in the winter of the same year Defender readers were met with headlines

⁵²"White Southern Gentlemen Object to Educated Negro," Chicago Defender, 15 December 1913, p. 1.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid.

which declared: "Yankee Forbidden to Teach Colored People First Step to Enslavement."⁵⁵ The story that followed depicted the efforts of some southern whites to abolish the practice of white teachers, especially females from teaching in predominantly black schools. Oddly enough Claflin University, Abbott's boyhood alma mater, was listed among the targeted institutions. White South Carolinans were so adamant in their efforts to prohibit whites from teaching in all institutions of learning designated for African Americans that the state's governor, Cole I. Blease, and several of the State's house senators drew up and brought before the Carolina Senate House the "dreaded" Fortner Bill for passage.⁵⁶

Although, passage of the bill in the Senate House appeared definite, Abbott assured his readers that its enactment was in for hard times. Abbott thus declared that he had no intention of remaining silent while South Carolina, or any southern state attempted to sneak "Jim Crow" legislation pass black America. Denouncing the bill and the state's governor, Abbott angrily suggested that the United States

⁵⁵"Yankee Forbidden to Teach Colored People First Step to Enslavement," Chicago Defender, 31 January 1914, p. 1.

⁵⁶According to the Defender, the Fortner Bill also included in its prohibition white nurses from servicing black patients, black mammies from nursing white children, and white men from possessing black mistresses. The law was not retroactive pertinent to white women who had previously taught in South Carolina's black schools or black students and therefore ensured these teachers, if still alive, of their pensions. "South Carolina to Re-Enslave Colored People," Chicago Defender, 31 January 1914, p. 1.

government was too afraid to intervene. He disgustingly chided the federal government for its "spinelessness." In so doing, he also told his readers that white America was too busy keeping African Americans in a state of "second class citizenship" to notice that both Japan and Mexico had allied themselves with the Philippines and Hawaii in order to declare war on the United States.

Abbott persisted with his taunts: "Who will Fight for him?"⁵⁷ The "him" to which he referred was the American patriotic symbol, Uncle Sam. So upset was the owner of the Defender with the federal government's ignoring of the Fortner Bill that he even went so far as to suggest to his readers that it would be in their best interest to first think about the manner in which they were treated by their government before enlisting in the Armed Forces to fight against foreign countries. He added that many of these countries had never shown disrespect to black Americans. Abbott further suggested that perchance America's aliens would fight and die on the battle field in the place of black soldiers to help America retain its "false" status as the land of the "free" with justice for all.

Abbott kept the Fortner issue hot on the burners. As evidence of his concern, he covered every session held by the legislators involving Blease's attempt to goad the state's senators into passage of the bill. Ironically, the good white

⁵⁷Ibid.

folk of Charleston, South Carolina much to Blease's displeasure wanted no part of the controversy. Thus prompting the state's governor to snort as he tried to gain the support of the senate:

I appeal to you once again to pass the Fortner bill. If Charleston is so terribly interested in her pet white teachers who teach Negroes, let Charleston be exempted from the bill. She seems to be exempted from all other laws in the State, and I don't see that it would do any harm to make her an exception in this matter.⁵⁸

By editorializing the matter in the Chicago Defender, Abbott made it quite clear that the problem with South Carolina's governor and many southern white newspapers who carried the story was their fear of white teachers who taught blacks becoming morally corrupted by the students. He brushed this "dibble" off as sheer nonsense. Subsequently, he smugly taunted these individuals by surmising that black children, if given the chance, might aspire to emulate their white teachers. In any case he argued, the result would be an equalization of the races thereby eliminating racial discrimination.⁵⁹

Besides the Fortner issue, Abbott also covered articles on the passage of educational amendments that would benefit

⁵⁸Cole I. Blease comments about Charleston, South Carolina's whites resulted from that city's historical refusal to honor a tradition of "Jim Crow" policy and practices as followed by other southern cities and states. "Blease Tries To Debase South Carolina Senate-Fortner Bill Still In Air," Chicago Defender, 21 February 1914, p. 2.

⁵⁹"Social Equality," Chicago Defender, 28 February 1914, editorial p. 4.

African Americans. Praising the author and contents of the Jones Amendment, he declared that it, if passed, would provide more financial aid for southern black colleges. Accordingly, it also would bring to a halt racial discrimination in institutions of higher learning that received federal funds. In clarifying this statement, Abbott explained that the federal government had historically granted funding to colleges that allowed black students to enroll in agriculture course work at their institutions.⁶⁰

However, the continuation of these kinds of uplifting reports regarding educational news soon took a back seat to more pressing educational problems which persistently plagued the black community. Unfortunately, it became apparent to Abbott that the problems associated with learning and the color line would not lie dormant. By 21 March 1914, Abbott's readers were again greeted with news that racist factions of the Chicago public schools were still bent on dragging "Jim Crow" into the system. This time it was a public high school dean who tried to imposed the "color line." Again the

⁶⁰Senator Jones from the state of Washington had proposed that his amendment be passed and enacted as House Bill 7951. The Jones Amendment provided for co-operative agricultural operations between those agricultural colleges in designated states that received benefits pursuant to an Act of Congress approved 2 July 1862, and of supplementary acts thereof. Pertinent to the matter of racial discrimination, the text of the Amendment declared that any college involved in such specified co-operative work if caught in the act of discriminatory practices relevant to race, or color would forfeit its right to receive funding. "Jones Amendment Will Aid Afro-American Colleges," Chicago Defender, 7 February 1914, p. 8.

educational facility in the spot light as in 1912 was Wendell Phillips. But, unlike the previous incident which involved an attempt by assistant principal Charles H. Perrin to assign white and black students to segregated classes, this controversy centered upon integrated school socials. Fanny R. Smith, the dean in question, sought to prohibit race mixing of students by designating separate socials. One for whites and another for blacks.

In an attempt to justify her actions, Smith declared that she had conducted an impromptu investigation whereby she had questioned both black and white students regarding their socializing preference. After thorough questioning, she reported that whites assured her that they would not come to an integrated dance. Likewise, according to the dean, black students also had reported that they preferred their own private affair.

The black students at Wendell Phillips not only denied giving such information to Smith, but called upon their parents and Robert S. Abbott for assistance. Abbott called the dean to task by questioning her motives for separate socials while also implying her dishonesty in reporting such findings. He asserted that these students were accustomed to studying together in a peaceful manner and that they also wanted to socialize as an intact student body. Abbott further warned the board that neither he, nor the African American community would tolerate such "Jim Crow" behavior. He also

publicly criticized Smith. After his own investigation of the matter, Abbott stated: "During study hours everything is apparently all serene at Wendell Phillips, but the monster has been allowed to raise his head in the social life of the institution."⁶¹ He added to his report that it was the black students who chose not to attend a segregated social because they knew their constitutional rights were being violated.⁶²

It was not long before Abbott's readers found him complaining about the conditions of those Chicago public schools that had, unfortunately, become all black institutions of learning. These schools were referred to by him as nothing more than "stockyard" facilities with an environment no better than the city's filthy segregated jails.⁶³ Ironically, in spite of his disgruntled attitude toward many city officials and white residents who wished to indulge in "Jim Crow" tactics, Abbott continued to print nothing but positive articles about Superintendent Young's commitment to racial integration. As far as he was concerned the superintendent, during 1914, still possessed an outstanding record with the

⁶¹The issue of racial discrimination at Chicago's Englewood High School was also mentioned in this article, but not defined or elaborated upon. "Race Prejudice Crops Up Again In Chicago Public Schools," Chicago Defender, 21 March 1914, pp. 1-7.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³"Stockyard Conditions in Jail and School," Chicago Defender, 28 March 1914, p. 1.

Chicago public schools.⁶⁴

Abbott did not want any act of discrimination relevant to schooling to escape his attention. Therefore, he also focused on private institutions of higher learning. Chicago's Northwestern University and several other local and national educational facilities were selected by the owner of the Defender for either praise or chastisement. Abbott praised the dean of Northwestern University's Law School for his courage in admonishing faculty members for their obnoxious conduct toward an African American student. Of the incident, Abbott stated via an editorial:

Prejudice and hatred should have no room in the laboratories of science and in the classrooms of philosophy and ethics. What is education if it does not teach broadness from every viewpoint? If our learned men and women show by word or action that they do not countenance discrimination in any form and that a man is a man who holds himself so, regardless of race, creed, or color, it will not be long before the other class do likewise for it is easier to imitate than to create . . . Wisdom is the foundation of every nation, America is no exception to the rule.⁶⁵

Regarding the same subject matter, but this time directing his anger to the national scene Abbott's editorial of 19 September 1914 blasted both "Houses" of the Kansas City Council for passing a city ordinance which in effect declared that no

⁶⁴Robert S. Abbott contended that both black students and teachers praised Mrs. Young for her fairness and her opposition to segregated public schools. "Good Work of Ella Flagg Young," Chicago Defender, 28 November, 1914, p. 1.

⁶⁵"What Universities Stand For," Chicago Defender, 20 June 1914, editorial p.

black institutions of learning could operate within 2400 feet of a white educational facility. He thus pointed to the absurdity of the ordinance while at the same time calling attention to the insanity of the men who voted for it. Abbott found it hard to believe that an urban center as "cosmopolitan" as Kansas City would allow its so-called "intelligent" legislators to stoop so low.⁶⁶

Meanwhile, back in the District of Columbia the heighten call by many blacks for self imposed racial separation of the city's public schools caught Abbott's attention. Unfortunately, quite a number of African Americans in that area, as well as in other parts of the counrty began to argue that it was, perhaps, better to have separate schools for blacks and whites. These individuals believed that black students learned more when they were taught by members of their own ethnic group. Why everybody knew, according to these good folk, that it was a known fact that only African Americans could understand and relate to the black experience. As proof of their claim, many "race" members pointed to data which alleged that African Americans who attended black schools had a higher attendance rate than those who attended integrated ones. It was evident during this era that many

⁶⁶Abbott believed that the passage of this ordinance was in protest to black Western College's deposit of \$5,000 for property within the proscribed radius of a white educational facility. It appeared that some Kansas City whites feared the co-mingling of the races. "Blocking Education," Chicago Defender, 19 September 1914, editorial p.

black educators, leaders, and lay people also believed that whites did not "care" or know how to teach their children. Nor, did whites possess the necessary "compassion" to help facilitate the academic progress of black students.

Although, the individuals who expounded such theory were well intentioned Abbott wanted no part of their research or findings. In essence, he believed that the only way that the "race" would ever be accepted by white America was through total immersion. Abbott looked upon self imposed separation by blacks as pure "foolishness." He scorned segregation as imposed on blacks by white America, therefore such pleas for segregated educational facilities made by blacks fell upon deaf ears.⁶⁷ Despite, Abbott's objections to racial separation, he was cognizant of the many problems incurred by African Americans as they attempted to assimilate into American society. He knew, for example, that during 1914 not only were blacks subjected to violence from the general white populace, but also that African American children who attended integrated schools were often the victims of ridicule and debasement.

⁶⁷This article listed compared statistical data from states such as Massachusetts, Illinois, Tennessee, Missouri, Maryland and the District of Columbia pertinent to school attendance for blacks enrolled in predominantly white schools and all black schools. It was reported that there was a higher percentage of attendance in blacks schools than in integrated ones in all states and the one district surveyed. Chas E. Hall, "Northern Race Leaders Encourage Separate Schools For Prestige [sic]," Chicago Defender, 10 October 1914, p. 7.

After receiving a wire from Boston correspondents, Abbott printed an article in which he reported that black Bostonians were up in arms over distribution of derogatory "song books" by that city's public schools system. The "song books" were used by Boston's elementary and secondary students. The controversy centered around the insulting and "offensive" racial slurs depicted in the books. Hence, Abbott and the black residents of Boston clamored for the books removal from the city's public school classrooms.⁶⁸

Abbott rang in the new year of 1915 with an intense editorial that characterized the nation's lynch record for the preceding two years. Thus the Defender superseded its reports of school discrimination across the nation for a brief period with lynching articles. By the next weekly, however, Abbott's attention had once more swung back into focus, especially with regards to the issue of racial discrimination in the Chicago public schools. In rehashing the Dean Smith controversial segregated social issue, the Defender carried an editorial detailing the involvement of Dean Talbot from the University

⁶⁸Stating that songs such as Dearest Me, Carry Me Back to Old Virginny, Oh Suzanne, and My Old Kentucky Home as found in the books referred to African Americans as "niggers" and "darkies" were offensive; black Bostonians along with Abbott also objected to other terms found in the books such as "massa" and "missus." Arguing that these songs possessed no literary merit, Abbott demanded that the city's school board take immediate action pertinent to their disposal. The books which cost Boston's Board of Education less than \$1,500 total and were printed in pamphlet form were removed. "Song Book Offensive to Afro-Americans, Refused By Board," Chicago Defender, 21 November 1914, p. 2.

of Chicago in the matter. With bold front page headlines, Abbott reported: "MISS TALBOT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO has protested to Ella Flagg Young, superintendent of our public schools, against the social separation of pupils on a color basis at the Wendell Phillips high school."⁶⁹

Ironically, three days earlier the Chicago Daily Tribune had printed an article in its newspaper describing Talbot's intervention into the Phillips' affair. Unlike the Defender, however, the Tribune reported that white parents whose daughters attended the school had demanded an end to integrated dances. Thus reported the paper, the "Negroes" in order to avoid trouble had decided to hold separate socials.⁷⁰ The newspaper even went so far as to print Dean Talbot's letter to Superintendent Young, as well as Smith's reply to Talbot's accusation in an effort to corroborate its story. Incidentally, the publication also quoted Superintendent Young as having stated that there had been some complaints about the integrated socials.⁷¹ But, the Tribune did not clarify whether the complaints were in favor of Smith's actions.

Meanwhile, the debate over the social situation

⁶⁹"The Travesty Upon Wendell Phillips," Chicago Defender, 9 January 1915, editorial p. 8.

⁷⁰According to the Tribune's article, Marion Talbot in 1915 was Dean of Women at the University of Chicago. "Jim Crow Rule or No Dances, Say Schoolgirls [sic]," Chicago Daily Tribune, 6 January 1915, p. 1.

⁷¹Ibid.

continued. In fact, it not only persisted but also escalated, especially in the city's black community. This escalation in turn intensified Abbott's efforts to bring about Superintendent Young's direct intervention into the matter. Unfortunately, however, for the first time in the history of Mrs. Young's stewardship of the city's public schools Abbott displayed a lack of confidence about her handling of a problem. Yet, he appeared to remain optimistic that all would end well at Wendell Phillips. But, he also urged the superintendent to take charge of the situation before the ugly "monster" known as prejudice dominated the hallowed halls of the city's public schools. Declared, Abbott:

The race does not believe that Mrs. Young, the vital head of the schools, will let the prejudiced heart of one woman cause racial antipathy to exist in a school named after Wendell Phillips, whose character stood for all that was honorable, fair, just, and right.⁷²

It appeared, that Abbott in a last ditch effort was attempting to arouse a sympathetic cord in the superintendent relevant to the heroic deeds of Wendell Phillips.⁷³

But, with waning faith in the superintendent's ability to

⁷²"Wendell Phillips Should Abolish Social Affairs," Chicago Defender, 16 January 1915, p. 2.

⁷³Wendell Phillips along with William Lloyd Garrison, and Frederick Douglas was a leader in the 19th century movement to eradicate slavery in the United States. After the Civil War, Phillips worked with other liberals in drafting and pushing for the enactment of federal legislation for the protection of African Americans. Lerone Bennett, Jr., Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, 1987), 152-260.

withstand the pressures of outside white agitators, Abbott begun to question Mrs. Young's motives for not taking a direct stand about the affair. Thus he asked: "Is it possible that Mrs. Young will let this woman humiliate, retard, and discourage the young Afro-Americans who number the brightest, obedient, aspiring, and most deserving students of that school?"⁷⁴ In anticipation that the superintendent had not forgotten her promise to Chicagoans to provide fairness for all students who utilized the city's public schools, Abbott further complained that public institutions were not meant to be forums for societal dictates, but establishments where all of "God's" children received equal treatment.⁷⁵

Although, the Chicago Daily Tribune chose not to continue its front page coverage of the Phillips' dispute it did allow its readers space to air their opinions via the publication's editorials. One such editorial carried a letter from a white parent who approved of Dean Smith's decision to have segregated socials. This woman argued that black children lacked good moral training: "Unless this separation is made you will ruin the future generation socially and debauch your homes."⁷⁶

By the next weekly, Abbott had lost all patience with

⁷⁴Chicago Defender, 16 January 1915, p. 2.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶A. P. Lucas to Editor of the Tribune, "Black and White in the School, Chicago Daily Tribune, 19 January 1915, editorial p. 6.

Smith, as well as with Superintendent Young's slow intervention into the matter. Now, he showed signs of agitation:

In following up this introduction of the demeaning and unlawful southern practices into the public schools of this city, the Chicago Defender finds that there is no need for further discussion of the matter. Mrs. Ella Flagg Young, superintendent of schools, should give a ruling on the matter. If there is to be discrimination in the social affairs at Wendell Phillips, or any school, then abolish the social AFFAIRS.⁷⁷

Abbott, also described in great detail proceedings of the Chicago Board of Education's meeting with prominent local leaders of the black community concerning the dispute. He now cautioned African American parents to closely "watch" their children. Abbott, further added that it was now clear that white employees of the Chicago's public schools even its administrators could not be trusted to ensure fair treatment of black children.⁷⁸ At last, it appeared that the confidence that he had once entrusted to the city's public schools to guarantee equal educational opportunity to all its students regardless of color had been lost.

By 6 February 1915, it was apparent that Abbott's reservations about Superintendent Young's true commitment to equity for black students was increasing. Although, he knew that Mrs. Young was sapient in talking to known white

⁷⁷"Discrimination at Wendell Phillips High School Can't Be Smoothed Over, Chicago Defender, 23 January 1915, p. 4.

⁷⁸Ibid.

agitators about transferring their children from Wendell Phillips High School to avoid socializing with African American students Abbott, nevertheless, announced that black Chicagoans still anxiously awaited her decision on the segregation issue. In a declaration of hope, however, he acknowledged that Mrs. Young had always presented herself in a "polite" manner. He also hoped that she was becoming perturbed over the Phillips dispute.⁷⁹ Thus Abbott assured his readers that the superintendent would not be fooled by the kinds of excuses used by many racist white parents to gain transfers for their children. In fact, he explained that the superintendent had decided against these transfers because she suspected that they were racially motivated.

By April of 1915 Mrs. Young had rendered a firm decision regarding the Wendell Phillips' problem. Accordingly, all dances at the school would be canceled indefinitely. Satisfied with the superintendent's decision, Abbott responded with front page headlines: "No Segregation In Schools"⁸⁰ He was pleased with the Ella Flagg Young's resolution, and about the fact that she was not swayed by dictates of white agitators. Yet, Abbott's readers were greeted the following week with another page one article which expounded that it was now time for race representation on the Chicago Board of

⁷⁹"Foxy Excuse of Parent Don't Fool Superintendent," Chicago Defender, 6 February 1915, p. 4.

⁸⁰"No Segregation In Schools," Chicago Defender, 17 April 1915, p. 1.

Education.

The list of qualifications for the job as enumerated by the editor included that the applicant be selected by the people, be in good moral standing in the black community, possess an excellent academic background, and be willing to work on behalf of all children, but especially African Americans. However, if for some reason the applicant lacked these qualities, Abbott asserted:

It is better that the race be unrepresented in this important place than to have one whose purpose is to play cheap politics with a reckless disregard for the little ones, whose future will mean so much to race uplift in the community.⁸¹

With the Wendell Phillips High School matter settled, Abbott again turned his attention to the national scene. He started to focus once more on the South, and its intent to halt the practice of blacks teaching whites and vice versa in public and private institutions of learning. This time Abbott spot lighted the state of Georgia. The Georgia senate during the week of 17 July 1915 had enacted a bill that precluded integrated teaching practices. Abbott denounced the state's decision in an editorial:

There are no words in the English language base enough to be applied to these wreckers of progress. No logical reason or excuse can be offered save prejudice, for such an action. Are we rising too rapidly? Does education make better or worse

⁸¹"Afro-Americans Want Representation On School Board," Chicago Defender, 24 April 1915, p. 1.

citizens?⁸²

The following week's editorial showed a continuance of Abbott's disapproval of Georgia's new state school law. He shamed those who supported the bill and also those who stood idle while the bill passed. Abbott declared that Georgia's educational system was now in the hands of "mob rule." He enunciated that it was appalling to see "fair minded" Georgians let a bill as illogical as this one pass without so much as a whimper.⁸³

Thus the fight against "Jim Crow" schooling for the year 1915 was to end on a pessimistic note. Not only were blacks in for a long and bitter battle against school segregation, it now appeared that the struggle would include attacking every facet of the educational structure. Sadly, Abbott had come to the realization that in matters of formal education involving the African American the fight would encompass school curriculum, textbook materials, and teaching methodology along with segregated educational facilities.⁸⁴

⁸²"Keeping Up Their Reputation," Chicago Defender, 24 July 1915, editorial p. 8.

⁸³"That Georgia Bill," Chicago Defender, 31 July 1915, editorial p. 8.

⁸⁴"Geography Improperly Taught In Public Schools," Chicago Defender, 23 October 1915, p. 5.

CHAPTER IV

EDUCATION AND THE NEWS (1916-1918)

A Closer Look At Losing the Discrimination War in Education

In 1916, Abbott was forty-eight years of age. The Chicago Defender had for the past eleven years increased its circulation and found its place among the nation's leading black publications. This status to a great degree was accomplished through the exclusive scoop on the 13 November 1915 death of Booker T. Washington.¹ Abbott reported the educator's demise in precise detail. Defender readers were met with a headline that announced: "WORLD WEEPS FOR WASHINGTON: 35,000 PEOPLE PRESENT AT BURIAL"² The story that followed gave an enumerated account of the famous leader's illness, death, and burial. The report also helped to give Abbott's newspaper the lead in black news coverage.

The uniqueness of the scoop and style for disseminating the information led former Defender correspondent Dewey Roscoe Jones to surmise that it was more than the news of Washington's death that attracted readers. It was the use of an "extra" that gave Abbott's newspaper the distinction of

¹Booker T. Washington was forty-five years of age and at the pinnacle of his profession at the time of his death. Hypertension and kidney failure were the two afflictions that contributed to his demise. Louis R. Harlan, Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 447-455.

²"World Weeps for Washington," Chicago Defender, 20 November 1915, p. 1.

being the first weekly publication in the nation to provide such coverage.³ Consequently, Abbott's unparalleled format was the first for many newspapers both black and white. Incidentally, it was Abbott's close friend Louis B. Anderson who conceptualized the wording for the headline. In acknowledging Anderson's contribution to the growth of the Defender, Abbott commented in later years: "I recall that it was Mr. Anderson who while assisting us to get a headline telling of the death of Booker T. Washington at Tuskegee, hit upon the line."⁴ Despite, the newspaper's increased popularity and praise from the black community for endeavoring to educate the African American on matters associated with developing political savoir faire and economic sophistication, Abbott knew that there was still more work to be done in the areas of social discrimination and educational inequity. Thus his battle became a personal one which he intensified on all societal fronts. Nowhere, was this "personalized" raging war more evident than in his fight to achieve quality education for blacks.

Since 1910, there had been an increase in school attendance and graduations for this minority group, however,

³Jones believed that the profoundness of being the first to report the death of Booker T. Washington as an "extra" in a Chicago weekly newspaper gave the Defender instant notoriety. Dewey Roscoe Jones, "World's Greatest Weekly Reviews Its Progress," Chicago Defender, 4 May 1935, p. 1.

⁴"Editor Abbott Calls Roll of Those Who Aided Defender," Chicago Defender, 31 May 1931, p. 12.

the problem of augmented racial inequality remained within America's educational system.⁵ For example, during 1916 Abbott reported that certain white southern law makers had pushed for legislation prohibiting race mixing in educational facilities. One such state, Mississippi, wanted to pass a law that would make it illegal for the state's teachers to instruct any student who was not a member of his or her race. Of course, this would mean that whites could not teach blacks and blacks could not instruct whites. The Mississippi law was in all respects similar to South Carolina's educational law of 1914 and Georgia's state school law of 1915. This law was applicable to both private and public institutions of learning. Its primary objective was to strengthen racial and ethnic segregation.⁶

Upon receiving such news many blacks out of sheer desperation became even more vocal in their cry for separate schooling. These "desperate" individuals thus justified their rationale by suggesting that separate school systems would at least create more teaching jobs for African Americans. But,

⁵In 1910, according to Bond, for a five to twenty aged school population there was a combined total of 3,677,860 white and black students attending American elementary and secondary schools. Of this number 45.4% or 1,670,650 were black. Horace Mann Bond, The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1934), vii.

⁶This bill also implied, if passed, that white teachers already teaching in black facilities or integrated institutions would have to vacate their positions. "Bill Introduced to Bar White Teachers," Chicago Defender, 26 February 1916, p. 4.

Abbott, as in earlier years, stood steadfast behind his convictions that a segregated school system would produce an unbalanced and pathological society.

