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Robert S. Abbott's Chicago Defender: A Study in Negro Journalism and Reform, 1910-1920

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ROBERT S. ABBOTT'S CHICAGO DEFENDER:
A STUDY IN NEGRO JOURNALISM AND REFORM,
1910-1920

by
Henry C. Vander Voort

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School,
Loyola University, Chicago, in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirement for
the Degree of Master of Arts

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PREFACE

In a seminar on the Progressive Era conducted by Professor Ralph E. Minger during the fall of 1969, I became interested in the role of the Negro in the reform movement. Under Professor Minger's direction, I finally decided to research the attitudes of Robert S. Abbott's Chicago Defender to the events occurring during the Taft Administration. There were three principal reasons for choosing this topic. First, the Defender had not been adequately explored as a medium of Negro reform. Second, it was published throughout most of the Progressive Era. Third, microfilm copies of the paper were available.

Toward the end of the seminar, I began to realize just how difficult it was to determine the attitudes of a weekly newspaper during a period of only four years. This was especially true with the Defender, for it was evolving rapidly from a local paper to one of national stature. I therefore decided to expand my original study into a thesis and cover the entire period from 1910 to 1920. This decade was a crucial one in American history. It saw the crusading spirit of the progressives, the struggle of a major third party, race riots and lynchings, the debate over immigration, a world war and its aftermath, and much more. Just what role did the Defender play while these momentous events were taking place?

Throughout the spring semester of 1970, I continued my research in conjunction with another of Professor Minger's courses, Historical Method. The final result is the following thesis, the purpose of which is to determine how one small segment of the Negro press, the Chicago Defender, viewed its part, and more importantly how it viewed the part of the Negro as a whole in American life. Specifically, to what extent did the Chicago Defender and its founder, Robert S. Abbott, articulate and voice the strivings of the Negro to achieve a greater place in American society during the decade.

As far as I could ascertain there has not been another in-depth analysis of the Defender's role in the Progressive Era. Many studies have been made on the Negro press and on certain newspapers in particular, but none have studied in detail the Defender's reporting and interpretations of the news during a period so crowded with important events.

I wish to express my deep appreciation to Professor Minger who not only directed this thesis but provided examples in scholarship to follow. I also wish to thank Professor James L. Penick Jr. whose course on the Progressive Era helped me to better understand that period in history. The Chicago Historical Society aided me greatly in providing the records of the Defender and other related material. Last but certainly not least, I am indebted to my wife, Sharon, whose support enabled me to carry this work to completion.

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CHAPTER I

THE MAN AND THE PAPER

Robert Abbott was born on the outskirts of Savannah, Georgia on November 24, 1868. His father, Tom, had been the trusted slave butler on a nearby plantation. Unlike her husband, Flora Abbott had been free since childhood and had acquired considerable skill as a hairdresser. Tom died only five months after Robert's birth, and Flora moved into Savannah in order to take up her former trade.¹

While living in the city Flora met John H. H. Sengstacke whose German immigrant father had married a slave girl from Charleston. John Sengstacke passed for white in Savannah until legal problems over his father's estate revealed him to be of mixed parentage. It would have been easy for John to have returned to Germany where being a Negro carried little stigma. However, another event intervened. Flora and John fell in love. Knowing full well the problems he faced in racially divided Savannah, John still decided to marry Flora and bring Robert up as if he were his own son.²

The family moved to Woodville just outside Savannah,

¹Saunders Redding, The Lonesome Road (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1958), pp. 188-189.

²Ibid., p. 190.

and there John organized a Congregational church and became its minister. Life was not easy in those years so John supplemented his meager church income by opening the only school in Woodville. Although money was scarce, Robert remembered this period in his life as being a happy one.³

By 1886, Robert was attending Beach Institute in Savannah. There the black boy from Woodville encountered a color-line drawn by the lighter skinned mulattoes. Only a few blacks were admitted to the