In an attempt to clarify his position, he declared:

There are many reasons why we should use every means in our power to retain the mixed schools. Contact is the one thing that will do more to break down prejudice than all other means, and short sighted indeed are they who would make a place for a few and permit the many to pay the price for it.⁷

He also cautioned his readers that separate schools would in the long run produce further disparities of educational funding for curricula, materials, and facilities for the black community.

In an effort to demonstrate the rewards of a shared cultural and ethnic experience, he argued that in the North both teachers and students would fair better as a result of multicultural involvement. He then posed the following poignant question while at the same time providing the answer. "Why, then should members of our own race seek further discrimination by appealing to school boards for separate schools? The very thing that should be fought at every turn, 'discrimination,' these enemies within the camp are fostering."⁸ As evidence of his findings that the two races, if given the opportunity, could study and learn together without friction Abbott supplied his skeptics with pictures

⁷Separate Schools," Chicago Defender, 1 July 1916, editorial p. 8.

⁸Ibid.

and stories of integration in action. Boston's Morgan Bible School was used as an example. The featured article and accompanying photograph showed a faculty and student body harmoniously working together in an attempt to achieve academic and spiritual excellence.⁹

For the remainder of 1916, Abbott advocated for the election and appointment of competent African Americans to serve on various urban boards of education. He also pushed for the hiring of qualified black administrators to be employed as principals at local school sites. Ironically, in this endeavor he was not alone. To his surprise there was now a consolidated effort by quite a few East coast black leaders to resist the efforts of some school officials in their concerted attempt to pass over effective black educators and lay persons for less astute individuals. New York city was one such place in which blacks banded together to get their school candidates hired.¹⁰

Before the year had ended, Abbott had somehow managed to convinced large numbers of black Americans across the nation to abandon the notion of a workable racially divided school system. In offering those blacks who were still "doubting Thomases" additional proof that white extremists were stepping

⁹"Worthy Institution Closes," Chicago Defender, 26 August 1916, p. 1.

¹⁰This article depicted black Kentuckians' demand for equal representation on the Louisville School Board. "Want Race Man on School Board," Chicago Defender, 22 July 1916, p. 3.

up their pace to ensure a "Jim Crow" system of education, Abbott reported on the activities of these individuals as they worked together to establish laws and procedures that would result in a platform of unequal educational opportunity for future generations of blacks. However, he never side stepped the occasion to glorify the strategies of those courageous African Americans who vowed to resist such policies.¹¹

In a concerted effort to gain even more troops for the battle against discrimination in education, the editor implored black parents to scrutinize all reading materials before purchasing them. He found the "Mother Goose" series to be extremely offensive and insulting. To the parents who possessed the books, he offered this advice: "Those who have such books in their homes should put them in the stove and burn them. There are too many other books of a higher type for our young."¹² Before the end of 1916, Abbott also sought to illustrate the negative effects of a segregated educational system for black children. For instance, he highlighted selected articles which depicted "deplorable" conditions found in many northern school districts. Of course, these districts

¹¹The local black residents of Louisville were given recognition for standing up against forced separation. "Object to Plan of the School Board," Chicago Defender, 19 August 1916, p. 6.

¹²Abbott was perturbed over racial slurs found on pages 34-38 of the series. These pages featured the story of the "The Ten Little Niggers." The books were also known as the Complete Melodies. "Bar Mother Goose Stories," Chicago Defender, 23 December 1916, editorial p.

had established separate educational facilities for "race" students. Michigan was one of the states that had succumbed to this, unfortunate, policy. As illustrated by the editor, the state's bewildered black parents discovered to their dismay that schools in their neighborhoods were often "redistricted" for the sole purpose of achieving racial segregation.¹³

Additional articles in 1916 were accompanied with letters from what the editor termed "emotionally scarred" individuals who had appealed to him for assistance with their fight against educational discrimination. Often these people found that administrators who headed cultural institutions of learning were just as race biased as white educators who were employed in academic settings.¹⁴ The year ended with Abbott's pledge of continued resistance against racism in education. However, he was now cognizant that the fight would be a long and tedious one. Despite, the fact that he had resigned himself to the harsh reality of "Jim Crow's" gaining momentum in what he referred to as American's "sacred halls" of learning, the Defender's editor vowed to, at least, give the old "buzzard" a good licking.

The year was 1917, and the first weekly issue of the Chicago Defender conveyed a sign of hope pertinent to

¹³"Charge Schools Unfair," Chicago Defender, 9 September 1916, p. 1.

¹⁴"Race Prejudice Bars Boy From Art School," Chicago Defender, 23 September 1916, p. 9.

educational matters for blacks. For example, the first edition featured a congratulatory message for educator, Dr. E. P. Roberts. Roberts had been appointed to New York city's board of education. During this period, his appointment was among the historical firsts for blacks. To this extent, at least for Abbott, it now appeared that for the moment African Americans had begun to make some real headway with respect to crashing the color barrier in hiring practices associated with education. The victory signaled that he had been correct in his decision to push integration. But, success stories such as these were short lived. Not, wanting to divert his attention for any length of time from the central issue at hand Abbott again mounded his attacks against any person who would deny African Americans equal access to educational mobility.

By this time, America was on the brink of its involvement in the "Great War." Nevertheless, the German/American conflict of 1917 did not over-shadow Abbott's fight for racial justice. During the war, he was as patriotic as any Euro-American. His concern, however, for black Americans was just as strong as his patriotism. Thus Abbott displayed his commitment to the nation by appealing to the black community to exhibit their loyalty for the United States by registering for the draft.¹⁵

¹⁵"Every Man, From the Age of 21 to 31 Years, Even Alien Foes, Must Register June 5," Chicago Defender, 2 June 1917, editorial p.

Despite, his annoyance with the nation's policy of relegating blacks to a position of second class citizenship his loyalty was genuine. As a matter of fact, throughout the war of 1917 Abbott filled his publication with articles that glorified every American victory. He was especially proud of the country's national youth organizations and their participation in the war effort. Such enthusiasm was apparent in displayed pictures and captions that depicted the patriotism of young high school males as they paraded down the streets of Chicago in full military attire. What appealed to him the most about the companies was the fact that they were integrated.¹⁶

It was not long before the spirit of presenting a united home front for many African Americans waned. The optimism that had lured most blacks into this belief thus turned pessimistic. Many northern cities, including Chicago, began to establish segregated military training schools.¹⁷ Blacks were further humiliated with demands by southern congressmen and many military commanders to relegate enlisted men and draftees of color to noncombatant positions.

Even more disheartening to the black community was the Army's plan to have African American soldiers work southern

¹⁶"A Wonderful Picture," Chicago Defender, 23 June 1917, p. 1.

¹⁷According to Abbott training camps where discrimination was most rampant were found in such places as Plattsburg, New York. "No Segregation Army Training Schools," Chicago Defender, 3 March 1917, p. 1.

farms instead of manning the battle fields of Europe. The American Red Cross's effort to exclude black female nurse volunteers, who wanted to service the wounded and dying in Europe and America, from its organization was the final insult. Abbott was appalled with the organization's attitude. As word filtered through the black community, the editor without hesitation issued a proclamation which declared that any effort to separate the races by the United States military would be viciously attacked on the home front by all black citizens. Vowed, Abbott: "We shall never submit to being less than equals; we will ask for nothing less and will accept nothing less."¹⁸ Not only did he swear to fight such segregation, he also demanded that the United States military enlist more black males to serve as leaders of "race" regimens.¹⁹

The problems associated with blacks, discrimination, and the military were not the only issues confronted by Abbott during 1917. The great black "exodus" of the same year also shared the spotlight with World War I. As evidence of his influence in persuading thousands of southern blacks to migrate to the urban centers of the northern, eastern, and western sectors of the country many contemporary black and

¹⁸"Any Attempt to Segregate Race Will Be Bitterly Fought," Chicago Defender, 28 July 1917, p. 1.

¹⁹Abbott believed that all Americans black or white should be afforded the same respect at home and abroad while serving in the country's Armed Forces. "Race Prejudice and the War," Chicago Defender, 24 November 1917, editorial p.

white historians have credited his movement as the driving catalysis behind the migration. This surging mass of rural blacks left the impoverished Mississippi delta in search of the American dream.²⁰ The largest group settled in Chicago much to the alarm of a great many white residents. The influx of blacks, at one time, was so massive that one particular major Chicago newspaper printed the following: "More than 2,000 Negroes from Tennessee, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia have arrived in Chicago in the last two days. About 500 more are expected today."²¹ Because of their "rag tag" appearance most northern whites feared and in many respects misunderstood this migrating sea of humanity. To resident whites the southern "Negro" was immoral, crude, and ignorant.

Of course, black Americans who left the South were generally in search of educational and economic opportunities just as thousands of European immigrants had done in the first half of the century. As Abbott beckoned these poor southern migrants to come to Chicago, it was easy for them to heed his call with appreciation because: "For the first time, Negroes

²⁰Ottley has stated that Abbott was the primary figure responsible for the exodus of thousands of blacks to northern cities. Roi Ottley, The Lonely Warrior: The Life and Times of Robert S. Abbott (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1955), 160.

²¹"2,000 Southern Negroes Arrive in Last 2 Days," Chicago Sunday Tribune, 4 March 1917, p. 1.

were actually being invited, even urged to come to Chicago."²² Although, the initial migration had began in 1910 Abbott turned his attention to the matter in 1916. His "Great Northern Drive" movement was an expanded effort which germinated throughout the following year.

As set forth by the editor, the campaign's primary objective was to appeal to the basic survival instinct of the southern black. Accordingly, Abbott complained that for more than a century African Americans had been denied the intrinsic dignity essential for even the humblest of existence. He also believed that this was especially true in the nation's South where the long tradition of slavery and the "Negro's" apparent physical differences had set him apart from other resident individuals. These factors alone had thus relegated the African American to a life of peonage, inferior status, and "unspeakable" atrocities.²³

Hope of economic advancement was not the only thing that attracted blacks to industrial areas. The chance for social freedom as well as educational opportunity were two other paramount concerns that served to hasten their flight. Regarding the subject of schooling, Abbott had proclaimed that: "Education will force open the door of hope behind

²²Drake and Cayton stated that between 1910 and 1920 about fifty thousand blacks left the South for the city of Chicago. St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1945), 58.

²³The ceremonial date set by Abbott for the launching was 15 May 1917. Ottley, 160.

which is success."²⁴ He also had assured southern blacks that unlike the school systems that they had left behind, northern institutions of learning were more open to integration. This bold notion encouraged many southern blacks to believe that all northern school districts would without hesitation welcome their attendance:

But if youthful migrants welcomed the chance to secure the education denied to their parents, they quickly learned that northern schools welcomed them ambivalently at best. From, the first day, they suffered indignities and embarrassment.²⁵

These unsuspecting young migrants and their parents soon realized that northern educators not only regarded their southern education as substandard, but also considered them as "innately" inferior.

This, unfortunate, occurrence was as common in Chicago's public and private schools as it was in many other northern metropolitan areas. Most northern white educators based their justification for their low opinion of blacks' intellect on data gathered from the military's Army Alpha Mental test. Indeed, the results of the test clearly indicated that white Anglo-Saxons in relationship to the African American were

²⁴Chicago Defender, 4 August 1917, citing James R. Grossman, Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners and the Great Migration (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 251.

²⁵Ibid.

superior in intellectual ability.²⁶ However, test givers failed to consider which variables, if any, might have affected their findings. In essence, as the Defender's editor urged thousands of black southerners to migrate North it also became crystal clear that he was faced with the unpleasant task of alerting his readers of the existence of "Jim Crow" conditions as they existed in many northern school districts.

So devastating was the practice of racial discrimination in the North that from March to December of 1917 Abbott's newspaper carried a multitude of articles on racial bigotry encountered by African Americans as they sought to improve their educational lot in northern cities.²⁷ For instance, as large influxes of blacks began to attend Chicago's Wendell Phillips High School, the "color line" problem resurfaced. Of course, Abbott had assumed that the problem had been solved. This time, however, the dispute involved the school's "military training" program. A white United States Army

²⁶Rury stated that when the Army tested whites and blacks for the military, the average whites' mental age was 13.08 years and the average mental age for blacks was 10.41 years. The mental age levels for both groups was extremely low. However, the below average scores of the Negroes qualified them as "morons." John L. Rury, "Race, Region, and Education: An Analysis of Black and White Scores on the 1917 Army Alpha Intelligence Test," Journal of Negro Education 57, no. 1 (1988): 52.

²⁷In this article Abbott reported a strike staged by two hundred white Murphysboro, Illinois students. These individuals were upset because seven black students had enrolled at their local high school. "Refusal to Attend Jim Crow High School Causes Strike," Chicago Defender, 29 September 1917, p. 1.

sergeant assigned to the high school had refused to train white and black boys together as part of the military's induction program.

The sergeant had even demanded that the school's principal sanction the segregated unit. When the matter was brought to Abbott's attention by local black parents, he immediately dispatched one of his reporters to investigate the situation. The principal's response to the editor was satisfactory. The school's local administrator was aware of the sergeant's attitude, but had no intention of honoring his request.²⁸

Ironically, this incident sparked another protest by resident black parents about unsavory conditions that existed within the school's perimeter. The parents were unhappy with the number of taverns and billiard halls that had sprung up in close proximity to the institution. Many of them blamed elected city officials and school board members for allowing such conditions to prevail. They believed that due to the large numbers of African Americans who had recently moved into the school's district, the surrounding neighborhood had been allowed to deteriorate. According to the parents the safety of their children was at stake due to the hoodlums and derelicts who frequented the "Hell holes" and often molested the students as they walked to school. Calling the situation

²⁸"Color Line Bobs Up in High School Again," Chicago Defender, 17 March 1917, p. 1.

extremely indecent, these protestors took their complaint directly to the board. But, board member Jacob Max Loeb suggested to the black parents that if the conditions surrounding the high school were as impossible as they so portrayed then the black parents should report the matter to the board's morality department. The parents' retort was that no such department existed.²⁹

Despite, parental protest and Abbott's involvement with the Phillips' matter the problems associated with racial intolerance continued. By the year's end tensions had become so intensified at the school that its newly appointed principal, Mr. Perine, suggested to the board that the high school transfer its black students to another school. The school in mind was the Raymond Elementary School. That school's principal, John Lewis, and Perine had come up with an idea that, if approved, would turn the Raymond School into a junior high school for black students only. Raymond instead of Phillips had been selected as the site because the school was located in an area that was more than 50 percent African American.

If agreed upon by the board the new junior high school would not only serve the predominantly black community, but

²⁹Black parents were objecting to the maintenance of such immoral facilities within school boundaries. They believed that since the city council and board members were aware that there was already in existence a city ordinance which prohibited such places near schools then, indeed, the issue was racial. "Color Question Again Raised At High School," Chicago Defender, 6 April 1917, p. 15.

also eliminate the racial problems that existed at Wendell Phillips High School.³⁰ Abbott, however, was afraid that if the plan was adopted the vast majority of black freshmen would be forced to forfeit a "bona fide" secondary degree and instead receive only the equivalent of a grammar school education. Thus he was vehemently opposed to the idea. This "inferior" type of secondary education would curtail economic mobility for African Americans.

Meanwhile, within the private education sector unpleasant news relevant to St. Monica's parish again dominated the front page of the Defender. This time, however, Abbott directly questioned the motives of Archbishop Mundelein's intent regarding the issue of segregated education for Chicago's black Catholics. Printing in his newspaper a copy of a mandate written by the archbishop, Abbott reported that: "By a long proclamation from Archbishop Mundelein to the Very Rev. Burgmer, provincial of the Catholic religious order of the Fathers of the Divine Word, the order has been sent out to 'Jim Crow' St. Monica."³¹

Despite, evidence of the decree Archbishop Mundelein denied any racial impropriety. The "proclamation" of which

³⁰Perine had suggested to Lewis that although Wendell Phillips had a somewhat large African American enrollment, only sixty-six percent of black attenders went beyond the first year. Of the few who continued, over half did not remain in attendance until graduation. "Color Line Again at Wendell Phillips," Chicago Defender, 6 October 1917, p. 1.

³¹"St. Monica's Church Again the Scene of Discrimination," Chicago Defender, 17 November, 1917, editorial p. 8.

Abbott spoke was addressed in a letter dated 26 October 1917 from Archbishop Mundelein to the Reverend J. A. Burgmer of St. Mary's Mission House which was located in Techny, Illinois. According to the archbishop, the Reverend Burgmer was to replace the Reverend John S. Morris who was then St. Monica's parish priest. The letter also disclosed the reasons for Archbishop Mundelein's decision to exclude other ethnics from the parish. Portions of the archbishop's letter revealed the following:

With the change of Rectors, a change of policy is likewise to take place at St. Monica's. Until now practically anyone who so desired could affiliate himself with St. Monica's, attend the services and receive the Sacraments there. But now I desire St. Monica's to be reserved entirely for the colored Catholics of Chicago, and particularly of the South Side; all other Catholics of whatever race or color are to be requested not to intrude. It is, of course, understood that I have no intentions of excluding colored Catholics from any of the other churches in the diocese . . . but simply excluding from St. Monica's all but the colored Catholics.³²

Reasons given by the archbishop for his decision were simplistic. First, the parish was in walking distance of its black parishioners. Secondly, the parish had originally been established around the turn of the century for a relatively small number of African American Catholics residing in its vicinity. With the influx of other ethnic Catholics into the area, the church facility had become inadequate for its

³²George Wm. Mundelein, Archbishop of Chicago to the Very Reverend J. A. Burgmer, S. V. D., Provincial, citing Reverend George W. Mundelein, Two Crowded Years (Chicago: Chicago Extension Press, 1918), 291-92.

present and new members. Thirdly, as a result of historically based anti "Negro" sentiment within the city Archbishop Mundelein believed that St. Monica's black members would feel more secure in their own "colored" surroundings. He also informed the priest that the parish would cater to their social and educational interest, as well as their spiritual needs. Adding to this last statement the archbishop further told the Reverend Burgmer that Chicago, although more racially relaxed than any southern city as well as many northern ones, had historically embraced a pattern of racial exclusion. Stated Archbishop Mundelein: "I am powerless to change it, for I believe the underlying reasons to be more economic than social."³³

In assuring the city's black Catholic population that his intentions were not racial in nature, he endeavored to clarify his position by declaring: "What I am concerned about is that my colored children shall not feel uncomfortable in the Catholic Church."³⁴ Before ending the letter, the archbishop also informed the Reverend Burgmer that the black race was on an economic upswing. Thus, according to Archbishop Mundelein, would eventually result in the growth and prosperity of the parish. To St. Monica's black parishioners, he expressed his faith in their ability to expand and improve their parish. He thus reassured them that, although, they now must take full

³³Mundelein, 294.

³⁴Ibid.

responsibility for the parish, he would support their efforts to maintain religious and educational stability.

With respect to the issue of church discrimination, the archbishop told the Reverend Burgmer that he was not a racist. In closing Archbishop Mundelein asked Burgmer to relay the following message to the church's black parishioners upon his arrival at St. Monica's Mission:

Finally, I remind them that they and their children are as dear to me as their white skinned brethren, and that for them and for their children, too, I must one day render an accounting before the Eternal Judge who looks not at the color of our faces, but searches for the purity of our hearts and judges us by the fruits we have to show.³⁵

Abbott never acknowledged how he came by the Archbishop's "proclamation" nor was it evident that he had spoken directly to Archbishop Mundelein about the situation at the parish. For the remaining months of 1917, as well as for the preceding year, Abbott appeared to have abandoned the controversy of "Jim Crow" and its connection with the Catholic church. Hence, the St. Monica matter became a silent issue.

Abbott Encounters the Wrath of William Randolph Hearst

By 1918, the Chicago Defender had become a giant in the world of journalism. The fact that its owner had kept his commitment to the black community and stood steadfast as

³⁵Ibid, 300.

together they battled the forces of racial discrimination aided in the paper's growth. However, there now arose in Abbott's life other concerns that required his immediate attention. One such urgent matter involved a threatened law suit instigated against the newspaper by the William Randolph Hearst organization. Abbott's troubles began with the Hearst corporation when his newspaper dramatically increased its circulation. Ironically, the publication had not only attracted the attention of more blacks, but it had also perked the interest of many white readers. Even white dailies had begun to marvel at the "sassiness" of this expanding publication.

The Hearst enterprise at the time was considered to be the "goliath" of white journalism. Unfortunately, its owners had also taken notice of the now popular Chicago Defender, and the attention Abbott received from this organization was not favorable. After viewing several editions of Abbott's newspaper, the Hearst group charged him with illegal duplication and usage of their "eagle masthead." During this time the "masthead" in question appeared on the front pages of both the Herald Examiner and the Chicago Evening American. These two newspapers were a part of the Hearst chain.

According to the allegation, Abbott had deliberately copied and applied their "masthead" to his paper. Hence, the Hearst organization bellowed that this act of piracy was done

to entice white readers.³⁶ Abbott denied any impropriety, but he could not deny that there had been a dramatic increase in white readership. This augmentation was, especially, evident in the Chicago area. Despite, the fact that whites were buying the Defender many were more than mystified by the manner in which the publication presented controversial concerns about racial issues. Still others were alarmed at the harshness of the owner's position on the policy of separate schooling for African Americans.

Of course, the Hearst group declared that Abbott's use of their "masthead" had been instrumental in the publication's surge of white readership. Screaming fraud: "They contended that the public was being fooled; and that many Hearst readers were buying the Defender in the mistaken belief they were purchasing a Hearst paper."³⁷ Thus Abbott was served with a court subpoena.

From the onset of the affair, Abbott had suggested that the Hearst people were irked because white Americans had begun to buy and enjoy a black owned newspaper. "To most white Americans the black press was a voice unheard, its existence unknown or ignored."³⁸ However, upon being served with a court ordered subpoena Abbott narrowly avoided further court

³⁶Roi Ottley, The Lonely Warrior: The Life and Times of Robert S. Abbott (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1955), 141.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Enoch P. Waters, American Diary: A Personal History of the Black Press, (Chicago: Path Press, Inc., 1987), 141.

litigation by quickly directing his cartoonist, Langston Mitchell, to remove the symbol from the publication's front pages. Thus without hoopla the "eagle" was replaced with the Egyptian "sphinx." When later questioned about his choice of a new "masthead," Abbott retorted that it was the only admired emblem that his staff could think of at the moment.

Unbeknown to the Hearst people, one of their own employees was responsible for the duplication. Lanston Mitchell who moonlighted for the Defender while working at the Evening American had convinced Abbott to use the "eagle masthead." Thoroughly satisfied, however, with the removable of what the Hearst group termed their "eagle masthead," the law suit was withdrawn.³⁹

Incidentally, during most of the commotion most blacks were unaware of the disturbance. But, when news of the dropped law suit surfaced throughout the streets of Chicago's black community many would be foes and a few so called admirers started to spread the word that Abbott had just narrowly escaped the wrath of his employer, William Randolph Hearst. Not only had the incident sparked black interest, it had also fueled jealousy among several of Abbott's most staunch competitors. These old "chaps" thus began a rumor alleging that Abbott had never owned the Chicago Defender. Despite,

³⁹Abbott's biographer stated that while working for the Hearst organization, Langston Mitchell had crossed the color line by pretending to be Euro-American. However, Ottley did not make clear Abbott's position pertinent to the duplication of the "eagle masthead." Ottley, 141.

the negative connotation Abbott had, unequivocally, chosen not to publicly disclose the Hearst incident.

Individuals who were unfamiliar with specific details regarding the matter started another rumor in which it was alleged that the Hearst organization was the parent of the Defender. These blacks further declared that Abbott was no more than the "hired" boy of William Randolph Hearst. Abbott was greatly offended by these allegations. "But he was perhaps consoled by the fact that the threatened suit suggested that the white population, at least grudgingly, acknowledged the importance of his paper."⁴⁰ With a changed "masthead" Abbott printed a letter in an attempt to let it be known that he was the sole owner of the publication. This open letter to the public also delineated the newspaper's revised format. However, Abbott made no mention of the Hearst matter. A portion of his letter reported:

The Chicago Defender is preparing to give the reading public a greater paper than it is now publishing. A full 16 page, up to date newspaper, carrying a full page of news interesting to women, two of sports, a column for children, fashions, a good live editorial page, cartoons, excelled by none, pictorial history of world events pertaining to the Race, a soldiers' page, and a regular page on the war, written by a Defender reporter who will be with the troops.

ROBERT S. ABBOTT, Sole Owner and Publisher⁴¹

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹A Letter from Robert S. Abbott, To the Public, "A Greater Chicago Defender," Chicago Defender, [Special Anniversary Edition, 3 May 1930, p. 1.] 2 February 1918.

The Courtships of Robert S. Abbott

With the Hearst matter behind him, Abbott could now concentrate on more pleasant interests. In 1918, Abbott was fifty years of age. The owner of world's most popular black publication had never until now engaged in a serious romantic relationship. Although, he had been seen in the company of several women over the years before his marriage to Helen Thornton Morrison none of the affairs had become permanent. Never having considered himself as a "ladies' man," Abbott was rather shy when it came to lasting relationships.

As a young man growing into adulthood in Georgia, Abbott had adored his childhood friend Catherine Scarborough. But the mulatto Scarborough family, although close friends of the Sengstackes, did not want their daughter entangled in a romantic interlude with the young man. Upon discovering that the son of Flora Butler Abbott Sengstacke had intentions of marrying their daughter, at some future date, they quickly dismissed him as a suitor. It was then rumored by the folks of Woodville that this rejection was primary due to Abbott's dark complexion and low socioeconomic status. However, the Scarboroughs denied the existence of any such racial or class bias regarding their decision.⁴²

Upon his arrival in Chicago, (1897) Abbott kept company with an attractive dark skinned lass whose family had

⁴²Ottley, 313.

relocated from the Mississippi delta. But, the relationship also was short lived. As the editor related, one evening after arriving unannounced at the young woman's home, he was saddened to over hear her instructing her mother to inform Abbott that she was not home. Unaware that he was in hearing distance, the daughter thus added: "You know, Mom, I don't deal in coal."⁴³ Of course, Abbott believed that the comment was in reference to his ebony complexion. After the encounter, Abbott began to be seen in the company of only light complexioned "colored" or white women. In justifying his choice of companionship, he used the "coal" incident as the deciding factor for not commingling with darker hued African American ladies.

Still smarting from the "coal" incident, Abbott turned his attention to a German born widow, Louise Jones. Louise acquired the name Jones after marrying an African American. She and Phillip Jones, her late husband, had established a support organization for interracial couples. The association was called the Manassas Society. Abbott and Louise were close companions for a few years, but they did not marry. As the former wife of the deceased Mr. Jones and the mother of three children, Louise sought to preserve the memory of her departed spouse. This was evident by the fact that she adorned herself with a locket that was worn constantly. The locket contained a picture of her dead husband.

⁴³Ibid, 312.

Before his marriage to Helen Thornton Morrison of Athens, Georgia, Abbott had tried again to kindle a romantic relationship with Catherine Scarborough. By this time, Catherine had been involved in two mediocre marriages both to mulattoes. These marriages had both terminated with the deaths of her husbands. In 1918, Catherine consented to marry the famous owner of the Chicago Defender. But, a few days prior to the wedding she changed her mind. When Abbott inquired as to her motive, Catherine simply replied that she was uncertain if he could support her in the manner she so desired.

Despite, the fact that he was now the editor and publisher of one of the nation's leading publications Abbott could not convince Catherine to even come to Chicago and witness what he had accomplished. Disappointed and bitter over Catherine's decision, he again chalked up this rejection to nothing more than his "Negroid" appearance.⁴⁴

Although, Abbott had been introduced to Helen Thornton Morrison while courting Catherine they had not formed an intimate relationship. With the cancellation of his marriage their platonic status changed. "He soon married a replica of his first love. Helen, like Catherine, was a quadroon. She had blue eyes, delicate features, and what was described as 'a regular Georgia woman's titan hair.'⁴⁵ Helen, a Georgia

⁴⁴Ottley, 314.

⁴⁵Ibid.

black socialite, had moved to Chicago one year after the death of her husband. Upon their initial meeting, Abbott was impressed with Helen's wit and attractiveness. The stately Helen, prior to their marriage, had secured employment as a sales clerk with one of Chicago's most prestigious Loop based department stores, Carson Pirie Scott. She had accomplished this feat by crossing the "color line."

Of course, this sales position kept her in the fashion lime light. After a short courtship, Abbott and Helen were married 10 September 1918.⁴⁶ But from the onset of the marriage most folks in the black community, who were acquainted with the couple, predicted that it would not last. It was rumored by these individuals that both Abbott and Helen possessed the same "aloof" characteristics. The marriage also neither pleased his family, nor the majority of his readers. With regards to the former, this displeasure was clearly seen in the Abbott clan's displayed outrage with his choice of a marriage partner. Being extremely dark of hue, the clan contended that he should have married a dark complexioned African American woman. Using his Uncle Randolph as the family's spokesperson, the Abbotts declared: "We tried to show him that he would be much better off with a black woman.

⁴⁶Abbott v. Abbott, Bill For Separate Maintenance (Cir. Ct. c.c., 1932), Claude A. Barnett Collection, Box 149, Folder 7, Chicago Historical Society Archives and Manuscripts Department.

But he was color struck."⁴⁷

After the marriage, Abbott was assaulted by many of his readers with a barrage of letters against his choice of a marriage partner. Many of these writers objected to Helen's skin color. Still others admonished the Defender's editor for having rebuffed the "race" because he had not chosen a woman who represented African "womanhood" in appearance and demeanor. One such letter from a group of southern blacks expressed their sentiment in the following manner: "The South has lost faith and admiration for you since you married a white face."⁴⁸

The fact that there was also intrigue surrounding the death of Helen's former husband did not help to soothe the Abbott clan's ruffled feathers. Incidentally, the tragic death of Helen's former husband did prove to be interesting gossip for Abbott's readers and for his adversaries. "Her first marriage to Lacy Morrison of Augusta, Ga. ended in a tragedy when he is alleged to have taken his life by shooting himself through the head with a gun following a violent quarrel in their home."⁴⁹ But, according to rumors: "Gossip placed quite a different interpretation upon his demise."⁵⁰

⁴⁷Ottley, 317.

⁴⁸Ibid, 316.

⁴⁹"Editor R. S. Abbott Is Named in Suit," Chicago Defender, 6 June 1932, p. 2.

⁵⁰This gossip also would later resurface when the Abbotts were engaged in divorce proceedings. Ottley, 316.

It was alleged by the good black folk of both Augusta and Chicago that Helen had shot the "unfortunate" Mr. Morrison. The childless marriage between Robert S. Abbott and Helen T. M. Abbott ended in divorce some fourteen years later.

Abbott and the Jacob Max Loeb Affair

Although, the year 1918 witnessed Abbott's narrow escape from court litigation instituted by the Hearst corporation and his scandalized marriage to Helen Thornton Morrison there was still the discrimination war in education to be fought. As neighborhoods in most northern urban centers began to change from white to black so did the attitude of many white residents in conjunction with their growing intolerance toward African Americans. For example, newly arriving black southerners were often thrown into direct contact with competing and sometimes hostile big city white ethnics. These ethnics along with the migrants were competing for jobs, housing, and political control. Often, blacks found after moving into neighborhoods that were occupied by Euro-American ethnics that these groups had an aversion to living in close proximity with their darker hued country men. Each northern metropolis, however, had a different pattern of residential segregation which was thus determined by such entities as the percentage of blacks residing in the area, distributions of available jobs, and the attitude of the indigenous white

population toward racial integration.⁵¹

In speaking of the issue of urban residential segregation, competition for housing in the Chicago area became so volatile that: "From July 1, 1917 to March 1, 1921, the Negro housing problem was marked by fifty-eight bomb explosions."⁵² In essence, there was a rapidly emerging anti black sentiment primarily against race fraternization which thus influenced white attitudes in relationship to an integrated school system. Hence, this anti black movement began to attract a more vocal group of activists. Unfortunately, these individuals held positions of authority within the infra structure of urban white leadership. Due to the size and complexity of a city like Chicago, it was only natural that this type of sentiment would attract opponents of racial integration who wanted to put forth their own agenda. One such individual was Jacob Max Loeb.

Loeb, acknowledged as Max by Abbott, had become a member of the board of education in January of 1913 while Ella Flagg Young was still superintendent.⁵³ After the retirement of

⁵¹T. J. Woofter, Jr. Negro Problems In Cities (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc., 1928), 37.

⁵²Frank O. Lowden, The Chicago Commission On Race Relations, The Negro In Chicago: A Study of Race Relations And A Race Riot (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1922), 122-123.

⁵³Jacob Max Loeb a Chicago real estate agent was selected to fill a vacancy on the Chicago Board of Education upon the death of Dr. John Guerin. Joan K. Smith. Ella Flagg Young: Portrait of Leader (Ames, Iowa: Educational Studies Press and the Iowa State University Research Foundation, 1979), 188.

Mrs. Young in 1915, he remained on under the superintendency of John Shoop.⁵⁴ Loeb's membership on the Chicago Board of Education also extended after the death of John Shoop in 1918 and into the administration of Peter A. Mortenson. Mortenson took over the superintendency in November of 1919.⁵⁵ While Shoop was superintendent, Loeb orchestrated a plot to facilitate the segregation of the city's public schools. However, he was not alone in his endeavor. There were also other white board employees, principals and teachers, who were staunch segregationists. In June of 1918, Abbott placed a personal message in the Defender which urged black teachers to be cognizant of the board's "sinister" plan to institute involuntary segregation among its personnel and students.

In another editorial, he reported on the efforts of the Chicago Board of Education to dismiss black teachers from white schools on what appeared to be racially motivated charges. Declared, the editorial: "It seems to be a concerted action by those in authority to directly interest themselves in causing the removal of a teacher of our race who

⁵⁴Ibid., 218.

⁵⁵John Shoop died in the fall of 1918. Charles E. Chadsey former superintendent of the Detroit public schools was to replace Shoop. However, an ensuing battle for the superintendency witness the position being given to Peter Mortenson in 1919. Loeb who had become an opponent of Chicago's then mayor, "Big Bill" Thompson soon found himself fighting to retain his seat as a board member. Mary J. Herrick. The Chicago Schools: A Social and Political History (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1971), 138-139.

has by merit of her application received an appointment to instruct in a school largely attended by white students."⁵⁶ From this incident and other similar attempts, Abbott concluded that an ominous board plan was under way, spearheaded by Max Loeb, to bring about a condition of permanent "Jim Crow" within the city's public schools.⁵⁷

By August of the same year, Abbott had uncovered a "diabolical" scheme to achieve this objective. Much to his indignation, Loeb had sent a letter and "questionnaire" to some fifty leading Chicago black residents requesting their response to the idea of a separate school system for blacks and whites. Loeb explained that the plan was designed to eliminate hostilities of a racial nature which generally occurred with race mixing. Accordingly, he asked the black community:

How best can the Race antagonisms be avoided which so often spring up when the two races are brought into juxtaposition, especially when colored children are in attendance under the same guidance and in the same classes?⁵⁸

On 17 August 1918, Abbott printed an article which

⁵⁶The Defender's editor listed the schools that had been involved in the plot as the Raymond, Doolittle, and Keith elementary schools. In the past, according to Abbott, these schools had been a safe haven for blacks relevant to the sting of racial discrimination. Robert S. Abbott, "Teachers Beware, Chicago Defender, 15 June 1918, editorial p.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Max Loeb Letter To The Colored Population, "Answer to Mr. Loeb's Letter Fostering Separate Schools in Chicago," citing Chicago Defender, 17 August 1918, editorial p. 12.

described "Big Bill" Thompson's public disapproval of the Loeb letter.⁵⁹ At the time the editor equated Loeb's action with the antics of the German "kaiser." Thus Abbott's response to Loeb's conduct suggested that: "He could do no more to help the kaiser among our people than by raising the issue of separate schools while we are engaged in a war to convince the Hun that class and race distinctions must forever be banished."⁶⁰ Abbott also reminded Loeb that in his zeal for racial separation he had, perhaps, forgotten that he too was a minority in a country that had a policy of religious and ethnic discrimination against persons like Loeb.⁶¹ In further criticizing Loeb's actions while cautioning blacks to ignore the content of his letter, Abbott said:

There are many reasons why Mr. Loeb or any other citizen claiming to have the best interest of our country at heart should not attempt to stir up friction between the races. It is surprising that he especially, would consider for a moment a school policy favoring segregation based upon racial lines only. Friction arises because children of one race are taught and encouraged to look with contempt upon those of another race. Wherever segregation has been established prejudice has increased rather than decreased and opened the door to other restrictions.⁶²

⁵⁹"The Mayor Publicly Denounces Loeb's Segregation Plan," Chicago Defender, 17 August 1918, p. 11.

⁶⁰Robert S. Abbott, "Loeb's New Propaganda," Chicago Defender, 17 August 1918, editorial p. 12.

⁶¹In this article Abbott also was referring to the fact that Jacob Max Loeb was Jewish. Ibid.

⁶²"Max Loeb and Segregation," Chicago Defender, 24 August 1918, editorial p. 12.

Other August articles which addressed the Loeb segregation plot featured the reactions of blacks from across the nation regarding their disapproval of the Loeb letter. These African Americans also chastised other Chicago board members for their dereliction of responsibility in allowing one of their ranks to publicly insult the city's African American community by suggesting such a plan.⁶³

By September of 1918, Abbott's personalized editorials about the Loeb controversy had caught the attention of several leading politicians, religious leaders, and business entrepreneurs from the Chicago area. A black group comprised of such notables as south side Second Ward Alderman, Louis B. Anderson, physician A. J. Carey, Reverend W. A. Blackwell, Army Major Allen A. Wesley, and the Honorable W. H. Wright formed a committee to investigate Loeb's actions. When the committee approached Thompson with their complaint, "Big Bill" told them that when the letter was distributed Loeb was not a board member. Therefore, he had no authority to speak for the organization.

Because of an on going feud between the two men, Thompson had omitted Loeb's name from the list of candidates up for appointment and reappointment. Satisfied with the mayor's response, the committee then disseminated letters throughout their communities assuring black Chicagoans of Thompson's non

⁶³"New Haven Lawyer Condemns Action of Max Loeb To Separate Schools in Chicago," Chicago Defender, 24 August 1918, editorial p.

involvement in the matter, and his personal admonishment of Jacob Max Loeb. Incidentally, Abbott also pointed the finger of blame at the owners of the Chicago Tribune for their part in the controversy. The Defender's editor was perturbed because he believed that the owners of the Tribune had encouraged Loeb in his segregation attempt. Abbott suggested that Loeb was being supported in his efforts for reinstatement to the board by the owners of the newspaper. Abbott believed that Medill McCormick, who held ownership in the newspaper, opposed Thompson's administration because of his own political ambitions. In 1918, McCormick wanted to become a candidate for the United States senate. Abbott further informed his readers that the Tribune had not only opposed the mayor, but had also for the past "fifty" years made a concerted effort to impede the advancement of blacks. He further reported that the publication had for some "unknown" reason neglected to inform its readers that Loeb had been terminated as a board member and therefore had no right to act on their behalf.⁶⁴

The year 1918 ended with Abbott fuming over Loeb's attempt to "Jim Crow" the city's public schools. But it also ended with a tribute to one of Chicago's most admired educators, Superintendent Ella Flagg Young. In an article via the Chicago Defender, Abbott reported on the death of Mrs. Young. As in prior years, Abbott praised the superintendent

⁶⁴"Mayor Thompson Opposes Segregation," Chicago Defender, 7 September 1918, p. 10.

for her dedication to public education. Of her commitment, Abbott stated: "No woman in public life since the foundation of our government has left such an indelible impression as a teacher and instructor upon the public as Mrs. Young."⁶⁵ In further honoring the deceased educator, he declared:

To those who in future years will be assigned the task of telling the story of her life it will be said that she lived beyond the narrow and insipid state of caste and prejudice, and that her life was spent in the interest of all of the people regardless of race, creed, or religion.⁶⁶

Although, toward the end of her superintendency Abbott and Ella Flagg Young appeared to have chosen slightly differing approaches for preventing the encroaching menace of "Jim Crow" within the Chicago public schools system he still respected her leadership ability.

⁶⁵"The Passing of Ella Flagg Young," Chicago Defender, 2 November 1918, p. 11.

⁶⁶Ibid.

CHAPTER V

KEEPING A VIGILANT EYE ON "JIM CROW"

Abbott Views Segregated and Unequal Schooling for Blacks from 1919 Through 1926

In 1919, the signs of racial intolerance continued to be wide spread and extended throughout the United States. This prevailing attitude overlapped educational and economic, as well as social and political boundaries. During this period of American history, it was a time of uncontrollable hatred and violence directed against black Americans. Although, the Great War of 1917 had come to an end the nation's returning unmaimed and disabled black heroes, like their state side relatives, found themselves in the midst of an atmosphere of debilitating animosity. Indeed, no one of color was spared the wrath of "Jim Crow's" foul mood.

Abbott had recognized this precarious emotional state of affairs and had attempted to forewarn white America as to the potential for an explosive racial confrontation. In an endeavor to educate his white country men about the mood of returning black soldiers towards the idea of second class citizenship, he published several editorials regarding the problem. These editorials were for the most part a deliberate effort to arouse the consciousness of white America. In one such editorial, Abbott emphasized:

When our boys come back they will be filled with new ideas. If they were made to forget that they were men in this country, they will be made to realize

that they are men in every sense of the word in the older countries. They have undertaken willingly a good sized man's job, and will acquit themselves creditably. When they return their spirit will still linger, and the things that happened on those dark yesterdays will not happen on the bright tomorrows.¹

But, Abbott's forewarning appeared to go unnoticed by white America. Thus there were several bloody urban riots. The Chicago riot of 1919 was one of the most deadly.

Not unlike other local and national newspaper editors, during the early days of racial confrontation, Abbott was interested in boosting sales. Hence, he provided his readers with sensationalized news coverage. However, as the rioting progressed many Defender featured headlines and articles became tempered. After witnessing the deadly effects of the Chicago riot in terms of the loss of human life and destruction of property, the editor developed a new attitude that was evident by his elimination of sensationalism in favor of more moderate reporting. He even used his newspaper as a buffer between the city's warring white and black factions.

The most crucial component of this new approach was his personal refrain from pointing the finger of blame at any one racial group for instigating the riot. The Defender also appealed to the city's black community for patience and compliance with imposed marshal law, and self control. He followed this appeal with the printing and distribution of

¹"When Our Boys Come Back," Chicago Defender, 18 May 1918, editorial p.

approximately thirty thousand "handbills." These leaflets combined a passionate plea with five essential points; two of which implored African Americans to exercise good judgment by remaining in their homes and by assisting local authorities.

However, not all blacks were pleased with Abbott's performance. Some of his colleagues believed his cooperative stance was a "foolhardy" move. These individuals warned the editor of the backlash that might occur if his readers came away with the impression that he had gone soft on the issue of racial injustice. Despite, their concerns Abbott wanted an expeditious end to the rioting.² As the days of violence drew to a close, Abbott once again turned his attention to the business of schooling. But, the ugliness of the nation's growing animosity towards black Americans began to shatter his faith in the ability of local, or federal leadership to impartially meet the educational needs of African Americans.

Unfortunately, it had become clear that the demand made by many whites for segregated educational facilities was increasing. This fact was as pronounced in the North as it had been for decades in the South. To his dismay, during this period, northerners had also begun to view blacks as "innately" inferior. "Public education for Negroes in the South had been influenced by the assumption of Negro intellectual inferiority. The concept of racial inferiority was built up during slavery as a moral justification for this

²Ottley, 182.

institution."³ As black migrants pushed northward, the assumption of "intellectual inferiority" followed them. What resulted in part was a constructed bias by many whites against school integration based upon the idea of white superiority.

The 1890 decision of Plessy v. Ferguson did not help in the struggle for integrated education.⁴ Hence, blacks were confronted with the realization that America's concept of the common school had never been intended to provide them with equal access to educational opportunity. Thus for a number of African Americans, the controversial issue of self imposed segregated schooling became a central point along with economic and educational survival.

In 1919, many black educators and leaders seriously examined this option as a way of assimilating into the country's economic and political main stream. For many, separate schooling would also solve the problem of gaining more control over their educational destinies. From an economic standpoint, a separate system of education would mean more positions for black administrators and teachers. In

³Virgil A. Clift, et al, ed., Negro Education In America: Its Adequacy, Problems, and Needs (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), 186.

⁴Homer Adolph Plessy, the plaintiff in this case, was a Louisiana mulatto who refused to ride the Negro railway car while in route from New Orleans to Covington, Louisiana. His conduct was in direct violation of a Louisiana law of 1890 mandating that "separate but equal" public accommodations be enacted for separation of the races. Samuel Calvin Davis, "Education, Law, and the Negro," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Illinois: Urbana, Illinois, 1970), p.p. 35, 36, 51.

essence, this economic windfall would produce a variety of jobs in the public educational sector, as well as entry into the body politic of schooling. "The early establishment of a public school system open to children of all white citizens went hand and hand with the formation of the distinctively American pattern of working class participation in educational politics."⁵

Furthermore, black schools both public and private that offered industrial training and vocational education, as well as academic programs would facilitate their economic mobility. Although, equal access to colleges and universities was also a concern in many black communities during this particular period there was no concerted attempt by African Americans to relegate secondary black graduates to "colored only" institutions of higher learning.

Exploring the idea of a divided educational system was an old notion. Scrutinizing measures that would expedite black progress in American society had been pondered by many prominent black educators some thirty years after the emancipation of the slaves. For example, in 1895 Booker T. Washington captured national attention when he outlined a plan for a segregated industrial training facility. According to

⁵According to Katznelson and Weir, access to public education afforded many white ethnic leaders the opportunity to demand to some extent, what was needed by their constituents relevant to school programs. Ira Katznelson and Margaret Weir, Schooling For All: Class, Race, and the Decline of the Democratic Ideal (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1985), 178.

the educator, his plan would ensure the economic future of black Americans.⁶ However, many blacks at this time were not impressed with what they saw as Washington's submissive posturing. Thus he was accused of forgoing the pursuit of academics in lieu of domestic training for African Americans.

As far as he was concerned, it was a lack of comprehension on the part of these individuals pertinent to the gist of his well publicized speech that for decades led to a misunderstanding of his plea to southern whites for shared economic cooperation. Yet, to many black intellectuals Washington was willing to trade "Negro" rights for white financial support. This stance was viewed by many blacks as a national plot to disenfranchise the African American.

Several years after the erection of Tuskegee, in 1904, Washington decided to set the record straight. Thus in clarifying his position on the issue of higher education, he stated:

We need not only the industrial school, but the college and professional school, as well as for a people so largely segregated, as we are, from the main body of our people must have its own professional leaders who shall be able to measure with others in all forms of intellectual life.⁷

Ironically, despite their differing political ideologies, both Washington and W. E. B. DuBois shared this awareness of the

⁶The Atlanta Compromise Address was presented by Washington before a southern commercial convention. Louis R. Harlan, Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), viii.

⁷Ibid., 174-75.

need for diversified educational objectives for the African American.

Abbott also saw the need for a variety of academic options to meet the varying abilities of blacks. Hence, whenever the occasion arose he commended those industrial training centers that facilitated black progress.⁸ However, he continued to frown upon the idea of a segregated public or private system of formal education to appease segregationists. Instead, he advocated the hiring of more competent African American teachers and administrators at white institutions. Accordingly, these individuals by virtue of their instructional skills and administrative adeptness would prove beyond a doubt to whites that blacks were their intellectual equal and thus capable of functioning in an integrated system.

In keeping with this conviction, it was not uncommon for Abbott to question current teacher training practices. He also pressed for equity of teacher salaries, especially for southern black educators.⁹ But, his efforts to convince white America of the feasibility of a workable integrated society were ignored.

Basically, because of this unfavorable attitude towards integration by mainstream white America, Abbott believed that he had to increase his assault upon any governmental agency,

⁸"A Worthy Educational Institution," Chicago Defender, 5 May 1919, editorial p.

⁹"Educating School Teachers," Chicago Defender, 27 December 1919, editorial p.

organization, group, or individual who supported racial discrimination in any form. In an attempt to alarm his readers as to the dangers of "apartheid," he expounded that no individual of color was safe from the clutches of "Jim Crow." For example, on 5 November 1920, he featured an article which reported the discriminatory treatment inflicted upon the daughter of a prominent black university professor. The professor was W. E. B. DuBois. With an unabashed headline, Abbott declared: "Daughter of Dr. DuBois victim of Southern tactics; Principal accused."¹⁰

On 3 July 1920, Abbott's reading public was again greeted with racial accusations leveled against the principal of Chicago's Wendell Phillips High School. According to the article, the administrator had knowingly segregated white and black students during graduation commencement.¹¹ By the following year the problem of racial discrimination in educational institutions across the country had become so acute that edition after edition of the Defender presented stories which delineated efforts by both private and public school officials to exclude blacks from their establishments.

For instance, in the 2 February 1921 edition Abbott

¹⁰This incident involved William L. Feiter, the school's principal. The school in question was an integrated public all girls' facility. Feiter had allegedly attempted to stop DuBois' daughter from attending the school's social. "Stop Color Line in N. Y. School," Chicago Defender, 5 November 1920, p. 1.

¹¹"Accuse Perrine of Color Line Ruling," Chicago Defender, 3 July 1920, p. 1.

attacked Notre Dame's "white only" policy as an attendance requirement for the school's Kankakee, Illinois' branch.¹² In an earlier scoop, the newspaper had chided endeavors by Toledo, Ohio's public school system to segregate its students in the classrooms and on the schools' playgrounds.¹³

Although, he publicly chastised such discriminatory acts Abbott also made a point of praising any individual who courageously defied the practice of "Jim Crow." For example, he praised the efforts of University of Minnesota white students who banded together against a white professor's determined attempts to segregate a black student from his white classmates. Jeremiah Young, the controversial professor, had demanded that the black student be isolated while attending his science class. This endeavor was viewed by the white students and Abbott as a means of imposing the professor's racist views upon the entire class.¹⁴

The following week's Defender described the charges leveled against Rhode Island's prestigious Brown University. Allegations of efforts to institute a "caste system" within the school's hallowed halls prompted this investigation. Through spies Abbott discovered that Brown had decided to

¹²"Reject Girl At Catholic Academy," Chicago Defender, 2 February 1921, p. 1.

¹³"Probe School Evil; Claim Segregation, Chicago Defender, 15 January 1921, p. 1.

¹⁴"Students Rebel When Professor Discriminates," Chicago Defender, 7 May 1921, p. 1.

approve a \$3,000,000 "discrimination campaign" aimed at keeping fraternities affiliated with the university "lily white." This exclusion was aimed at all ethnic minorities, especially Jewish students.¹⁵

As 1921 drew to a close, Abbott had plunged again into a nation-wide battle aimed at curtailing segregated schooling. The last issue of the publication detailed Cincinnati's efforts to maintain segregated schools. Articles in this edition reported on the school administrators' efforts to imposed "Jim Crow" policies upon black students. Regarding the Ohio caper, Abbott declared:

A sinister omen looms upon the horizon of Cincinnati school conditions with the continued uncertainty of so many Race people here concerning the disadvantage of separate educational accommodations and the obvious tendency of some leading spirits here to exploit the shallow thinkers.¹⁶

But, by now some African American leaders were beginning to find it difficult to defend any integrated educational system. With the issue of racial pride at stake and what now appeared to be a losing war against the forces "Jim Crow" schooling, a great many blacks had convinced themselves and others that separate was, perhaps, better. However, prophesying what segregation of the races would mean for future generations of blacks, Abbott never faltered in his

¹⁵"Pollard's Alma Mater Sets Up Caste System," Chicago Defender, 28 May 1921, p. 5.

¹⁶"Fight to Expel Jim Crow From 'Cincy' Schools," Chicago Defender, 17 December 1921, p. 3.

offense against segregated schooling. Indeed, for him separatism meant unequal access to academic progress and economic mobility.

During 1922, Abbott continued his attacks upon the nation's educational leaders for their dereliction of educational responsibility in allowing the issue of separate schooling to become a national disgrace. For instance, in April the Defender charged leading Gary, Indiana officials and local residents with inciting riotous behavior. Abbott was outraged at the white school administrators, teachers, parents, and the city officials who refused to give African Americans students access to certain building facilities as well as quality education.¹⁷

On the other hand, Abbott was jubilant over news from his District of Columbia (D. C.) correspondent about a "foiled" attempt to entrench segregation within the city's public schools system. Whites in the D. C. area had endeavored through a statistical report to show that black teachers and students from the city's black Anthony Bowen school could be transferred and "accommodated" at the Bell school which also was attended by African Americans. This transition would free the Bowen school for the enrollment of only white students.

¹⁷Abbott reported that black students who attended integrated public schools in Gary were not allowed to use the schools' washrooms, nor the schools' swimming facilities. These students were also subjected to physical assault and verbal abuse by white teachers and principals. "Who Caused The Jim Crow School System in Gary?" Chicago Defender, 15 April 1922, p. 5.

However, black community leaders and parents had proven via recorded data that the Bell school facility was too small to absorb the combined faculties and student population of both institutions.¹⁸

By the following year the battle had legally intensified as blacks began to petition the courts for protection against racial discrimination. Beginning in 1923, some northern state courts surprised quite a few blacks by siding with them against the out cry for segregated schooling. One such legal action involved a Springfield, Ohio court ruling. When the State's school integration mandate was challenged by local white citizens, city officials stuck by their state supreme court decision. Stated the local judge in keeping with the mandate: "There is no occasion for a discussion of the law. The supreme court has spoken, and this court has no option in the matter. It must follow the law as laid down without regard to any personal views on the subject."¹⁹

During 1923, African Americans also found solace in decisions made by some institution of higher learning. For example, Harvard University's "board of overseers" took action against ethnic, racial, and religious discrimination issues.

¹⁸"Foil Whites in Jim Crow School Ruse," Chicago Defender, 14 October 1922, p. 1.

¹⁹The decision by the judge in this case forbade the Springfield public schools system from separating by transfer or segregating within its premises black and white students. "Separation in Schools Abolished," Chicago Defender, 17 February 1923, p. 1.

The problems had been addressed by the university because of growing ethnic unrest at the school's campus.²⁰ Unfortunately, not all news concerning the fight to eradicate racial discrimination in education was favorable. For instance, black students at Syracuse University found their fraternities excluded from the school by orders of university administrators. This exclusion came in the aftermath of school officials succumbing to white pressure groups whose agenda was to continue a policy of "whites only" fraternities on that campus.²¹

Even Wilberforce University which in the past had prided itself on its ability to successfully maintain an integrated facility shocked many blacks by endeavoring to sever the school's industrial department from the main university. Of course, the department had a heavy black enrollment. This effort as discovered by Abbott was aided and sponsored by the infamous racially divisive, Liggitt Senate Bill No. 233.²² Wilberforce was one of many such institutions during this period that had decided to discontinue their open door policy

²⁰"Harvard Shakes Off Stigma of Race Prejudice," Chicago Defender, 14 April 1923, p. 2.

²¹"Fraternity Is Barred Out by White Students," Chicago Defender, 17 March 1923, p. 2.

²²Two years prior to the introduction of Senate Bill 233 a similar bill was introduced. It passed both State Houses, but was vetoed by the state's chief administrator, Governor Cox. If passed the Liggitt Bill would have put an end to Wilberforce's integrated school policy. "Wilberforce Threatened by Jim Crow," Chicago Defender, 10 March 1923, p. 1.

of integrated educational services for African Americans.

During the same year, Abbott also spearheaded investigations into the practice of physical intimidation by white school districts against resident blacks. One such incident again involved the Gary public schools system and its alleged acts of physical misconduct by white teachers, students, and administrators. The incident was investigated by a black undercover agent. Upon request by the city's school superintendent, gathered information was turned over to him for examination. The alleged offenders were accused of physically brutalizing both male and female black students. They were also accused of instigating riots within their school units.

Similar situations occurred in "exclusively" black schools. Undercover agents reported that black principals assigned to "colored only schools" were made to do janitorial work and menial tasks while their white counterparts were instructed to attend only to administrative duties. Furthermore, black teachers were paid less than their white counterparts and were quickly dismissed by district supervisors if they complained.²³

By the summer of 1923, Abbott received numerous letters from across the nation encouraging him to continue the battle.

²³The "secret service" officers referred to by Abbott were actually employed by a private detective agency called, the Keystone National Detective Agency which had offices in Chicago, Illinois. "Lid Lifted Off Slimy Practices in Gary Schools," Chicago Defender, 14 April 1923, p. 3.

Many of these letters were from blacks who praised his courageous leadership in the fight against segregated schools. These individuals also urged him to remain in the struggle for the survival of the African American. An excerpt taken from one such letter written by a black public school principal from Philadelphia read:

Robert S. Abbott,
The Chicago Defender:

I wish especially to praise your stand against segregation of colored children in public schools, and to urge you to redouble efforts in this direction.

Being in charge of a large school in Philadelphia, which has only colored children and colored teachers, I speak with first hand knowledge when I plead with all our Negro leaders to stand firm against further segregation and to fight bravely for the abolishing of every iota of race discrimination in that source of our democracy, the public school.

Very sincerely,
Daniel A. Brooks,²⁴

In 1924, the Defender published an article which appeared to be contrary to Abbott's stance against separate schooling for blacks. Staff writer, William Pickens, reported on an attempt by one Ohio school district to segregate its elementary schools. This endeavor was to be accomplished by erecting "outbuildings" in the "back yard" of the school for its black students who attended integrated classes. Thus stated Pickens: "It would be better to have an entirely

²⁴Daniel A. Brooks, Principal to Robert S. Abbott, "Praise Work of Press," Chicago Defender, 4 August 1923, Editor's Mail, editorial p.

separate school."²⁵ Pickens suggested to the publication's readers that the insult should prompt Ohio's black parents to ask for separate schools, or transfer their children to non public institutions of learning. Abbott, included his suggestions in the newspaper even though it was out of sink with the editor's position.

In an April edition of the Defender, Abbott featured a story which involved schools in Chicago's Morgan Park area. School officials in the district were assailed by local black residents for their attempt to employ a policy of racial segregation.²⁶ During the same school year, William A. McAndrew became superintendent of the city's public schools.²⁷ Contrary to the Ella Flagg Young years, the cordial association that had existed between Mrs. Young and Mr. Abbott during her administration was absent throughout the McAndrew era.

Beginning in 1925, African Americans were confronted with "Jim Crow" education in nearly every major American city.

²⁵William Pickens, "Dayton Allows 'Jim Crow' in Public Schools," Chicago Defender, 16 February 1924, part 2, p. 1.

²⁶"Principal Accused by Irate Citizens," Chicago Defender, 19 April 1924, p. 1 and part 2, p. 2

²⁷William A. McAndrew assumed the superintendency 1 February 1924. Before coming to Chicago, McAndrew for ten years had served as an associate superintendent for the New York public schools system. His tenure as an administrator of the Chicago system stretched from 1924-27. Joan K. Smith, "Educational Policy & Conflict in the Chicago Schools: The McAndrew Years, 1924-27," Journal of the Midwest History of Education Society 15 (1987): 44-45.

But, by this time Abbott had become more sophisticated in his approach to the problem. For example, presenting information with a dollars and cents angle he attempted to gain more black support by illustrating a historical perspective on educational inequities for black students. Still dissatisfied with what appeared to be a slow response by too many blacks toward the problem of separate and unequal schooling, Abbott once again supplied his readers with data that revealed discriminatory practices.

First he attacked the South by declaring: "The Southern states discriminate sharply against the children who are not white in their struggle for education."²⁸ Backing up his charge of educational neglect, he also provided his readers with spending patterns of a number of southern states for the maintenance of segregated educational facilities. Included in his report were the distribution of funds by such states as Florida, Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia.²⁹

In keeping with the subject of segregation and ignorance, Abbott also printed comments made by two southern congressmen who wanted to derail governmental funding to Howard University. Miles C. Allgood, the most outspoken of the two,

²⁸In this article, Abbott stated that an investigative report had revealed that southern states such as Mississippi, for example, spent in 1925 a total of thirty two dollars and fifty seven cents to educate a white child while spending only six dollars per black student. "Millions of Dollars Spent by Race on Own Education," Chicago Defender, 28 November 1925, part 2, p. 9.

²⁹Ibid.

setting forth his views on the subject stated: "I believe the Negro was put on earth to work. You can't make educated animals out of them."³⁰ Responding to this insult and remarks made by Representative Henry R. Steagall, Abbott retorted:

There in a few simple words is the South's philosophy of education and the Race problem . . . In Alabama statistics show there are more illiterate persons of both races than there are those who can be classed as literate. With the possible exception of Mississippi, Alabama has the worst school system in the South . . . Education is the final solution to all of America's problems.³¹

During 1925-26, Abbott's newspaper carried a series of articles which illustrated the determination of many African Americans to utilize the courts as a way to air their grievances against the nation's practice of educational discrimination. Abbott also called attention to the absurdity of financing two separate systems of education. According to him, the attempt to maintain a segregated system of education placed many southern states in a financial bind. Reporting on Kentucky's financial woes he revealed that an interracial committee had suggested to the district superintendent, after examining the state's educational expenditures, that it was just too costly to provide two systems of education in order

³⁰"Two Congressmen From Alabama Speak on Education," Chicago Defender, 30 May 1925, editorial p.

³¹Ibid.

to accommodate the state's segregationists.³²

In a 1926 article, Abbott applauded the Indianapolis' chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People for their involvement in the law suit of Archie Greathouse. Greathouse, an African American, had sued the Indianapolis public school system for attempting to segregate white and black students in that city. School officials sought to accomplish this feat by erecting a "blacks only" high school in the district.³³

So concerned was Abbott with ensuring quality education for black citizens that in the same year, he urged the United States Congress to address the need for a secretary of education. Citing the necessity for a "uniform" arrangement of schooling, Abbott proclaimed that not one of the nation's forty eight states had a homogeneous system of laws that governed formal education. The editor added to his complaint that even more astonishing was the fact that a great number of American cities as well as counties instituted their own "willy nilly" policies and mandates on school procedures. He further claimed that because this loose knit autonomy had been allotted school districts, a fragmented educational system now existed. Accordingly, this system without reservation had allowed disastrous variances in school curricula and had also

³²"Kentucky Votes to Nullify Its Separate School Board," Chicago Defender, 19 December 1925, p. 2.

³³"Ask Court to Forbid 'Jim Crow' School," Chicago Defender, 6 March 1926, p. 10.

fostered a lackadaisical attitude toward "compulsory" schooling.³⁴

As to his request, it is unclear whether or not Abbott understood the premise of the United States Constitution with regards to the Tenth Amendment on matters of formal education. Accordingly, the United States Constitution is the primary law of the country. Although, the Constitution encompasses an enormous tract of controls, responsibilities, and boundaries, it does not "expressly" direct itself towards schooling. Hence, enters the dictates of the Tenth Amendment.³⁵ However, this does not mean that the United States Constitution has no affect on schooling. According to Reutter, formal education thus becomes a "function" of the state whereby: "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people."³⁶

The Ku Klux Klan Invades the Classroom

The year 1927 began with an increase in klan activities throughout the United States. The focus of their activities

³⁴"We Need a Secretary of Education," Chicago Defender, 27 March 1926, editorial p.

³⁵E. Edmund Reutter, Jr., The Law of Public Education, 3rd edition (Mineola, New York: The Foundation Press, Inc., 1983), 2.

³⁶Ibid.

were directed primarily, but not exclusively, towards African Americans. For example, other ethnic and religious groups such as Jews and Catholics also were targeted for the organization's campaign of hate and terror.

Historically speaking the klan, also known as the Invisible Empire, was created in 1866 by returning southern Civil War soldiers. These veterans wanted to prevent racial commingling in the South. Their plan included the purging of northern intruders called carpetbaggers and southern scallywags from their region. Believing that the intruders were only concerned with their own political gain, most white southerners viewed them as enemies of the fallen confederacy. They also suggested that these uninvited individuals had entered the South with the intent of undermining what little control white southerners still held over blacks.

For the most part, carpetbaggers and scallywags had greatly distressed the conquered confederacy with their promise of social and politically equality for the newly emancipated slaves. Hence, southern whites believed that this equality would be at the expense of their racial identity. In 1916, the concept of "internationalism" along with newly arriving immigrants also were included in the klan's repertoire of ideologies and individuals that threaten the social fabric of American society.³⁷

³⁷Kenneth T. Jackson, The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), xi-18.

By the early 1920s, the organization had embarked upon a massive effort to attract klan sympathizers outside of the South. In so doing, the klan expanded northward and westward hoping to increase its membership. With one eye on the northeast, the klan also desired to infiltrate the midwest. Their expansion into these areas was successful. Thus between 1920 and 1926 the Ku Klux Klan's recruitment efforts netted the organization an increased membership estimated at well over two million persons.³⁸

To the dismay of Abbott and other blacks by 1921 the organization had become firmly entrenched in the Chicago area. This entrenchment was evident when approximately ten thousand klansmen participated in the organization's first public rally 16 August 1921.³⁹ Despite the klan's presence, Abbott as an advocate of the Beavers' Association assured his readers that they were not alone in their struggle against klan intimidation.

For example, the Chicago Defender carried advertisements that urged African Americans to join the Beavers in the fight against the group. This organization was a national protection association that sought to publicly assure blacks of their support against klan intimidation and violence. It also offered financial and medical assistance to any African

³⁸Ibid, 20-91.

³⁹Ibid, 94.

American who had been victimized by the organization.⁴⁰

On an even broader scale in 1922, Abbott attacked the antics of the klan with a personal vengeance. Using page one of his newspaper, he boldly defied the klan and chastised the federal government for their laissez faire attitude toward the safety of black citizens. He ran articles that warned of the grave consequences that could occur if the federal government ignored this hate group. Exhorted, the editor:

One of two things will happen. Either the Ku Klux Klan diseased child of a clandestine association must die, or this government itself must go. The two cannot live together, side by side, under the same flag and the same Constitution.⁴¹

In an attempt to allay the fears of the black community, the editor ridiculed the organization by suggesting that they were nothing more than hooded bigots who danced frantically around open fires with drawn swords. Abbott, further declared defiantly: "To Hell with the Ku Klux Klan."⁴²

Regarding the issue of schooling, the klan had held a vested interest in formal education long before 1927. For instance, expounding upon the theory that there was no better way to train future Aryan citizens than through public education, klansmen were strong advocates of the common school

⁴⁰"Objects of Beaver Organization," Chicago Defender, 1 October 1921, p. 2.

⁴¹Robert S. Abbott, "Ku Klux Klan Made Possible By Bigotry and Cowardice of American White Man," Chicago Defender, 2 September 1922, p. 1.

⁴²Jackson, 102.

concept.⁴³ Although, they believed in the idea of "separation of church and state," they supported the notion of Bible reading in school. Their support of this concept included segregated schooling, at most, for African Americans.

The presence of the klan in public education was a problem that had plagued Abbott since the early days of the Chicago Defender. During the first part of the 1920s, he had warned his readers' of their intent to disrupt the education process. Hence, he made public a letter written by an Alabama klansman who denounced the erection of a black high school in Birmingham. The klansman had argued that "white" children should be educated first before any thought was given to the schooling of blacks.⁴⁴

Within the same year Abbott held the klan responsible for the Coffeyville, Kansas school board's decision to exclude black students from that city's only junior high school.⁴⁵ Still other articles uncovered the organization's infiltration of Harvard University's faculty.⁴⁶

In 1924, the Chicago editor blamed the klan for degrading "propaganda" which he believed had influenced the state of

⁴³Ibid, 19.

⁴⁴"Klan Fights High School in Alabama," Chicago Defender, 2 June 1923, p. 1.

⁴⁵Blame Klan in School Ouster at Coffeyville," Chicago Defender, 10 November 1923, p. 3.

⁴⁶"Invisible Empire At Harvard," Chicago Defender, 3 November 1923, p. 13

Indiana's decision to segregate its Indianapolis' public schools.⁴⁷ In another incident, klansmen were also accused of threatening a Columbia University African American law student with violence. These individuals were upset because the student would not vacate a white dormitory at the university. The threat was accompanied by a "cross burning" incident on the front lawn of the campus dormitory.⁴⁸

By 1927, Abbott once again assured his readers that such intimidation in the "hallowed" halls of the nations institutions of learning would not be tolerated. Nevertheless, the Defender's editor admitted that a growing rash of discriminatory acts against black students was a direct result of klan influence in northern cities. In essence, Abbott found the courageous decisions of some states to bravely defy the organization in these perilous times quite rewarding. For example, he commended the state of Colorado for abiding by their state supreme court's dictate to eliminate the practice of "Jim Crow" schooling.⁴⁹

However, Chicago's Board of Education was quite a different matter. In past years, Abbott had chided the board for its laxity in allowing black students to be relegated to

⁴⁷"Indianapolis Fights Against High School on Jim Crow Method," Chicago Defender, 5 January 1924, part 2, p. 2.

⁴⁸"Columbia Law Student Threatened by Kluxers Not Afraid," Chicago Defender, 5 April 1924, part 2, p. 4.

⁴⁹"Jim Crowism Gets Setback In Colorado," Chicago Defender, 5 February 1927, part 1, p. 5.

segregated classrooms. During 1927, this type of trouble occurred in the Morgan Park school district. Much to his annoyance, the city's superintendent, William A. McAndrew, ignored complaints of discrimination by the district's black parents. For some unknown reason McAndrew chose not to meet with the disgruntled parents. Instead, he left the incident in the hands of the district's superintendent, William Hedges.

Area parents were not amused. Since the beginning of his tenure as district superintendent black parents had accused Hedges of being a racist. Thus his involvement in the matter only made the problem worse. This prompted Abbott to publish an article which accused Hedges of bigotry. The Defender alleged that the district superintendent believed that segregating the races was in the district's best interest. Abbott thus informed the black parents that their only available recourse was to remedy the situation in a court of law.

These same parents also objected to the reappointment of board member, Helen M. Hefferan. Equating her racism view of the African American with that of the Ku Klux Klan, the Defender reported: "The citizens are fighting to keep her off on account of her attitude towards our Race and our children."⁵⁰

Despite these racial tensions, Abbott did not consider

⁵⁰"Morgan Park Citizens Ask Equal Rights," Chicago Defender, 15 January 1927, p. 1.

all Euro-Americans as anti-black. For example, he applauded Mary McDowell's efforts to bring about racial harmony within the city. Citing portions of a speech given by McDowell who was then Commissioner of Public Welfare, he quoted the following: "There is no color line where all peoples are working for the common cause."⁵¹

In the next edition of his newspaper, Abbott humorously and derisively printed an article that detailed the formation of a North Carolina black clandestine order that was similar in some respects to Ku Klux Klan. According to the editor, these individuals hid their identity by wearing black hooded robes trimmed with "scarlet" lettering. Although, aping the dress and antics of white klansmen this black organization's basic purpose, as it expanded throughout the South, was to counteract any acts of violence so perpetrated by the klansmen against blacks.⁵²

Abbott, continued his crusade against separate black schools. For example, in a February 1927 editorial, he discussed attempts by some blacks and whites to gain the support of black Illinois residents for segregated education. He scolded the advocates by proclaiming:

Our Race seems notoriously devoid of foresight in this matter of segregation. We claim that we come to the North to escape humiliating Jim Crow

⁵¹"pleads For Abolition of 'Color Line'," Chicago Defender, 19 February 1927, p. 1.

⁵²"New K.K.K. 'Krusaders' are 'Kololed'," Chicago Defender, 26 February 1927, part 1, p. 4.

conditions in the South and then proceed to impose the same conditions upon ourselves in our new communities. Jim Crow schools certainly have not always been in Illinois. The state law expressly forbids any sort of separation based upon race, color, or religion. In this state we have the best chance of any states of the Union to fight segregation.⁵³

Abbott suggested that these blacks who aligned themselves with racist whites were no better than the "Kluxers" who endeavored to force segregated schooling upon African Americans by means of intimidation.

By 1928, the Chicago Defender led the nation's black publications in the fight to keep the Ku Klux Klan out of American schools. For example, Abbott displayed a strident stance against klan activities in Gary, Indiana as klansmen attempted to block student integration. Thus reported the editor, racial unrest begun when white Gary parents were influenced by klan's efforts to disrupt the orderly process of the city's public schools system. The disruption, according to Abbott, was to take place in the form of a student strike at a local high school.

This threatened strike was a protest over the enrollment of twenty four minority students at white Emerson High School. Emerson's white parents were so angered over the board's decision that they also circulated a petition to have the school renamed the William Stephenson High School in honor of a former klan "grand dragon." Perturbed over the klan's

⁵³"These Jim Crow Schools," Chicago Defender, 12 February 1927, part 2, editorial p. 2.

invasion of the school house, yet jubilant over the court's decision to investigate the organization's antics, Abbott reported: "According to Attorney F. W. Alexander the Ku Klux Klan was responsible for the trouble. By spreading vile propaganda the Klan was indicted for instituting the color line into the schools."⁵⁴

Abbott's Legal Troubles and the Beginning of the Great Depression

The year 1929 was one of mixed blessings for Robert S. Abbott. The successful editor and publisher of one of the nation's leading journalistic chains was sixty-one years of age. Success had come to Abbott by way of hard work and sheer fortitude. However, as he began to ascend to notoriety he was at times threatened with various law suits. There had been the initiated law suit by the white established journalistic mega giant, William R. Hearst, in 1918. Abbott was also charged by Marcus Garvey in 1919 with character assassination.⁵⁵ The Garvey litigation was precipitated by

⁵⁴"Pupil Loses Suit In Gary School Case," Chicago Defender, 14 July 1928, p. 3.

⁵⁵According to the author, Abbott was sued by Garvey for libel because he publicly denounced his back to Africa mission as a fraudulent scheme. Abbott had criticized Garvey's Black Star Line as a "Jim Crow" streamship line enterprise. He also was instrumental in Garvey's arrest by federal authorities and helped to orchestrate his deportation from the United States. Martin further suggested that, in part, Abbott's dislike for Garvey stemmed from what the Defender's owner saw as a competitive force in the field of journalism. Garvey was

a 20 September 1919 article in which it was alleged that Abbott had compared Garvey to the notorious "Chief Sam."⁵⁶ The trial ended one year later in Abbott's favor.⁵⁷

Ironically, in 1929 Abbott was sued by his former attorneys, French and French. These two gentlemen were the ones who had successfully served as his legal counselors during the court litigation brought about by Marcus Garvey. French and French alleged that the Defender's editor had refused to pay their back fee of \$30,000. The alleged unpaid bill was incurred earlier as a result of the libel suit. However, the editor emerged from the French and French encounter victorious. In essence, he had convinced the court that the fee was far less than alleged and that all monies owed the attorneys had been paid.⁵⁸

ving for black readership of his publication, the Negro World. In so doing, he often criticized Abbott for printing advertisements in the Defender that called upon blacks to straighten their hair and whiten their skin in order to be accepted by white America. Tony Martin, Race First (Dover, Massachusetts: The Majority Press, 1986), 316-27.

⁵⁶According to Ottley, "Chief Sam" of Kansas City also had defrauded several African Americans out large amounts of money with his back to Africa plan. This action was prior to the Garvey movement. Ottley, 261.

⁵⁷Magill writes that Garvey had brought an initial suit against Abbott at the tune of \$200,000 which was dismissed. Garvey then brought a second suit against the editor for \$100,000. This legal action ended with the jury awarding Garvey 6 cents for damages. Charles T. Magill, "Six Pennies End Damage Suit," Chicago Defender, 26 June 1920, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁸"Court of Appeals Upholds Decision in French and French v. Chicago Defender," New York Amsterdam News, 17 July 1929, p. 1-2.

Abbott also continued his war against racial discrimination, but obstacles in the form of the 1929 Depression struck the Defender's editor as it did so many other Americans. Nevertheless, Abbott vowed to keep his newspaper from folding and even managed to embark upon another printed venture. This new undertaking was known as Abbott's Monthly. The magazine debuted in the fall of 1930.

Abbott's Opinion of Funding For Black Education

Abbott was cognizant of the mounting cost incurred by a great many school boards throughout the country as they pursued quality education. He believed that it was his responsibility to pass on this information to his readers. Thus on 31 August 1929 he announced that the Chicago public schools system spent an annual of \$100.02 per student for an estimated one hundred thousand children.⁵⁹ But, he added that they spent approximately thirteen dollars less for public education than many other urban centers. On the other hand, Abbott praised noteworthy agencies and individuals such as the Jeanes Fund, the Phelps-Stokes Fund, and Julius Rosenwald for their contributions to educational facilities for blacks. Abbott also praised the John F. Slater organization for its

⁵⁹The estimated cost was thus broken down according to expenditures for elementary and secondary students. "Cost of Sending Child to School Is \$100.02 a Year," Chicago Defender, 31 August 1929, p. 7.

total contribution of \$69,050 for the educational progress of African Americans during the previous two year period.⁶⁰

New York's general board of education and Rosenwald were recognized for their combined gift of \$2,000,000 to Meharry Medical School.⁶¹ Abbott also noted that Rosenwald had sponsored ten lectures for an interracial conference on the subject of educating the African American. According to the editor, Rosenwald had paid for the traveling expenses of the participating speakers.⁶² In noting the generosity of Julius Rosenwald, Carter G. Woodson commented:

He had not so much love for the Negro as he had for humanity. He saw an opportunity, not so much to elevate the Negro, as to elevate Americans. As a business man, Mr Rosenwald could see that the civic policy of forcing the Negro to live in poverty and in vice and in disease was merely suicide for the South and to that extent suicide for the whole United States.⁶³

The editor also carried announcements of various scholarship clubs that were open to black youths who were serious about furthering their education at institutions of

⁶⁰"Millions Spent to Spread Education in United States," Chicago Defender, 10 August 1929, part 2, p. 1.

⁶¹"Meharry Gets Millions for Modern Plant," Chicago Defender, 16, February 1929, pp. 1-3.

⁶²"To Use Gift of Rosenwald for Program," Chicago Defender, 5 October 1929, part 2, p. 13.

⁶³Carter G. Woodson, "The Need" [Chapter I, p. 18], [File Copy], The Papers of Julius Rosenwald, Box XXXIII, Folder 1, Department of Special Collections, Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Chicago.

higher learning.⁶⁴ During the summer of the same year, Abbott happily published an article that reported that ten deserving African American students had received education scholarships to attend Howard University.⁶⁵ News of Kansas City, Missouri Governor Henry S. Cauifield's promise to help defray the financial expenses of black Lincoln University, as well as his assurance of access to formal education for thousands of the state's black children also pleased the Defender's owner. Stated, Abbott:

The governor stressed the fact that he wanted to help the citizens while in office, and that he is doing all possible in keeping with his campaign pledges . . . in which he urged greater educational aid from the state and also reforms in the state prison.⁶⁶

In stressing the importance of funding for schooling blacks and in particular that of higher education, Abbott permitted his staff writers to express their sentiments on the subject. For example, Kelly Miller also appeared elated by philanthropic endeavors to help support black institutions of learning. Declared Miller:

Philanthropy, which at one time seemed to show indifference, if not unfriendliness, towards the higher education of the Colored race, is now liberally sustaining the leading Negro institutions and supplying adequate means to carry on the grade

⁶⁴"Club to Give Scholarships to Students," Chicago Defender, 4 May 1929, p. 4.

⁶⁵"Ten Youths Receive Aid in Education," Chicago Defender, 6 July 1929, part 2, p. 1.

⁶⁶"Missouri Governor Renews Educational Promises," Chicago Defender, 23 February 1929, p. 7.

and standard of work assumed.⁶⁷

Miller also commended the states of North Carolina and West Virginia for their commitment to higher education for African Americans. These states, according to the staff writer, had given "generously" from their financial coffers to provide for black youngsters the opportunity to receive college or university degrees.

⁶⁷Kelly Miller, "College Bred Leadership," Chicago Defender, 10 August 1929, part 2, p. 1.

CHAPTER VI

TOWARDS A PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

Abbott Embarks Upon a National Quest for Quality Education

Abbott became an even stronger advocate for a system of education that would adhere to a national criteria, and his main target of criticism was the South. He accused southern regions of neglecting their educational responsibility. On the other hand, he also recognized that a number of northern school districts were in need of major curriculum over-hauls. But, he conceded that the North appeared to have the better of the two systems.

One area of concern was the failure of many black southern transfer students to master subject material as presented in northern school districts. Due to the South's tradition of supplying substandard curricula, Abbott believed that most of these students were academically ill prepared. He also thought that the problem was more pronounced at the elementary and secondary levels than at higher educational institutions.¹ In order to rectify the situation, he suggested that the South adopt a curriculum similar to that

¹Although, Abbott declared that transferring southern black students' academic performance was worst at the elementary and secondary levels he did not provide statistical information to back up his claim. "Suggest Standard Course of Study for All Schools," Chicago Defender, 9 September 1930, part 2, p. 15.

offered by the Chicago school district.² Specific courses within the curriculum also were of primary interest to the newspaper's editor. For instance, he featured articles on the need for African American males to be more astute in mathematics, especially in the area of advanced mathematics, so that they could score higher on entrance examinations for engineering and architectural schools, and also compete for prestigious military institutions such as Annapolis and West Point.³

Abbott's push for nation-wide quality education also focused on teacher competency. Reprinting an article written by former Wisconsin University president, Glenn Frank. He

²At the time, the Chicago public schools provided a curriculum that included a four year general science course. This course of study consisted of; English, mathematics, science, a foreign language, drawing, music, and physical education to be taken in the first year; for the second year history or civics were added, drawing was excluded, and biology replaced science while all other subjects remained the same; for the third year a technical subject substituted for English or science, and music was excluded while all other subjects remained the same; the fourth year provided United States history, civics, chemistry, and physical education. The district also furnished a four year general language course. This program included; English, language, science, drawing, music, household arts, and physical education; for the second year household arts and physical education were excluded, civics, mathematics, and a choice of biology or history were added while all other subjects remained the same; in the third year physical education was picked up again, European history replaced undefined history, drawing was dropped while English remained constant; and by the fourth year United States history, language and English, plus physical education were offered. Ibid.

³"Engineers and Architects Debate on Mathematics," Chicago Defender, 30 August 1930, p. 3.

echoed Frank's sentiments in declaring that it was imperative to employ teachers who know their subject matter; who were innovators, flexible, and motivated; who possess high moral standards; and who were professional achievers.⁴ In further exploring the competency question, Abbott showed concern about the quality of the nation's southern black colleges. For example, he agreed with V. V. Oak's position that African American institutions of higher learning had become too numerous. Besides, this problem had created "inter-denominational" rivalries and duplication of services. In essence: "It causes not only a waste of money, but it greatly affects the quality of work produced in these institutions."⁵

Both men also were in agreement on the inability of many black college administrators to use sound judgement when hiring faculty. Unfortunately, this problem produced a rapid teacher turn-over. In fact the staying power of many new faculty members was short. Again echoing Oak's feelings, Abbott was likewise bothered with the low criteria by which a

⁴The article also listed as valuable traits inherited in teacher competency common sense, goal and student oriented, and congeniality. Glenn Frank, "An Interesting Article for the Teachers," Chicago Daily News, 17 March 1930, reprint Chicago Defender, 12 April 1930, part 2, p. 21.

⁵This article was submitted to Abbott's Monthly magazine by Oak who was also, during this time, a professor in the Department of Economics at Jefferson City, Missouri's black Lincoln University. V. V. Oak, "What is Wrong with Our Colleges," Abbott's Monthly, p. 29.

number of black colleges measured their students' academic success. He viewed many of these institutions as "social warehouses" where the custom of just "getting by" became the norm. Unfortunately, this practice prevented large numbers of black graduates from successfully competing with their white counter-parts for jobs.⁶

In 1931, the Defender ran an article on the "miseducation" of African Americans. The views expressed were those of Carter G. Woodson. Woodson was a distinguished black historian who in 1916 had created the Journal of Negro History.⁷ In keeping with Woodson's opinion, Abbott declared that the quality of educational facilities could be greatly improved if courses were offered in "Negro" history, art, literature, psychology, and philosophy. Such an education would eliminate the perception of inferiority that was attached to the African American by the dominant culture. Abbott, further believed that these teachings also would help to improve self-esteem for blacks by giving them a sense of their past.⁸ Abbott was convinced that Woodson held the key to quality education for blacks and in 1932 he asked him to

⁶Ibid, 31.

⁷Sister Anthony M. Scally, Carter G. Woodson: A Bio-Bibliography (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985), 33.

⁸"Dr. Woodson Says Our Modern Institutions Do Race Harm," Chicago Defender, 24 January 1931, part 2, p. 3.

become a regular contributor to the Defender's series on education.⁹

At the time that Woodson wrote for the newspaper, there were two other staff writers, Walter L. Lowe and Elmer Carter, who showed the same kind of interest about what blacks learned and how they were taught. Both men resounded Woodson's theme. For instance, Walter L. Lowe pointed to the significance of history in ethnic cultivation by stating:

It is especially advantageous for each nation to know its own history; for it is by this means that such a race will better know its origin and traditions. It will be in a position to judge its own peculiarities, its capacities for love, war, science, and culture.¹⁰

Elmer Carter went a step beyond the importance of knowing one's history by suggesting that: "The immediate aim of education must be to a great degree the preparation of young people for living; that is in learning to control their environment."¹¹

Abbott also took quality education to mean a healthy learning environment. Hence, he believed that if youngsters were forced to attend schools where class sizes reached a

⁹Woodson wrote for the Chicago Defender from 1932 through 1936. Scally, 177-79.

¹⁰Walter L. Lowe, "Miseducation Seen as Cause of Most of Our Troubles," Chicago Defender, 23 December 1933, part 2, p. 16.

¹¹Elmer Carter, "Modern Race Education Needs Revising," Chicago Defender, 22 April 1933, part 2, p. 1.

maximum of one hundred students not much individualized instruction, or real learning was taking place. Similarly, if classroom lighting was poor and students were without textbooks learning also would be minimized. Through spot checking, Abbott found that many of these kinds of problems existed in the city's public schools. In an attempt to curtail the problems, he and a concerned group of black parents complained to the Chicago Board of Education.¹² William J. Bogan was superintendent of the city's public schools when this crisis unfolded.¹³

Keeping politics out of the classroom was another item on Abbott's agenda. Subsequently, this became part of his campaign for educational quality during the mayoral regime of Edward J. Kelly. Abbott feared that Kelly had stacked the board with people who were not interested in providing quality education for the poor, and especially for black students.¹⁴

¹²Dewey R. Jones, "Rotten Conditions at Phillips High School," Chicago Defender, 30 September 1933, part 2, p. 24.

¹³Upon the suspension of William A. McAndrews by the Chicago Board of Education in August, 1927, William J. Bogan, former assistant superintendent, was declared acting superintendent and subsequently was elected to the position in June, 1928. Mary J. Herrick, The Chicago Schools: A Social and Political History (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1971), 172.

¹⁴Edward J. Kelly replaced Anton J. Cermak as mayor of Chicago on 17 April 1933 after Cermak died as a result of an assassin's bullet meant for president elect Franklin D. Roosevelt in Miami. Lloyd Wendt and Herman Kogan, Big Bill of Chicago (Indianapolis, Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1953), 342.

Thus he printed several articles criticizing a number of Kelly's political board appointees for attempting to "economize" on monies that were earmarked for the Chicago public schools. Abbott saw this "debauchery" as a means of establishing an "elitist" system of public education whereby black and poor students would be denied equal access to good schooling. In a July editorial, Abbott alleged that the mayor and his board friends had conspired to defraud the city's residents of their right to educational equity. In an attempt to counteract the board, he called for a city-wide protest and declared: "The social and economic consequences of the program designed by the school board will retard the growth of Chicago for a hundred years to come."¹⁵

Abbott also sided with his staff writer, A. N. Fields, Congressman Oscar DePriest, and Second Ward Alderman William A. Dawson in asserting that the mayor's "cronies" were spurred on by "bankers" who had a vested interest in destroying Chicago's public educational institutions by drastically cutting the budget. He even agreed with Clarence Darrow regarding what should be done with the "likes" of Kelly. Thus, he reported: "Mr. Darrow said that Governor Horner should act to bring about a popular election of a mayor of Chicago, chosen by the people themselves instead of by self-

¹⁵The protest that Abbott called for never materialized, nor did he follow through with any action regarding the matter. "The Schools and the School Board," Chicago Defender, 22 July 1933, part 2, p. 14.

serving politicians."¹⁶

Abbott Discusses the Need for Finishing Schools
for the Black Female

In 1934, Abbott informed his readers that he would present them with a "ten" article series detailing the educational needs of the African American female. His intent in discussing the matter was to illustrate that black women were in need of cultural awareness.¹⁷ Thus he conveyed that his purpose in addressing the subject stemmed from a number of letters from black females who were uncertain about the correct way to prepare for their marital responsibilities. Declared, the editor:

Untutored, lacking in finesse, and in the attributes of culture and refinement, which constitute good breeding, many of these women who oftentimes marry men of prominence and wealth find themselves unsuited for the social circle in which their husbands move and much unhappiness, if not actual

¹⁶According to this article, Darrow believed that Edward J. Kelly had been facilitated into the mayoral office by underhanded political shenanigans instead of by the approval of resident Chicagoans. A. N. Fields, "Thousands Gather at Eighth Armory to get Inside Facts on Debauchery of City's Educational System," Chicago Defender, 29 July 1933, pp. 1-2.

¹⁷Although, Abbott promised his readers ten articles he actually ended up supplying them with twenty. In addition, his singling out the black female for her lack of cultural refinement in no way meant that the black male was less guilty of the same dereliction. "Editor Abbott to Write on Vital Subject," Chicago Defender, 10 February 1934, p. 1.

separation is the result.¹⁸

In an effort to convince his public of his competency regarding the topic, he informed them that his travels to Europe and South America had heightened his expertise.

Furthermore, Abbott surmised that black women required more than just academic "window dressing." Hence, the finishing school concept could rectify this situation by serving as an integral component of their formal education. In addition, he also suggested that they should study the behavioral patterns of aristocratic Renaissance women as examples of cultural refinement.¹⁹ Perhaps, endeavoring not to antagonize his female patrons Abbott, somewhat apologetically, told them that he was not against higher education for the black woman. However, he made it clear that academics were only secondary to these women's primary role:

There is need for reorientation and for redirecting our potential and kinetic energy into less glamorous, but profitable channels. For what does it avail us to have a super abundance of women with masters and Ph.D degrees, women so highly trained as to frown upon the biological functions of their sex and ignore such basic aspects of society as marriage

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹In this article, Abbott presented as models Italian and French upper class women. However, he did speculate as to the method by which African American females were to acquire these characteristics. Robert S. Abbott, "Finishing Schools Are Necessary, Says Editor," Chicago Defender, 17 February 1934, pp. 1-7.

and the family?²⁰

In essence, Abbott presumed that possessing a degree was not unacceptable but that cultural refinement and the love of family were more important. Besides, he believed that husbands needed wives who were culturally knowledgeable.

Despite, his rather conciliatory tone Abbott suggested that the female social liberation movement along with its subsequent economic independence had indirectly hampered the development of the black family. As a result of such freedom, the shy and virtuous lady of "yesteryear" had been replaced by the contemporary worldly woman who had become a callous individual, no longer concerned with home or family. In essence, what she really wanted was a "business partner" and not a husband.²¹ Extremely critical of the existing situation, Abbott called for a return to "normalcy." He concluded by conjecturing that civilization would terminate without the stability of the family: "You may call it evolution. To me it is a plain indication of erosion or the

²⁰Unfortunately, in this article Abbott made no mention about the importance of self-esteem for African American women. Robert S. Abbott, "Higher Education is No Corrective for Social Ills," Chicago Defender, 24 February 1934, pp. 1-4.

²¹In this article, Abbott's major complaint appeared to be that many college educated African American women preferred spouse equality. It should also be noted that his first wife, Helen, in a previous article of the same month, date, and year was said to have been a normal school graduate and had for a short period "dabbled" in social welfare work. Robert S. Abbott, "Selecting Wives No Simple Matter, Says Editor R. S. Abbott," Chicago Defender, 1 September 1934, p. 11.

breaking down of our social system."²² Although, not overtly stated the underpinnings of Abbott's declarations appeared to have reflected his disappointment with the dissolution of his first marriage.²³

Even though, Abbott believed that social and economical progress were important keys to upward mobility, he also wrote that the issue of true "racial" progress without the existence of cultural awareness was absurd. In divulging such, he mentioned that cultural stimulation of the African American had been greatly retarded by social prejudices and economic hardships. But, knowledge of the existing problem did not alter his willingness to co-mingle with other ethnic groups who comprised the dominant culture, nor of borrowing and readapting their customs or traditions to meet the cultural deficiencies of his racial group.²⁴

Despite, Abbott's absorption with the role of the black woman he also addressed the cultural deficiencies of the black male. In doing so, he argued that like the African American

²²Ibid.

²³Helen had accused Abbott of desertion, adultery, plus mental and physical cruelty. However, one year later in an attempt to reconcile with the publisher she withdrew her accusations and publicly stated that she had lied. "Publisher in Denial of Wife's Charges in His Answer," Chicago Defender, 20 August 1932, p. 1.

²⁴Robert S. Abbott, "No Racial Group Can Make Gains Where Culture is Lacking," Chicago Defender, 10 March 1934, part 2, p. 16.

female many males had succeeded in developing their intellectual skills, but had neglected to stimulate their "cultural senses." He, therefore, implored them to correct their oversight. Surprisingly, he suggested that they too needed the "Finishing School" as a means of obtaining cultural awareness.²⁵

Abbott Explains His Views on Morality Training

Abbott had definite convictions about family morality and promoting cultural growth among black children. To this extent his philosophy for such was similar to that of providing African American women with cultural stimuli. For example, in the fifth installment of his series he talked about the well mannered behavior of French children, as well as their appreciation for opera, great books, and renowned art.

Although, Abbott reported that many of these individuals were economically disadvantaged they still managed to display proper conduct. In addition, he remarked that American

²⁵Initially, this article appeared to reveal a contradiction in belief as expounded by Abbott relevant to his concurrence with Carter G. Woodson on the "miseducation" of the African American. However, upon closer examination one finds that he acknowledged the importance of knowing African history, but also felt comfortable with the idea of European cultural readaptation. Robert S. Abbott, "Education, Culture Should Keep Apace, Says R. S. Abbott, Chicago Defender, 2 March 1935, p. 11.

youngsters, and in particularly blacks, could benefit from a similar show of "irreproachable" behavior. He further disclosed that: "Such an exhibition was an eloquent testimony to the character of French homes and the stuff out of which the republic is made."²⁶ Without a doubt, he was convinced that the need for cultural and morality training was the greatest among the black masses. Therefore, he affirmed that it was unexcusable for so many parents to not give a "tinker's damn" about good morals, culture, or "social discipline." In short, he proclaimed: "In the first place our youngsters are exposed to scenes, sights, and pictures so lewd, so disgustingly suggestive as to shock the modesty of even a

²⁶Abbott was extremely upset with the lack of discipline shown by the majority of lower class blacks. He declared that too many African American parents, especially mothers, encouraged vulgarity among their children. He frowned upon forms of dance like the "rhumba." Abbott considered this dance to be disgusting. He was also displeased with lewd and boisterous language as uttered from the mouths of youngsters barely school aged. He reasoned that it was the responsible of both parents to teach morality and serve as role models. But, he also cautioned that the responsibility for morality weighed heaviest upon the mother. Therefore, women should be indoctrinated with Christian values. In addition, he surmised that mothers with good morals experienced little or no difficulty in guiding their offsprings toward moral behavior. Hence, children who possessed such character were easier to teach and more receptive to learning. Abbott chose the French as his example because throughout his travels to the country, he had always found the people to be courteous and knowledgeable about their cultural heritage. Robert S. Abbott, "Education Futile Without Culture, States Editor," Chicago Defender, 17 March 1934, p. 12.

moron."²⁷

Despite his disapproval, he conceded that there was a delicate balance between negative and constructive discipline. For this reason, he believed that it was essential for disciplinarians to be schooled in the proper procedure for guidance if the child was to become a productive member of society. In addition, he exclaimed that "severity" of punishment and/or the absence of affection would warp the child's sense of value.²⁸ This concept was equally important for both parents and school authorities. While mindful of the control that should be exerted over the adolescent, he also recognized that many educators, as well as parents, often lacked compassion and ethics. As a result, he suggested that it was impossible for these individuals to fairly administer discipline. Abbott saw this problem extending beyond the elementary and secondary levels of education. For example, he believed that it was not unusual for such persons to hold positions at institutions of higher learning. Consequently, he cautioned college and university administrators to hire "deans" who were who were properly trained in guidance

²⁷Although, Abbott sided with Carter G. Woodson on the importance of knowing one's history. When it came to cultural awareness he appeared to favor the European concept of refinement. One can only speculate that this seemingly inconsistency was due to the influence of his European reared stepfather. Ibid.

²⁸Robert S. Abbott, "Even Discipline May Prove Dangerous If Not Right Sort," Chicago Defender, 16 June 1934, p. 12.

techniques.²⁹

In viewing the effects of what he termed "cultural deficiency," Abbott considered such absence as the catalyst that facilitated disrespect among members of an ethnic or "racial" group. Recognizing that this problem was prevalent in the black community, he thus scolded those African Americans afflicted with what he termed "colorphobia." In arguing against the custom of "drawing the color line" among themselves, he complained that too often blacks retarded their own social progress because of such discriminatory habits. In other words, there should be no hierarchy of superiority based upon the color of one's skin. Although, Abbott acknowledged the historical influence of such practices he reminded these individuals that the end of slavery should have brought with it an eradication of the slave mentality.³⁰

Abbott knew that Euro-American bigotry appeared to be the single common factor relating to cultural stagnation of blacks. Yet, he applauded the French and the Russians for acknowledging their literary geniuses of African ancestry.

²⁹Abbott also suggested that the pivot of black formal education would progress further, if such persons were not allowed to assume positions of authority. Ibid.

³⁰To Abbott "colorphobia" meant being afraid to interact on equal terms with individuals who were of a different skin coloring. For example, he was agitated about the practice of light complexioned African Americans shunning the darker members of their ethnic group. Robert S. Abbott, "Lack of Culture Aids Color Line Within the Race," Chicago Defender, 24 March 1934, p. 12.

Alexandre Dumas and Alexander Pushkin were used as examples of such recognition. He also congratulated the Brazilians for their identification of Lope de Vega's literary works.

In contrast, he found the historical evils of "Jim Crow" as the major stifler of creativity among African American youth. To this extent, he lamented: "The arrows of prejudice poison at too early a period the probable stream of productivity to give hope for the rise of a literary genius expressive of love, sympathy, and understanding."³¹ He speculated that if Dumas or Pushkin were to have been born in the United States their talents would have gone unnoticed.³² Abbott also denounced the use of racial labels to describe African Americans because the tagging by white America of them by color hindered the group's assimilation within the dominant culture.³³

³¹Although, Abbott acknowledgment that some blacks were able to creatively produce even though they were mentally and physically hampered by racial discrimination they were still restrained by social barriers. Robert S. Abbott, "Race Prejudice Seen as Biggest Barrier to Artistic Genius," Chicago Defender, 22 September 1934, p. 11.

³²Ibid.

³³As in previous years Abbott besieged both white and black Americans to avoid such terms as Negro, Negress, Colored, Afro-American, Dark and Black American. Calling his readers attention to the fact that reference to the group by such descriptive labels singled the African American out as an intruder to main stream America. According to him, blacks should be referred to as the "race." Robert S. Abbott, "Editor Abbott Puts Taboo on 'Negro' As Descriptive of Race," Chicago Defender, 29 December 1934, part 2, p. 14.

Abbott also stressed what he hoped to gain via his articles. He wished to establish a forum for dialogue that would awaken his readers to those impediments that effected their cultural standing. In addition, he wanted to enlighten them about the available options for cultural and moral uplifting. In confirming his intent, Abbott stated:

Certainly, the finest method of social reform is to get people thinking and arguing over the merits or demerits of a proposition. I dare to hope that the change for the better will follow these discussions as naturally as night follows day.³⁴

Of course, there were other entities that Abbott believed were of equal importance. For instance, he emphasized the role of the church as a significant factor in character molding and of establishing family values.

Similarly, he emphasized the necessity for "personality unfolding." He viewed this procedure as extremely important where the child was concerned and believed that it should be a vital component of schooling. In explaining its function, he stated:

The work should include the improvement and correct modulation of the speaking voice; the correction of carriage and attainment of grace in bodily movement; the study of the habits and idiosyncracies of the student; all looking toward the proper unfolding and expression of the true self, and the acquirement of distinction and charm of personality.³⁵

³⁴"Editor Tells Purpose of Cultural Articles," Chicago Defender, 24 November 1934, p. 11.

³⁵According to Abbott, instruction in "personality unfolding" could be obtained from the finishing school. Ibid.

Abbott's concluding series about the incorporation of morality training in education ended with a response to his readers' reaction regarding the "Finishing School" as a way of ensuring its implementation. Like he had done with the idea of cultural awareness, Abbott also suggested this type of educational facility as a model to meet the moral needs of the black community. This is not to say that he did not believe that the job could not be accomplished via the public school. He, merely, appeared to favor the concept of "finishing" institutions.

Abbott's reading public's reaction to his notion was at best lukewarm. Stunned by their lack of "enthusiasm" he, nevertheless, informed them that their resistance to the idea was understandable. However, he also took the opportunity to chide the black community for their absence of forethought by arguing that they were missing an opportunity to eradicate their moral and cultural deficiencies. In addition, he insisted that most African Americans, economically enriched or deprived, thought that such schools were only for wealthy "white folk." For this reason, the editor warned:

We shall not develop a society with all the dignity, and the poise that constitutes the characteristic attributes of such grouping, until a cultural nucleus shall have been established and a demarkation [sic] instituted in accordance with defined social norms and cultural mandates.³⁶

³⁶Abbott envisioned the Finishing School as the "nucleus" for gaining cultural acceptance. Robert S. Abbott, "Finishing School Essential to Race Cultural Progress," Chicago Defender, 9 March 1935, part 2, p. 17.

Because of their attitude he thus complained that blacks, unfortunately, were on the verge of missing the one "essential" ingredient that would enable them to be accepted by white America. Extremely agitated, he added that the element could help create a cultural product which would last for generations.³⁷

Abbott Establishes His Philosophy of Education

It was during 1935, that Abbott embraced what he considered a genuine philosophy of education. In echoing certain philosophical ideas regarding education, the individual, and the state as found in Plato's Republic, Abbott appeared to have shared the philosopher's views on specific aims and purposes of schooling. Abbott wrote:

It was Plato to whom is attributed the first systematic scheme of education, who taught that it is the aim of education to bring all the powers of man into harmonious cooperation. Believing in the oriental idea that man belongs to the state, he felt that the fundamental purpose of education was to fit the individual to serve the state.³⁸

As an advocate of "Platonic thought," Abbott was convinced that the role of the teacher was a significant one in carrying

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Robert S. Abbott, "Teachers Also Have An Obligation to Their Pupils," Chicago Defender April 6, 1935, part 3, p. 16.

out the function of schooling. For this reason, it was imperative that teachers recognize their responsibility as facilitator. As such their duties entailed guiding students to becoming productive members of society.

Included in his discussion was a minute list of things that constituted the attributes of a good teacher. Abbott believed that such individuals should be sympathetic, intellectually stimulating, and broad-minded. However, these entities could not be accomplished if, by chance, teachers were prisoners of negative emotions. In fact, he surmised that "emotional weakness" most often seen as prejudice was the leading cause of educational retardation. Unfortunately, he found this problem to be prevalent among both black and white educators. He further postulated that such behavior was unexcusable and if their ignorance, or bigotry hampered intellectual development they were to be dismissed.³⁹

Other philosophical points of consideration included the idea of applying "utilitarianism," to the learning process. He also proposed that elementary and secondary teachers induce students to become "self-reliant" and inventive. In essence, if they made this concept a part of every school program, educational input could produce a satisfactory output.

³⁹According to Abbott, "Platonic thought" centered around the notion that every individual should be educated to work for the good of society. Naturally, this meant that no group should be denied the opportunity to participate in this progress. While he understood the origins of bigotry, he abhorred its effects on children. Ibid.

Although, not detailing the specifics of such prescribed strategies he went on to say that students should also be "rewarded" for their academic successes by their respective teachers. In a similar fashion, Abbott interjected the importance of classroom instruction, although, he did not show its connection to his educational philosophy. However, he disclosed that this aspect of teaching was significant because the absence of correct instruction produced inferior students.

Lastly, Abbott argued that it was the duty of public institutions of learning to keep democracy alive. Abbott targeted colleges and universities in particular for their lack of understanding on the subject. Thus he stressed that just being schooled in the academics did not necessarily constitute social or economic success. Hence, African Americans needed a broader type of education that included practical training, as well as access to equal opportunity if they were going to gain a foothold in American society.⁴⁰

As previously argued, he raised the issue of cultural and morality training as a component of the educated man's repertoire. In spite of this fact, he did not publicly align himself with any other philosopher except Plato. In addition

⁴⁰In this article, Abbott was concerned that educated blacks had shunned the elements of vocational training in lieu of courses such as philosophy, logic, and higher mathematics. This stance was not unlike his earlier position while attending Hampton Institution. Robert S. Abbott, "We Still Lag Behind in Cultural Field, Says R. S. Abbott," Chicago Defender, 27 April 1935, part 2, p. 16.

to showing the significance of integrating academics and cultural refinement, Abbott requested that his subscribers become the masters of their own societal destinies. In essence, they were to stop begging for "handouts." Furthermore, he reminded them: "Now that we have reached, partially, our educational objectives, let us proceed with the building of an economic foundation that will insure financial security, cultural recognition, and social assimilation."⁴¹

Rounding out his philosophy of education, was Abbott's mandate to black college graduates to help uplift the masses. It was the blood and sweat of past generations locked in slavery that had kept America strong. Now it was crucial that the fortunate members of the black community serve as rungs of the ladder in the areas of economic and social mobility for thousands of less able African Americans. It was thus important that graduates support their alma mater, become efficiency experts in whatever venture they undertook, and adhere to a code of ethics befitting honest "servants" of humanity.⁴²

⁴¹Robert S. Abbott, "We Still Lag Behind in Cultural Field, Says R. S. Abbott," Chicago Defender, 27 April 1935, part 2, p. 16.

⁴²Abbott complained in this installment that too many African American college graduates were unethical and dishonest. Upon receiving their degrees they had become pompous and arrogant. In addition, these individuals were also guilty of defrauding their fellow men in dealings associated with business without forethought of conscience. Robert S. Abbott, "College Grads Also Fail in Their Duty Says Editor Abbott," Chicago Defender, 2 February 1935, p. 10.

Abbott ended this segment of his philosophical tenets with a warning. He declared that obtaining a degree was by no means a "blueprint" for success. Directing his criticism toward those individuals responsible for curricula and educational programming, he surmised that many higher institutions of learning were no more than "diploma mills" wherein educators had overlooked the importance of incorporating academics with human survival skills. For this reason, curriculum developers and programmers should create courses of study that were relevant to contemporary living.⁴³

Although, Abbott found fault with many existing models of educational delivery he still accepted the idea that good formal education was a key factor in the retardation of societal ills. In this sense, he appeared to have shared at least one philosophical assertion of Bertrand Russell.⁴⁴ In

⁴³In essence, Abbott complained that college graduates had been schooled in the areas of economics, but could not balance a simple budget. These same individuals had been introduced to the works of various philosophers, however, they did not know anything about the intimacies of social welfare. Lastly, graduates had been schooled in courses such as astronomy and the "nebula" hypothesis; yet lacked the know how to hold on to their jobs. Unfortunately, the publisher provided no formula for devising such curricula or program changes. "Diploma But No Blueprint," Chicago Defender, 12 October 1935, part 2, p. 16.

⁴⁴Russell reasoned that through good education communities would prosper. As a result, men and women would possess more intellect, vitality, sensitivity, and courage. In essence, poverty would be greatly reduced, infirmity and melancholy behavior would become a rarity, plus a dysfunctional sex-life would be practically nonexistent. Bertrand Russell, Education

pushing for continued economic and social advancement through schooling, Abbott maintained an academic activities column for both secondary and college students. Students were asked to utilize the column as a means for airing their grievances about the quality of their learning experience. Parents were likewise asked to voice their concerns. In addition, participating individuals were requested to rate the effectiveness of their educational institutions for entering the job market and life.⁴⁵

The Philosophy of Change Through Education
As a Component of Equal Opportunity

Abbott included in his philosophical scope the elimination of discrimination in formal education. In so doing, he stepped up his pace to outlaw the practice of "Jim Crow" whenever he found it in the nation's education systems. For instance, in 1936 he started with an attack leveled against Chicago's board of education. This action was in response to its neglect of educational facilities located in predominantly African American communities. Meanwhile, Defender staff writer Enoch P. Waters wrote a scathing article

and the Good Life (New York: Liverright Publishing Co., 1926), 82-83.

⁴⁵"In the Classroom and Out," Chicago Defender, 7 December 1935, p. 11.

which pigeonholed "deplorable" conditions uncovered at Lilydale's elementary school. Students at the facility were housed in "boxcar" like mobile units which were reminiscent of "hobo" villages. He added that the classrooms were overcrowded, unheated and dimly lit. Even more insulting, was the fact that students had to use "filthy" portable "outhouses" for toilets.⁴⁶

One week later, Lilydale residents threw their support behind Abbott in his attempt to rectify the situation. Similar investigations by community volunteers revealed that the students were also in need of textbooks and chairs. Moreover, they reported that the place was a fire hazard.⁴⁷ As the controversy escalated, a few local politicians endeavored to join in the fight. For example, Nineteenth Ward Alderman John J. Duffy pledged his assistance. However, he made no promises about specific strategies that he planned to employ for eradicating the problem. Nevertheless, he informed the protestors that if he could not find a solution to the problem within two years, he would resign.⁴⁸ As the Lilydale struggle dragged on other organizations like the NAACP and the

⁴⁶Enoch P. Water, Jr., "Lilydale Seeks Replacement of Its Packing Box School," Chicago Defender, 8 February 1936, pp.3-18.

⁴⁷"Lilydale Citizens, Groups Pledge Support to Defender School Fight," Chicago Defender, 15 February 1936, p. 7.

⁴⁸Although, Duffy had pledged to resign he did not. "Alderman Pledges Support in Lilydale School Fight," Chicago Defender, 22 February 1936, p. 10.

Urban League lent their support.⁴⁹

Meanwhile, parents in the Hayes Elementary School district also began to challenge the board about "intolerable" conditions at their facility. Branding the institution as unsanitary and a "fire trap," community residents asked Abbott to investigate their situation. As was suspected, his trouble shooters found that the school was a health hazard. Documenting their evidence with medical data obtained from the Chicago Board of Health, they uncovered a high incidence of "trench mouth" among the student population.⁵⁰ Thus Abbott and his group of concerned citizens immediately called upon the board of education for an explanation of the Hayes' problem. In addition, they demanded that a new building be erected on the old site. However, board members refused their request.⁵¹ While the battle raged on with the west side Hayes residents, the Lilydale group increased their pressure on board members for

⁴⁹"Lilydale Organizing to Fight for New School," Chicago Defender, 29 February 1936, p. 9.

⁵⁰Davis reported that there were seventy confirmed cases of trench mouth contracted at the school. The disease was spread through the use of dirty drinking fountains. Napoleon Davis, "Epidemic At Hayes School Causes Alarm," Chicago Defender, 21 March 1936, pp. 1-2.

⁵¹Napoleon Davis, "Hayes School Fight Backed by Defender," Chicago Defender, 28 March 1936, pp. 1-2.

a new school facility.⁵²

During the course of events, Superintendent William J. Bogan died. William H. Johnson replaced Bogan as head of the city's public schools.⁵³ Meanwhile, Abbott continued to badger the board for improved conditions at the two schools.⁵⁴

Much to Abbot's surprise, Board President James B. McCahey persuaded resistant members to pledge \$900,000 for three new school structures. Luckily, Lilydale residents shared in the good fortune with a promise of \$125,000 for a new building. Unfortunately, the west side group would have to wait. Pledges of monies for construction of a new building at the Hayes' west side site was postponed until a large enough facility could be located to house the school's seven

⁵²Joining the Defender, the NAACP, and the Urban League in applying pressure to board members was the Chicago Council of Negro Organizations. "Lilydale Gets Assistance In School Fight," Chicago Defender, 28 March 1936, p. 4.

⁵³Bogan died 24 March 1936. At the time of Johnson's confirmation, the Chicago Council of Negro Organizations was in the process of protesting any immediate replacement of Bogan. The organization had wanted the interim "Board of control" to remain in place until the end of the school term. Thus affording them the opportunity of interviewing any perspective candidate for the superintendency. Johnson was appointed as superintendent 22 April 1936. "Dr. Johnson New Head of City Schools," Chicago Defender, 25 April 1936.

⁵⁴"School Children Mourn Passing of WM. J. Bogan," Chicago Defender, 28 March 1936, p. 12.

hundred attending students.⁵⁵

Following the lead of the Lilydale protestors, parents with youngsters attending Wendell Phillips High School also organized against the board. Their complaints were similar to the other two schools.⁵⁶ With the help of Abbott their protest was so well orchestrated that within thirty days, board members had agreed to allot funds for construction of a new building.⁵⁷ Still not losing sight of eradicating racism from formal education, Abbott praised Northwestern University personnel, students, and community leaders for taking action to assist all persons, regardless of color or creed, to obtain social and human rights.⁵⁸ Then Abbott refocused on the

⁵⁵Enoch P. Waters, Jr., "Lilydale to Get \$125,000 for Building," Chicago Defender, 4 April 1936, pp. 1-16.

⁵⁶"Phillips PTA in Fight for Improvements," Chicago Defender, 3 October 1936, part 2, p. 25.

⁵⁷ In this article, Abbott reported that the board had generously allotted \$800,000 for the new facility. "Building at Phillips to Begin in 30 Days," Chicago Defender, 17 October 1936, part 2, p. 14.

⁵⁸Abbott reported that a group of Northwestern faculty members, students, and administrators spearheaded by Evanston's Alderman Edwin B. Jourdain, Jr. and other concerned community individuals had held a forum on discriminatory policies at the school and in their community. The results of their gathering was the creation of resolutions to halt the practice. Abbott applauded the school's efforts because he believed that educators should take responsibility for eliminating social and cultural conditions that impeded total participation of all societal members thus echoing certain principles as emphasized by reconstructionists like George S. Counts and Theodore Brameld. "Demand Northwestern Declare Race Policy," Chicago Defender, 19 December 1936, pp.1-14.

national scene.

Beginning with an investigation of Senate Bill No. 419 which was up for passage by the United States Congress, Abbott questioned the motives of the two senators who sponsored the bill. Fearful of its equity consequences for African Americans, he vehemently argued against its passage and suggested that the measure be scrapped.⁵⁹ In addition, for several weeks he bombarded his readers with information that included ways to stop passage of the bill. One of his main suggestions was that they support national and local black organization such as the NAACP and the Urban League. These organizations were also fighting against the measure. He further suggested that blacks join forces with other interested parties that were affiliated with local associations like the National Legislative Committee of the American Federation of Teachers and the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.⁶⁰ While still

⁵⁹Senators Harrison and Black had jointly introduced the measure in the U. S. Senate. They claimed that the bill would aid in federal disbursing of funds for "colored" schools. In fact, if allotted monies were placed directly in the hands of southern state legislators for distribution, blacks would lose. Cognizant of the prevailing attitude toward blacks by white southerners, Abbott like a great many African Americans was afraid that its passage would be detrimental to the educational future of the group. "Senate Bill No. 419," Chicago Defender, 20 March 1937, editorial p.

⁶⁰According to Burley several white prominent figures had joined the fight to halt Senate Bill No. 419. Doxey A. Wilkerson representative from the National Legislative

on the attack, Abbott implored white administrators in various school localities to employ more qualified blacks in their districts.⁶¹

As the year dragged on not all educational reviews received negative criticism. For example, there were many articles which complemented the educational philosophies behind noteworthy educational facilities such as the Phyllis Wheatley establishments. The schools were named in honor of a New England slave who through her poetry, during the eighteenth century, became a celebrated figure in both Europe and America.⁶² Most of these institutions were created at various intervals. However, the Phyllis Wheatley Home Association of Chicago was established in 1896.⁶³ Even

Committee of the American Federation of Teachers was one such individual. Professor E. Newton Edwards head of North Central Association's school evaluation was another. Edwards went so far as to argue that only through fair distribution of federal monies could education achieve its primary aim. Dan Burley, "Inequalities in Education Stir Leaders," Chicago Defender, 27 March 1937, pp. 1-2.

⁶¹"Full Representation of Race in Schools Sought," Chicago Defender, 10 April 1937, part 2, p. 32.

⁶²"The Story of Phillis [sic] Wheatley," Chicago Defender, 11 September 1937, p. 19.

⁶³In the late 1890s, several middle class African American women grew concerned about the lack of chaperoned affordable lodging available to young black women arriving in Chicago from the rural South. Upon further investigation, they found that these girls did not have the necessary education or vocational skills to obtain gainful employment. Thus they organized as a club, purchased a house, and established a

though these national schools were attended primarily by young women, a few accepted limited male enrollment. Yet, they seemed to be favorites with Abbott.⁶⁴

In line with his philosophical dogma of attacking social and cultural problems through formal education, the Wheatley schools emphasized training of the total individual to function in a "complex" society. Hence, they offered an academic curriculum that consisted of more than the 3rs (reading, writing, and arithmetic). There were courses in higher mathematics, languages, the physical sciences, Negro history, American and English literature, as well as rhetorical skills. What impressed Abbott about the establishments was their emphasis on programs which featured vocational training and daily living skills.⁶⁵

By 1938, Abbott suffered from the infirmities of old age

living and educational center to assist the youngsters. "Ohio Leads In Constructive Programs For Uplift," Chicago Defender, 28 August 1937, pp. 19-23.

⁶⁴Over the years, as the schools increased in numbers, several other projects were added to their educational programs. For example, some Wheatley institutions combined with state agencies to become facilities for delinquent black girls and adolescent women. Although, catering to a slightly different clientele they still offered the same curriculum and training programs. "A Department of the National Association That Invests in Lives," Chicago Defender, 21 August 1937, pp. 21-24.

⁶⁵Ibid.

and Bright's disease. Yet, he continued in his role as social agitator. This responsibility had become a necessary tenet of his educational philosophy. In spite of the fact that he was physically fatigued, he continued to press for more black representation on school boards throughout the nation. His efforts were even more pronounced in the Chicago area as he fought with political and board adversaries for recognition of qualified black candidates.⁶⁶ Although, the city resisted his endeavors to change the "status quo" he would not be dissuaded. He, therefore, commissioned his star reporter Metz T. P. Lochard to write a blistering attack against the city's mayor, Edward J. Kelly. Lochard, the publisher's first "foreign editor" had joined the staff in 1932.⁶⁷ Of course, the article contended that Kelly's actions had caused much

⁶⁶"Suggest Names of Seven For School Board Post," Chicago Defender, 22 January 1938, p. 1.

⁶⁷According to Abbott's biographer, Lochard first arrived in the United States in 1918 as an interpreter for French army commander-in-chief, General Foch. He was described as a mahogany colored little "brainy" fellow who had been educated at the prestigious universities of Paris and Oxford. After leaving the employment of the French general, he taught languages at Howard, Fiske, and the University of Nashville located in Tennessee. He first met Abbott in 1932 at a dinner party. Upon learning that Lochard spoke French, Abbott was delighted. The two men immediately struck up a friendship. After his divorce, Abbott invited Lochard to lived with him as his companion. He was also offered and excepted employment as a member of the Defender's staff. Ottley, 336-37.

consternation among black Chicagoans.⁶⁸

But, Abbott's ending battles did not merely involve black school board representation. Repeating his advocacy of 1916 to ban books that depicted negative African American stereotypes, the aging publisher called upon Chicago's school district to outlaw such materials in its public institutions of learning.⁶⁹ During the same year, he also reproached the editors of the Chicago Union Teacher magazine for featuring an article entitled "Down to Alabama" wherein the author referred to blacks in a derogatory manner.⁷⁰

In 1939, Abbott's declining health forced him to retire from his strenuous schedule of overseeing the daily operations of his beloved creation. As his strength ebbed, he became

⁶⁸Metz T. P. Lochard, "Observer Sees Ill Omens in School Systems," Chicago Defender, 6 June 1938, pp. 1-2.

⁶⁹Ironically, the song books in dispute were the same ones that Abbott had asked black parents not to purchase for their children some twenty two years earlier. "Publishers of 'Nigger' Song Facing Arrest," Chicago Defender, 23 April 1938, p. 2.

⁷⁰Abbott made it clear that he appreciated past actions of the Chicago Teachers Union in their efforts to win salary equity for its employees. He also welcomed their support in aiding black residents with pressuring the board into correction of "intolerable" conditions as found in many predominantly black public schools. However, he stressed that the union and its magazine should be representative of all area teachers regards of their color, creed, or race. Thus its editors had a responsibility to be more sensitive regarding the effects of racial slurs upon its constituencies. "Our Enemy's Voice," Chicago Defender, 18 June 1939, editorial p. 18.

bedridden. But, for a short time he continued to dictate from his restricted environment what should be printed in his publication. Proceeding to hold on to his alarmist role, he seized every opportunity to push for educational equality. For instance, following Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada which had come before the U. S. Supreme Court the previous year he was slightly appeased by the Court's decision. However, he agreed with other black leaders who suggested that the decision did not signaled the end of racial discrimination in Missouri's public schools or elsewhere. But, at least it had gained for black Missourians the recognition by the nation that there was a need for a law school at Lincoln University.⁷¹

During the spring and summer months, the Defender was again investigating allegations of racial discrimination associated with Chicago's public schools. Once again, the

⁷¹Lloyd Gaines a St. Louis African American graduate of Missouri's black Lincoln University had applied for admission to the University of Missouri Law School because the courses that he required were not available at Lincoln. However, because he was black the university refused his application. Justice Charles Evans Hughes, thus writing for the majority of Court decided that because the university was a state institution it must either admit the applicant or that the state must established an alternative law school for the student. Although, this story was presented in a 1939 issue, Abbott had pursued the case via the Defender since 1938. In that year's 17 December editorial, Abbott had emphasized that the Supreme Court's ruling was of "limited" effect because it did not specifically declare that separate educational facilities for blacks violated the Fourteenth Amendment. "For Racial Equality of Opportunity," Philadelphia Enquirer, reprint. "Other Papers Say," Chicago Defender, 11 February 1939, editorial p. 19.

issue was overcrowded conditions. This time the controversial "shift system" in black areas was also under scrutiny. By the time the investigation was underway Abbott's nephew and heir apparent, John H. H. Sengstacke, at the publisher's request had assumed more control over the newspaper.⁷² Because Abbott was childless, he looked to his favorite nephew as the guardian of his legacy.⁷³

Abbott was at least comforted in one respect: the Chicago Board of Education had appointed an African American, Dr. M. O. Bousfield, as one of its members.⁷⁴ But, as far as other discriminatory practices were concerned it was business as usual. Hence, the November and December editions of the

⁷²The deplored "shift system" implemented by the board was to remedy overcrowding of public schools in African American communities. Instead of incorporating more funds in the budget for new schools, board members decided to have black school children attend their facilities on a three shift basis. This arrangement included a morning shift, an afternoon shift, and an evening shift. The article also indicated that as many as 3,000 students participated in the scheme. Nahum B. Brascher, "Probers hear School Needs of South Side," Chicago Defender, 10 June 1939, p. 2.

⁷³Sengstacke had been educated by Abbott to take over the Defender after his death. Upon graduation from Hampton Institute in 1932, he was made vice president and treasurer of the Robert S. Abbott Publishing Company. One year later, he was given the position of general manager. Ottley, 336.

⁷⁴In this article it was stated that the victory "culminated" a twenty five year battle launched by Abbott to seat an African American on the board. The struggle had begun in 1915 under the mayoral administration of Carter H. Harrison. "Dr. Bousfield is Placed on School Board," Chicago Defender, 21 October 1939, pp. 1-2.

newspaper carried stories about district transfers of black students from predominantly white schools to achieve racial segregation.⁷⁵ There was also an attack on the city's Junior College system's "Jim Crow" policy.⁷⁶ Coupled with these features was an editorial on the resurgence of the Chicago Archdiocese' attempts to solidify segregated educational facilities.⁷⁷

At last, these problems appeared to be secondary. Having thus put forth his philosophy of education, Abbott now recognized the approaching specter of his mortality. On the evening of 19 December 1939 the weary sentinel signed his last will and testament. In an orderly manner, he bequeathed his "estate" as follows:

one-third to his wife, Edna; and two-thirds to John, with his sisters (Rebecca and Eliza Mckay) subsidiary shareholders. He made no bequest to his old employees, though John was to keep them on the payroll beyond their years of usefulness.⁷⁸

Although, this unwelcome task had been completed Abbott hoped that by some miracle he would regain his health and resume his

⁷⁵"The School Transfer System and Race Children," Chicago Defender, 4 November 1939, editorial p. 16.

⁷⁶"Jim Crow Junior College," Chicago Defender, 11 November 1939, editorial p. 14.

⁷⁷"The Catholic Church and Its Policy," Chicago Defender, 18 November 1939, editorial p. 15.

⁷⁸Ottley, 365.

work.⁷⁹

Robert S. Abbott is Overtaken by Death

The renowned publisher who had taken thirty-five years to become the giant of African American journalism, died 29 February 1940, at aged seventy-two years. Tributes given to the creator of the "World's Greatest Weekly," were as numerous as those awarded to him while he lived. Ironically, the editors of his old arch adversary, the Chicago Daily Tribune, got a jump start on his publication in announcing his death.⁸⁰

On 2 March 1940, leading correspondent Lucius C. Harper of the Chicago Defender printed the news that the "Dean" of black journalism was gone. The article also stated that he had carved life into four impelling sections of which included "love," "ideals," "faith," and "energy." In addition, Harper remarked:

He educated his race to demand their rights as men . . . He was the Toussaint L'Ouverture of journalism . . . He never lost the common touch; he was a militant defender of the lowly. He believed in his race and God. HE WAS NOT narrow, fanatical, and selfish. He was like all men with vision who

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰"R. S. Abbott, 69 is Dead; Noted Negro Publisher," Chicago Daily Tribune, 1 March 1940, p. 18.

deeply impress the generation in which they live.⁸¹

Along with this tribute were a multitude of condolence messages to the family and the Defender staff. Many of these were from prominent politicians, various heads of civic and business organizations, as well as from his loyal subscribers. For instance, former Mayor Edward J. Kelly expressed his deepest sympathy to the surviving family.⁸² Congressman Arthur W. Mitchell also expressed sadness regarding Abbott's death.⁸³ In a similar manner, former NAACP secretary Walter White shared the family's "loss." He declared that Abbott had extended himself beyond the call of duty to help uplift black America.⁸⁴ Similarly, Illinois governor, Henry Horner displayed sorrow over the death of his "admired" friend.⁸⁵

Moreover, as the news spread throughout the black

⁸¹Lucius C. Harper, "Robert S. Abbott Toiled Upward Thru the Night," Chicago Defender, 2 March 1940, pp. 1-2.

⁸²Edward J. Kelly, Mayor to Mrs. Robert S. Abbott, citing "Hundreds Express Grief At Editor Abbott's Death," Chicago Defender, 2 March 1940, p. 9.

⁸³Arthur W. Mitchell, Member of Congress to Mrs. Edna Abbott, *Ibid.*

⁸⁴Walter White, Secretary, National Association For The Advancement of Colored People to the Chicago Defender, citing "Hundreds Express Grief at Editor's Death," Chicago Defender, 9 March 1940, p. 6.

⁸⁵Henry Horner, Governor of Illinois, to Edna Abbott, *Ibid.*

community hundreds of children mourned his passing. Abbott had always shown a sincere interest in the welfare of all youngsters regardless of their ethnicity. In fact, he was the creator of Bud Billiken. Billiken was the mythical protector of all children. This fictitious character was represented at every annual "back to school" parade grand marshaled by Abbott. The activity always culminated with a colossal picnic where ice cream and other treats were personally distributed by the editor.⁸⁶

While Abbott's mortal remains lie in state, mourners by the thousands both black and white came to pay their final respect. The throngs included the rich and poor, the famous and unknown, his closest admirers, as well as his opponents.⁸⁷ He was laid to rest in Chicago's Lincoln Cemetery.

As the interment took place, the National Airmen's Association illustrated their condolences and their gratitude for his sponsorship of their organization. Members of the group soared above the clouds until the final benediction had ended; then as the body was lowered into the ground a single plane piloted by Dave White, vice president of the

⁸⁶Bud Billiken's character was brought to life by Lucius C. Harper from an idea conceived by Abbott. David W. Kellum, "Dedicated His Life to Children's Work," Chicago Defender, 2 March 1940, p. 12.

⁸⁷David H. Orro, "Notables and Lowly in Final Tribute," Chicago Defender, 9 March 1940, p. 1.

association, descended slowly over the "assemblage" and dropped a bouquet of roses on the grave's "canopy."⁸⁸

⁸⁸"Flier Drop Flowers on Editor's Grave," Chicago Defender, 9 March 1940, p. 6.

Epilogue

Born at a time when blacks were ostracized and kept from participating in mainstream American, Abbott struggled to be counted. Thus amid the back drop of racial prejudice he created a vehicle which propelled him into national prominence. This creation the, Chicago Defender, became his legacy. Upon researching the accomplishments of this ingenious individual one can not help, but ponder the following: What manner of man could endure the impediment of such a hostile environment? How was this person able to excel at his craft when others had tried and failed?

In exploring the character of Robert S. Abbott, it is necessary to first examine the influential forces that helped shape his personality. For instance, his stepfather was the driving thrust behind Abbott's quest for excellence. The European educated Reverend John H. H. Sengstacke, the product of a biracial marriage, never let Abbott forget the importance of education, culture, and the willingness to serve others. Of his stepfather's guidance, Abbott remarked: ". . . it was from my stepfather that I received not only my basic training . . . but it was from him that I received the most kindly advice and consideration ever given an individual."¹ On the other hand, Abbott acquired

¹"Gave Editor Start," Chicago Defender, 3 May 1930, part 2, p. 2.

resiliency from his mother.

Abbott displayed his adherence to the ethic concept in several issues of the Chicago Defender while the paper was under his editorialship. Similarly, his moral training showed in the types of articles he chose to publish advocating proper conduct. Furthermore, not wishing to appear hypocritical Abbott never engaged in debauchery. In essence, he was a gentle and unassuming man who liked flowers, poetry, and the idea that home was truly the hearth of man's comfort. In addition, he also believed that woman's primary role was to serve as dutiful wife and loving mother.

Although, Abbott felt a kinship with the common man he preferred to honor his commitment to the masses from a distance. He never frequented saloons or dance halls, but instead chose to keep abreast of the common condition by strolling down the south side neighborhood streets of his beloved Chicago. He also was often seen at the opera and the theater, although, he was not terribly fond of either. What he enjoyed the most was the companionship of close friends and acquaintances, as well as the lively spirit of song.

The effects of living the black experience during a period in America's history when skin color predominated social attitude was also significant in forging Abbott's outlook. Hence, the ebony colored lad from Georgia grew

into manhood recognizing his place in the hierarchy of racial constraints. However, he was not pleased with this situation. Nor did he intend to humble himself to the dictates of bigotry. On the other hand, he was well aware of the consequences that could befall an African American male if he aroused white temperament, especially that of white southerners.

In the process of building his journalistic empire, he opted to attack racism whenever possible at every level. Therefore, it was not unusual for him to besiege his readers with the "hypocrisy" of America's claim: "justice and liberty for all."² Abbott treated the sting of racism as he did every adversity. Despite, its existence in the life experience; it was, nevertheless, something to be conquered. In so doing, he declared that: "A man's philosophy of life is determined by the nature of his experience."³ In addition, he reasoned that even though negative and positive experiences shape our thoughts and actions we should not let negativism paralyze "race" progress. However, Abbott was greatly affected by color discrimination.

So intense was his affliction that it reached beyond the encounters of racial prejudice well into the realm of

²Robert S. Abbott, "Disregard for Rights of Others an Old American Custom," Chicago Defender, 20 October 1934, p. 10.

³Robert S. Abbott, "Quest for Equality: Experience Supersedes Training," Chicago Defender, 18 May 1940, p. 9.

his daily life. Thus it was surmised by many who kept his council that the perceived attacks upon his skin pigmentation justified his disdain of even the color black. Hence, he never wore the shade. Nor did he enjoy the company of dark hued women. However, this abnormality did not extend itself to ebony complexioned males. But, it did manifest itself in his resistance to have African Americans referred to by color.

Despite, these deterrents he managed to win the respect of numerous colleagues. Although, many of his opponents viewed him as a "demagogue." Yet, to his loyal followers he was their "anointed" chief. Ironically, Julius Rosenwald and the former president of Fisk University, Dr. Charles S. Johnson, had differing opinions of Abbott. Rosenwald said that he was: "like a monkey with a shotgun, who would hurt anybody; but to Dr. Johnson, he was 'a man with a sense of crisis.'"⁴

Although, hindered because of his race in a white dominated society this obstacle did not effect his desire for self-actualization or keep him from expecting African Americans to be high achievers. Evidence of his convictions are captured in the theme of his publication. For example, throughout every edition one can find an over abundance of articles which encouraged African Americans to persevere

⁴Roi Ottley, The Lonely Warrior: The life and Time of Robert S. Abbott (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1955), 5.

despite the many hardships that they faced.⁵

During his stewardship of the Chicago Defender, he attempted to meet the needs of the black community by focusing on social, economic, political, and educational issues of concern encountered by his racial group. In this endeavor, he was successful. Keeping this in focus, it was not unusual for him in times of crisis to extend the same priority to each subject area. But, for the most part social issues took precedent over all others (See Appendix A).

In the political arena, Abbott like many of his contemporaries favored the Republican party. Their choice was a throw back to Abraham Lincoln's emancipation of the slaves. Adding to this, the traditional democrats' refusal to welcome blacks into their party also accounted for their loyalty. Despite, his political affiliation Abbott was not afraid to endorse or urge blacks to vote against any candidate who did not show an interest in the problems that plagued the black community. In this respect, it can be surmised that he was a political independent. Carl Sandburg was so impressed with Abbott's "moxie" that in 1928 he published an article in the Chicago Daily News praising him for his ability to see through both parties. Declaring that

⁵Robert S. Abbott, "Robt. S. Abbott's Story of the Early Struggles and Success of the World's Greatest Weekly," Chicago Defender 3 May 1930, p. 1.

political independence for blacks was a good thing, Sandburg wrote: "Mr. Abbott and the Chicago Defender should have no regrets over their declaration. Such independence can be a healthy current in the Negro body politic."⁶ And what did Abbott think of the hoopla about his independent stance? At the time, he was encouraged by such recognition. However, seven years elapsed before he chose to preview the goal behind his political agenda. His objective included getting blacks to vote for individuals who supported their Constitutional rights.⁷ With this in mind, his racial ideology became one which expounded that every action must be done for the betterment of the "race."

Abbott also confronted social and economic problems, especially those involving racial discrimination with the thrust of a battering ram. Being the victim of such policy only served to reinforce his appetite for its elimination. Discussing his intent, he wrote: "I have been relentless in my campaign against discrimination, lynching and industrial exploitation."⁸ In further exploring his position about

⁶"From the Notebook of Carl Sandburg," Chicago Daily News, 22 December 1928, Weekly Column, reprint "Defender Wins Praise from Carl Sandburg," Chicago Defender, 29 December 1928, p. 4.

⁷Robert S. Abbott, "Looking Back," Chicago Defender, 4 May 1935, part 3, p.17.

⁸Ibid.

the matter one finds that he: introduced action for various legislative reforms; publicly combated local and national segregation; condemned blacks who were political sell outs; resisted white racists, and especially the Ku Klux Klan's attempts to intimidate and/or violate the Civil rights of African Americans.

Abbott claimed that increased circulation (See Appendix B) was evidence of his efforts. For example, in 1910 the newspaper reported a subscription rate of 25,000.⁹ By 1917, it was stated that the paper had reached the 65,000 mark. During 1919, it was cited that 176,000 people read the Chicago Defender. Although, Abbott claimed in 1920 that approximately 283,571 individuals bought the paper, Abbott's biographer suggested that readership was more in the range of 230,000.¹⁰ Unfortunately, circumstances of the era were instrumental in negligent record keeping.¹¹ Nevertheless,

⁹"25,000 People Read the Chicago Defender's Only Weekly," Chicago Defender, 12 March 1910, p. 1.

¹⁰Accuracy for circulation figures according to Ottley during this period were impossible to ascertain because of incomplete record keeping. In addition, although, the Audit Bureau of Circulations was established in 1914 it did not offer its services to African American journalists. Ottley, 138-39.

¹¹Barnett established the Associated Negro Press in 1919. The Defender became a member after Abbott's death under John H. Sengstacke in 1940. While researching the relationship between Barnett and Abbott it was discovered that the two men had a disagreement shortly after Barnett established the association regarding credit lines. Lawrence D. Hogan, A Black National News Service: The Associated Negro Press and

headlines from 1922 put circulation at 217,165.¹² Despite, the apparent discrepancy the publication appeared to reach its peak during and immediately after World War I. This upswing was due in part to Abbott's extensive coverage of the war effort and the plight of returning black veterans.

In 1930, Abbott declare that 10,000 new subscribers had been added to the rolls.¹³ But, by 1933 readership had dropped to 110,000.¹⁴ During 1935, circulation had decreased to 100,000.¹⁵ The decline in sales for the early to mid 1930s can be partially attributed to the depression crisis. Abbott, like many other businessmen of that era had to drastically cut production in order to keep his enterprize afloat.

Claude Barnett, 1919-1945 (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Press, 1984), 57.

¹²"Circulation for Issue of January 14th: 217, 165," Chicago Defender, 14 January 1922, page number missing.

¹³Increased sales of the publication during this year resulted from the introduction of Abbott's new magazine, Abbott's Monthly. "10,000 New Subscribers Boost Abbott's Monthly Circulation," Chicago Defender, 21 May 1932, p. 6.

¹⁴G. A. Kuyper, "Reporter Gives Facts About Achievements of Noted Leaders: Washington, Moton, Abbott and Mrs. Janie Porter Barret Praised," Newport News Daily Press, reprint Chicago Defender, 26 October 1933, p. 16.

¹⁵Dewey Roscoe Jones, "The Chicago Defender Passes Another Milestone in Its Campaign to Make America Safe for All Americans," Chicago Defender, 4 May 1935, part 3, p. 14.

Sales were not the only means by which Abbott assessed his newspaper's popularity. For example, most black journalists and historians of the period, as well as many contemporaries praise his radical style of reporting. Regarding his talent, the Interstate Tatter stated: "When the scholar of the future writes an impartial history of American journalism no name will be placed higher that of Robert S. Abbott."¹⁶ Enoch P. Waters has remarked of Abbott's prosperity:

The Defender's success had as great an impact on Negro journalism as on the people who were reading the newspaper in increasing numbers. This success is believed to have been largely responsible for the birth of forty-one Negro papers between 1920 and 1940, the period when the paper was at the height of its popularity.¹⁷

Abbott's method for getting his educational message across was not that ingenious. Like many publishers he decided to utilize his newspaper for that purpose. Starting in 1910, he carried a rather insipid column on school news. However, within the next five years his delivery took on more vigor. During this time his key issue became "Jim Crow" schooling. Eventually, he became interested in other educational related matters. For instance, concerns relevant to informal education, as well as academics

¹⁶"Robert S. Abbott: An Editorial," Interstate Tattler, reprint Chicago Defender, 18 June 1927, p. 2.

¹⁷Enoch P. Waters, American Diary: A Personal History of the Black Press (Chicago: Path Press, Inc., 1987), 141.

dominated his publication.

Consequently, readers were supplied with articles that addressed the need for moral training at home and in schools. Abbott was extremely critical about this topic when it came to the black masses. In particular, he was a stickler when it came to children and women conducting themselves properly. However, he also expected black males to exhibit gentleman-like behavior. The significance of cultural indoctrination for African Americans also became one of his primary interests. Indeed, this was the case when the subject of black women was explored.

Besides these issues, Abbott was clear on what the purpose of schooling should be. Hence, in a 1936 editorial he delineated that the aim of education should be to stimulate our minds and furnish direction for our existence.¹⁸ He also was interested in providing quality education for all students, but especially for the "race." This included unbiased textbooks, competent administrators and teachers, excellent school programs and curricula, as well as a pleasant learning environment. In essence, what he was wanted was effective schools.

When it came to the debate over which was better for the African American --e.g. industrial/vocational training or scholarly pursuit --Abbott was in favor of them all.

¹⁸"Has Education a Purpose?" Chicago Defender, 12 December 1936, editorial page 20.

Thus he stood behind the educational ideologies of both Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois. In expressing his belief, he declared:

Mr. Washington dictates always from the practical and material point of view and stands for what the masses sorely need today. Professor DuBois stands for the ethical and ideal in our race life, pleads for what the polished product needs and demands today.¹⁹

The idea that Abbott wanted to project was that industrial/vocational training would permit blacks to become economically independent, and higher education would develop and continue to stimulate their intellect. Bluntly speaking, however, he also cautioned that scholarly pursuit without practicality was futile.

After extensive research of Abbott's efforts to educate the African American through the media the final verdict on whether or not he accomplished his mission is positive. But, his role was limited. It is favorable in the sense that via the Chicago Defender he was able to encourage a feeling of cohesiveness and power among the "race" by zeroing in on societal problems that affected his racial group. He was successful largely because of his willingness to use the publication as a colossal communications network which represented the views of the black community. This also was true in the area of both formal and informal

¹⁹"The Washington-DuBois Fractions," Chicago Defender, 3 October 1914, editorial p. 8.

education. Despite, the obvious it is within this realm that one sees his limitations.

Although, Abbott fought against segregated schooling and for effective education he did not follow through as did many educators with recommendations and/or resolutions for achieving court ordered integration. Similarly, he did not design and/or implement improved school curricula, nor did he write any books on the idea of school reform. Keeping this in mind, it is therefore the opinion of the researcher that relevant to effective school change Abbott leaned more toward social alarmism than social activism. But, this is understandable because he was foremost a businessman and journalist rather than an educator as defined by academicians, including educational historians and social educators.

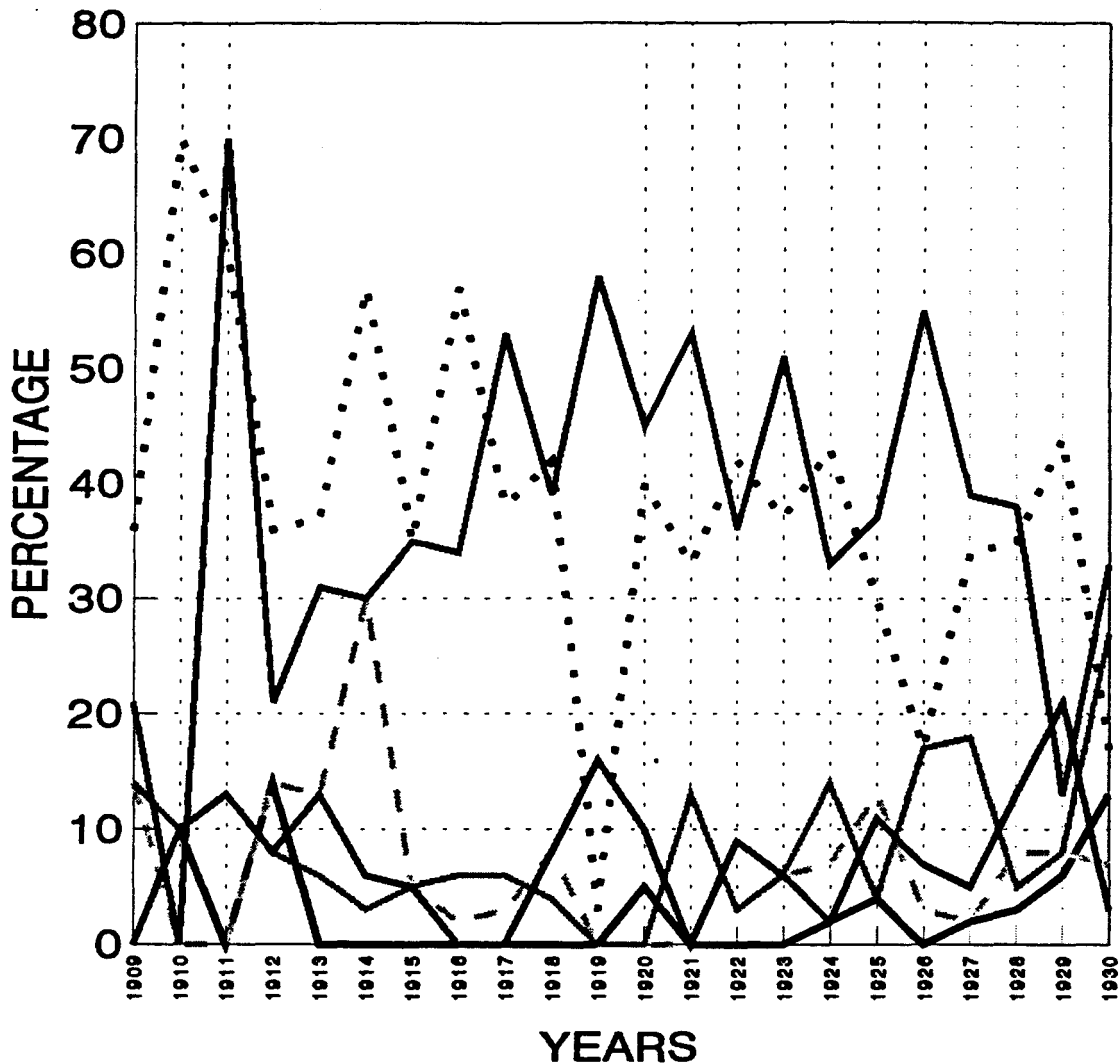
Historians like Michael W. Homel have labeled Abbott as a social activist.²⁰ Likewise, Abbott also considered himself as such because of his integrationist stance. In recognition of this and the fact that he was a task force member of several commissions that dealt with improving race relations on a social level both nationally and globally,

²⁰Homel refers to Abbott as a social activist because he initiated fights with any individual or group that engaged in discriminatory practices, but especially because he stood up to the Chicago Board of Education's attempts to segregate black students. Michael W. Homel, Down From Equality: Black Chicagoans and the Public Schools, 1920-1940 (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 157-58.

one can understand their assessment.

Although, the creator of Chicago Defender died some fifty-three years ago his endeavor to provide the African American community with an instrument for and about them continues under the stewardship of John H. H. Sengstacke (see Appendix C).

Percentage of Education Topics as Compared to Other Categories of Interest from 1909-1930

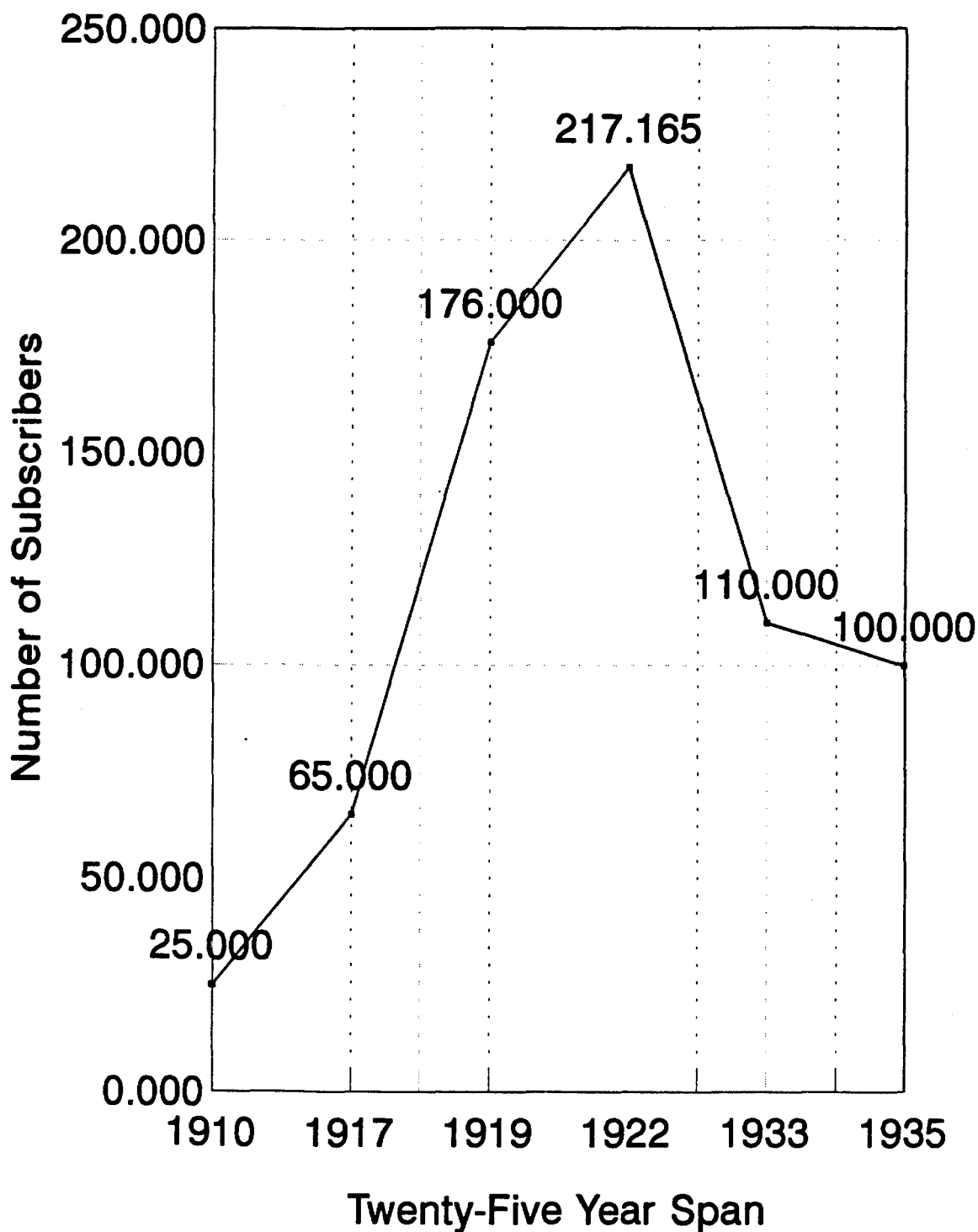


— Crime — Race Rel — Educ
 - · Politics · · · Human Int — Labor

Data taken from the Chicago Defender 1909 thru 1930.

APPENDIX B

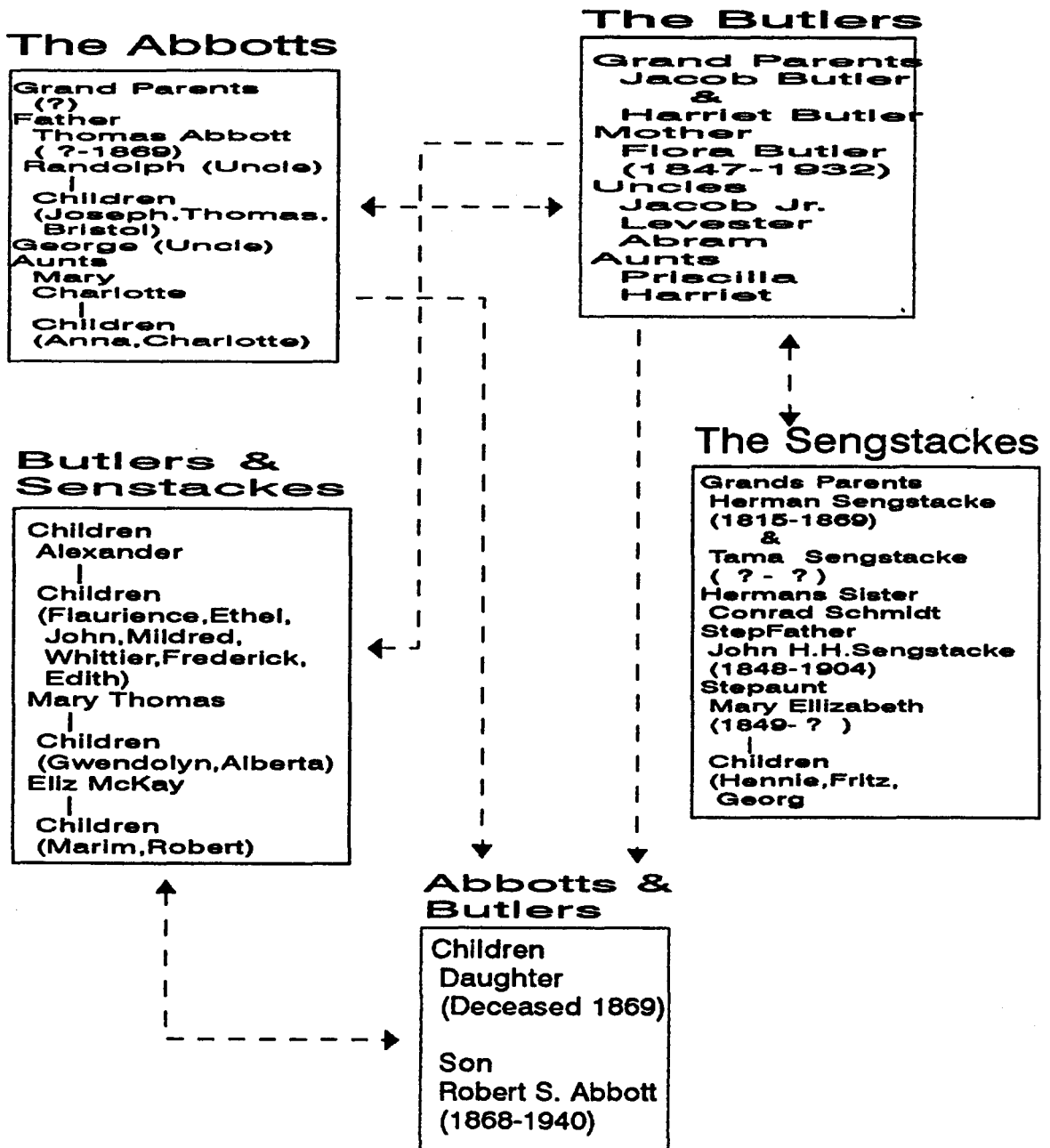
Chicago Defender Circulation Figures from 1910-1935



Data taken from the Chicago Defender 1910 thru 1935.

APPENDIX C

Robert S. Abbott's Lineage



Source: Roi Ottley, The Lonely Warrrior: The Life and Times of Robert S. Abbott (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1955), pp. 19, 29-356.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES:

Newspaper Articles:¹

Chicago Daily Tribune. 6, 9, 23 January 1909.

Chicago Defender. 22, 29 January; 12, 19 February; 4, 12, 19 March; 30 April; 21, 28 May; 18 June; 17, September; 8 October; 12 November 1910.

Chicago Defender. 21 January; 4, 11 February; 18 March; 22 July; 5 August; 2 December 1911.

Chicago Defender. 20, 27 January; 24 February; 9, 16, 23 March; 6 April; 27 July; 28 September; 12 October; 2 November; 28 December 1912.

Chicago Daily Tribune. 17 February; 16 March; 3 July 1912.

Chicago Defender. 8, 29 March; 5 April; 28 June; 19 July; 16 August; 11, 25 October; 15 November; 13 December 1913.

Chicago Defender. 31 January; 7, 14, 21, 28 February; 21, 28 March; 4 April; 2, 20 June; 19 September; 3, 10 October; 7, 19, 21, 28 November 1914.

Chicago Daily Tribune. 20, 30 January 1914.

Chicago Defender. 9, 16, 23, January; 6, 12 February; 15, 24 April; 22, 29 May; 24, 31 July; 7 August; 2, 16, 23, 30 October; 13, 20, 27 November; 25 December 1915.

Chicago Daily Tribune. 1, 6, 19 January 1915.

Chicago Defender. 26 February; 1, 8, 15, 22 April; 6, 27 May; 1, 22 July; 5, 19, 26 August; 9, 16 September; 28 October; 23 December 1916.

Chicago Defender. 20 January; 3, 17, 24 March; 26 May; 2, 9,

¹All newspaper entries will be arranged according to year.

23 June; 28 July; 29 September; 6 October; 17, 24 November; 29 December 1917.

Chicago Daily Tribune. 4 March; 6 April 1917.

Chicago Defender. 9 February; 13, 20 April; 18 May; 15, 22 June; 17, 24 August; 7, 18 September; 5, 12 October; 2 November 1918.

Chicago Daily Tribune. 2 June; 7 September 1918.

Chicago Defender. 22 February; 1 March; 19 April; 5, 24 May; 2, 30 August; 20, 27 September; 4 October; 29 November; 27 December 1919.

Chicago Defender. 3, 17, 24, 31 January; 6 November; 7, 28 February; 11, 18 May; 19, 26 June; 3, 24 July; 18 September; 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 October; 25 December 1920.

Chicago Daily Tribune. 22 January; 12 February 1920.

Chicago Defender. 1, 15 January; 12 February; 26 March; 23 April; 7, 14, 28 May; 4, 11, 18, 25 June; 2, 16, 23 July; 27 August; 3, 10 September; 1, 15 October; 17, 24 September; 29 October; 5 November; 3, 17, 24 December 1921.

Chicago Defender. 7, 14, 21, 28 January; 4, 11, 18, 25 February; 4, 11, 18, 25 March; 8, 15, 29 April; 6, 13, 20 May; 3, 10, 24 June; 1, 15 July; 2, 16 September; 1, 7, 14, 21, 28 October; 4, 11, 18, 25 November; 2, 23, 30 December 1922.

Chicago Defender. 6 January; 3, 10, 17, 24 February; 10, 17, 24, 31 March; 7, 14, 21 April; 2, 16, 23 June; 14, 28 July; 4, 25 August; 1, 29 September; 27 October; 3, 10 November; 1, 8, 22 December 1923.

Chicago Defender. 5, 12, 19 January; 2, 16, 23 February; 15, 22, 29 March; 5, 12, 19 April; 3, 24 May 1924.

Chicago Defender. 7, 14 February; 23, 30 May; 6, 13 June; 4 July; 19, 26 September; 3, 10, 24 October; 7, 21, 28 November; 19 December 1925.

Chicago Daily Tribune. 18 December 1925.

Chicago Defender. 2, 23 January; 27 February; 6, 20, 27 March; 10 April; 1, 8, 22 May; 12 June; 10 July; 30 October; 13, 27 November; 11 December 1926.

Chicago Defender. 15, 22 January; 5, 12, 19, 26 February; 5, 12 March; 16, 23, 30 April; 14 May; 18, 25 June; 2, 16 July; 6 August; 24 September; 1, 8, 15, 29 October; 5, 12, 19, 26 November; 3, 10, 31 December 1927.

Chicago Defender. 7, 14, 21, 28 January; 4, 11, 25 February; 24, 31 March; 28 April; 9 June; 7, 14, 21, 28 July; 4 August; 8, 22, 29 September; 6, 27 October; 3 November; 1, 8, 15, 22, 29 December 1928.

Chicago Defender. 12, 26 January; 2, 9, 16, 23 February; 2, 16, 23 March; 6, 13, 20, 27 April; 6, 15, 22, 29 June; 6, 13, 20 July; 10, 17, 31 August; 7, 14, 28 September; 5, 19, 26 October; 9, 23 November 1929.

Amsterdam News. 17 July 1929.

Chicago Defender. 11 January; 8, 15 February; 29 March; 5, 12, April; 3, 10, 30 May; 7, 11, June; 29 July; 30 August; 9, 20 September; 27 November; 6, 13, 27 December 1930.

Chicago Defender. 24 January; 7 February; 7 March; 31 May; 18 July; 31 October; 7 November 1931.

Chicago Defender. 11, 25 February; 23 April; 21 May; 6, 11, 18, 25 June; 9 July; 6, 20 August; 24 September; 1 October; 3, 24 December 1932.

Chicago Defender. 14 January; 22 April; 20, 27 May; 17, 24 June; 10, 22, 29 July; 19 August; 23, 30 September; 7, 14, 26 October; 18 November; 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 December 1933.

Chicago Defender. 13 January; 17, 24 February; 10, 17, 24, 31 March; 26 May; 9, 16 June; 14, 28 July; 25 August; 1, 8, 22 September; 6, 20 October; 24 November; 22, 29 December 1934.

Chicago Defender. 2 February; 2, 9, 25 March; 6, 27 April; 4, 25 May; 8, 18 June; 20 July; 17, 31 August; 5, 12, 26 October; 9 November; 7, 21, 28 December 1935.

Chicago Defender. 8, 25, 22, 29 February; 7, 21, 28 March; 4, 25 April, 11 July; 3, 17 October; 7 November; 12, 19 December 1936.

Chicago Defender. 1 January; 20 February; 20, 27 March; 3, 10, 24 April; 21, 28 August; 11 September 1937.

Chicago Defender. 22 January; 23 April; 6, 18 June; 19 November; 17 December 1938.

Chicago Defender. 9 January; 11, 18, 25 February, 20, 27 May; 3, 10 June; 21 October; 4, 11, 18 November; 23 December 1939.

Chicago Defender. 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 March; 6, 13, 20 April; 4, 11, 18, 25 May; 27 July 1940.

Chicago Daily Tribune. 1 March 1940.

Journals and Magazines:

Beale, Howard K. "The Needs of Negro Education in the United States." The Journal of Negro Education 3 (January 1934): 8-19.

Bell, Paul L. "The Teaching of Negro History." The Journal of Negro History 8 (April 1923): 123-27.

Bethea, Dennis A. "The Colored Group in the Gary School System." The Crisis 40 (August 1931): 268-81.

Bethune, Mary McLeod. "The Adaptation of the History of the Negro to the Capacity of the Child." The Journal of Negro History 24 (January 1939): 9-13.

Bond, Horace Mann. "Negro Education: A Debate in the Alabama Constitutional Convention of 1901." The Journal of Negro Education 1 (April 1932): 49-59.

Bousfield, Maudelle. "The Intelligence and the School Achievement of Negro Children." The Journal of Negro Education 1 (October 1932): 388-95.

- Bond, Horace Mann. "The Extent and Character of Separate Schools in the United States." The Journal of Negro Education 4 (July 1935): 321-37.
- Butler, Charles Thomas. "My Memories of Vardman." The Crisis 39 (February 1931): 60-61.
- Butsch, Joseph. "Catholics and the Negro." The Journal of Negro History 2 (October 1917): 393-410.
- Daniel, Walter G. "The Curriculum of the Negro Elementary School." The Journal of Negro Education 1 (July 1932): 277-303.
- Davis, Arthur P. "The Menace of Education." The Crisis 40 (August 1931): 269-70.
- Dill, Augustus Granville. "The Negro in Chicago." The Crisis 25 (January 1923): 111-13.
- _____. "The Negro and the Northern Public Schools." The Crisis 25 (January 1923): 262-65.
- DuBois, W. E. B. "The Tragedy of 'Jim Crow'." The Crisis 26 (August 1923): 169-72.
- DuBois, W. E. B. "Negro Education." The Crisis ____ (February 1918): 173-78.
- DuBois, W. E. B. "Does the Negro Need Separate Schools?" The Journal of Negro Education 4 (July 1935): 328-35.
- Einstein, Albert. "To American Negroes." The Crisis 41 (February 1932): 45.
- Frazier, E. Franklin. "The Status of the Negro in the American Social Order." The Journal of Negro Education 4 (July 1935): 293-307.
- Geyer, Denton L. "Can We Depend Upon the Results of Group Intelligence Tests?" The Chicago Schools Journal 4 (February 1922): 203-10.
- Henderson, H. Donald. "The Negro Migration of 1916-1918." The Journal of Negro History 6 (October 1921): 383-485.

- Holmes, Dwight O. W. "Fifty Years of Howard University." The Journal of Negro History 3 (April 1918): 128-38.
- Hopkins, Ernest N. et al. "The Northern College and the Negro Student." The Crisis 40 (August 1931): 263-64.
- Hubbard, Maceo W. and Raymond Pace Alexander. "Types of Potentially Favorable Court Cases Relative to the Separate School." The Journal of Negro Education 4 (July 1935): 375-405.
- Oak, V. V. "What Is Wrong With Our Colleges?" Abbott's Monthly 2 (April 1931): 29-61.
- Peterson, Gladys Tignor. "The Present Status of the Negro Separate School as Defined by Court Decisions." The Journal of Negro Education 4 (July 1935): 351-74.
- Rury, John L. "Race and Common School Reform: The Strange Career of the NYSPECC, 1847-1860." Urban Education 20 (January 1986): 473-91.
- Rury, John L. "Race, Region, and Education: An Analysis of Black and White Scores on the 1917 Army Alpha Intelligence Test." The Journal of Negro Education 57 (1988): 51-64.
- Smith, Joan K. "Educational Policy & Conflict in the Chicago Schools: The McAndrew Years, 1924-27." Journal of the Midwest History of Education Society 15 (1987): 44-50.
- Thompson, Chas. H. "Introduction: The Problem of Negro Higher Education." The Journal of Negro Education 2 (July 1933): 257-71.
- Washington, Alethea H. "The Supervision of Instruction in the Negro Elementary School." The Journal of Negro Education 1 (July 1932): 224-55.
- Woodson, Carter G. "Negro Life and History in the Schools." The Journal of Negro History 4 (July 1919): 273-80.

Unpublished Manuscripts:

Woodson, Carter G. "The Need." [File Copy], Chapter I, p. 18, The Papers of Julius Rosenwald, Box XXXIII, Folder 1, Special Collections, Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Chicago.

Published Proceedings:

City of Chicago. "Abolish Social Centers." Proceedings for the Board of Education in Chicago, Illinois, October 1, 1913, 1913, 260.

City of Chicago. "Communication From Citizens Save Our School Committee." Proceedings for the Board of Education in Chicago, Illinois, July 26, 1933, 1933, 29.

City of Chicago. "Authorize Opening of Evening Schools." Proceedings for the Board of Education in Chicago, Illinois, August 23, 1933, 1933, 116.

Letters:

Claude A. Barnett to Robert S. Abbott , 13 August 1935, [photocopy] The Papers of Claude A. Barnett, Box 149, Folder 7, Archives and Manuscripts, Chicago Historical Society, Chicago.

Published Documents:

Robert S. Abbott. "Record of Baptisms." Parish Record, 1859-1872 page 64. [photocopy] St. Matthews Episcopal Church. Savannah, Georgia.

Helen T. Abbott v. Robert S. Abbott. "Bill for Separate Maintenance." State of Illinois. County of Cook, June Term, A. D. 1932. Chicago, Illinois, [photocopy] The Papers of Claude A. Barnett, Box 149, Folder 7, Archives and Manuscripts, Chicago Historical Society, Chicago.

"The Robert S. Abbott House." National Register of Historic Places Inventory -- Nomination Form, June 30, 1976 [photocopy] City of Chicago, Commission on Chicago Landmarks, Chicago, Illinois.

Dr. H. B. Frissell. "Hampton Graduates, 1871-1899: Class of 1896." Hampton Institute. May, 1899. [photocopy] University Archives, Hampton, Virginia.

State of Illinois. "Attorney's Role Card for Louis B. Anderson." State of Illinois Supreme Court Clerk. Illinois Attorneys Record. June 15, 1897 [photocopy] Springfield, Illinois.

State of Illinois. "Attorney's Role Card for Edward H. Morris." State of Illinois Supreme Court Clerk. Illinois Attorneys Record. June 12, 1879 [photocopy] Springfield, Illinois.

Supreme Court of Indiana. "Rules of Supreme Court Requiring Applicants to Practice Law to Take Bar Examination: Enacted July, 1931." November Term, 1934 page 171. [photocopy] Executive Director, State Board of Law Examiners. Indianapolis, Indiana.

SECONDARY SOURCES:

Books and Dissertations:

Anderson, James D. The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.

Aptheker, Herbert. ed. A Documentary History of the Negro in the United States: Volumes II & II. New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1990.

- Banks, Marva. "An Analysis of Nineteenth Century Black Responses to Uncle Tom's Cabin as Recorded in Selected Antebellum Black Newspapers: 1852-1855." Ph.D. diss., Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, 1986.
- Beck, John M. "Chicago Newspapers and the Public Schools, 1890-1920." Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1953.
- Bennett, Lerone Jr. Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America. Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, Inc., 1988.
- Berkhofer, Robert F. Jr. A Behavioral Approach to Historical Analysis. New York: The Free Press, 1969.
- Bond, Horace Mann. Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel. New York: Octagon Books, 1939.
- Bond, Horace Mann. The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order. New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1934.
- Bontemps, Arna and Jack Conroy. They Seek A City. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1945.
- Brown, Lena Boyd. "Black Newspapers and Black Education in America, 1960-1970: A Study of Editorial Opinion on Education in Three Black Newspapers." ED.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1979.
- Caliver, Ambrose. Vocational Education and Guidance of Negroes. Westport, Connecticut: Negro University Press, 1970.
- Chicago Commission on Race Relations. The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1922.
- Counts, George S. The American Road to Culture: A Social Interpretation of Education in the United States. New York: The John Day Company, 1930.
- Davis, Samuel Calvin. "Education, Law, and the Negro." M. S., University of Illinois, 1965.

- Dewey, John. Democracy and Education. New York: The Free Press, 1916.
- Drake, St. Clair and Horace R. Cayton. Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1945.
- DuBois, W. E. B. The Common School and the Negro American. Atlanta, Georgia: The Atlanta University Press, 1911.
- Eibling, Harold H. et al. Two Centuries of Progress. Irvine, California: Laidlaw Brothers, 1977.
- Franklin, John Hope. From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans. 3rd ed. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967.
- Garforth, F. W. John Locke: Some Thoughts Concerning Education. London: Heinemann, 1964.
- Gay, Peter. ed. John Locke on Education. New York: Bureau of Publications, 1964.
- Gillard, John T. S. S. J. The Catholic Church and the American Negro. Baltimore, Maryland: St. Joseph's Society Press, 1929.
- Gore, G. Negro Journalism. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1979.
- Gosnell, Harold F. Negro Politicians: The Rise of Negro Politics in Chicago. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967.
- Gosnell, Harold F. Machine Politics Chicago Model. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.
- Gossett, Thomas F. Race: The History of an Idea in America. Dallas, Texas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963.
- Grant, Robert B. The Black Man Comes to the City. Chicago: Nelson-Hall Company, 1972.

- Grossman, James S. Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- Harlan, Louis R. Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- Harlan, Louis R. Separate and Unequal. New York: Atheneum, 1969.
- Herrick, Mary J. The Chicago Schools: A Social and Political History. Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1971.
- Hockett, Homer Carey. The Critical Method in Historical Research and Writing. New York: Macmillan Company, 1955.
- Hockett, Homer Carey. Introduction to Research in American History. New York: Macmillan Company, 1949.
- Hogan, Lawrence D. A Black National News Service: The Associated Negro Press and Claude Barnett, 1919-1945. London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1984.
- Homel, Michael W. Down From Equality: Black Chicagoans and the Public Schools, 1920-1941. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974.
- Katnelson, Ira and Margaret Weir. Schooling for All: Class, Race and the Decline of the Democratic Ideal. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1985.
- Jackson, Kenneth T. The Ku Klux Klan. New York: Oxford University Press, 1967.
- Johnson, Charles S. Patterns of Negro Education. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1943.
- Labbe, Delores Egger. Jim Crow Comes to Church. New York: Arno Press, 1978.
- Leavell, Ullin Whitney. Philanthropy in Education. Westport, Connecticut: Negro Universities Press, 1970.

- MacGregor Morris J. and Bernard C. Nally. eds. Blacks in the United States Armed Forces. Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1977.
- Martin, Tony. Race First. Dover, Massachusetts: The Majority Press, 1976.
- Martindale, Carol. The White Press and Black America. New York: Greenwood Press, 1986.
- Mason, Charlotte. "The Policy of the Segregation of the Negro in the Public Schools of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois." M. A. diss., University of Illinois, 1917.
- Mitchell, J. Paul. ed. Race Riots in Black and White. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970.
- Mundelein, George W. D. D. Two Crowded Years. Chicago: Extension Press, 1918.
- Ottley, Roi. The Lonely Warrior: The Life and Times of Robert S. Abbott. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1955.
- Perdue, Robert E. The Negro in Savannah, 1865-1900. New York: Exposition Press, 1973.
- Reutter, E. Edmund Jr. The Law of Public Education 3rd ed. Mineola, New York: The Foundation Press, Inc., 1985.
- Russell, Bertrand. Education and the Social Order. London: George Allen & Unwin LTD., 1971.
- Scally, Sister Anthony. Carter G. Woodson: A Bio-Bibliography. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985.
- Smith, Joan K. Ella Flagg Young: Portrait of a Leader. Ames, Iowa: Educational Studies Press, 1979.
- Spear, Allan H. Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967.

- Tinney, James S. and Justine J. Rector. Issues and Trends in Afro-American Journalism. Washington, D. C.: University Press of America, Inc., 1980.
- Tuttle, William M. Jr. Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919. New York: Atheneum, 1970.
- U. S. Department of the Interior. Bureau of Education. Digest of State Law Relating to Public Education. [Washington, D. C.]: U. S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education, 1915.
- U. S. Department of the Interior. Bureau of Education. Negro Education: A Study of the Private and Higher Schools for Colored People in the United States. New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969.
- U. S. Department of Commerce. Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce. Statistical Abstract of the United States 1930. [Washington, D. C.]: U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, 1930.
- U. S. Department of Commerce. Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce. Statistical Abstract of the United States 1933. [Washington, D. C.]: U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, 1933.
- Vanstory, Burnette. Georgia's Land of the Golden Isle. Athens, Georgia: University of George Press, 1956.
- Water, Enoch P. American Diary: A Personal History of the Black Press. Chicago: Path Press, Inc., 1987.
- Weaver, Billy L. "The Educative Role of Black Newspapers, 1920-1930." Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1979.
- White Theresa Mary. "Coping With Administrative Pressure in the Chicago Schools' Superintendency: An Anaysis of William Henry Johnson, 1936-1946." Ph.D diss., 1988.
- Wendt, Lloyd and Herman Kogan. Big Bill of Chicago. Indianapolis, Indiana: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1953.

- Wendt, Lloyd. Chicago Tribune: The Rise of a Great American Newspaper. Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1979.
- Wolseley, Roland E. The Black Press, U. S. A. 2nd ed. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1990.
- Wolters, Raymond. Negroes and the Great Depression: The Problem of Economic Recovery. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1970.
- Wood, Forest G. Black Scare: The Racist Response to Emancipation and Reconstruction. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968.
- Woodson, Carter G. The Mis-Education of the Negro. Washington, DC: Associated Publishers, Inc., 1933; Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc., 1990.
- Woofter, T. J. Jr. Negro Problems in Cities. College Park, Maryland: McGarth Publishing Company, 1969.
- Wrigley, Julia. Class Politics and Public Schools: Chicago, 1900-1950. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1982.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by Charlesetta Maria Ellis has been read and approved by the following committee:

Dr. Joan K. Smith, Director
Associate Dean/Professor,
Graduate School/ELPS
Loyola University Chicago

Dr. John M. Wozniak
Professor Emeritus, ELPS
Loyola University Chicago

Dr. Seldon D. Strother
Professor, Curriculum and Instruction
Chicago State University

The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

28 June 1993
Date

Joan K. Smith
Director's Signature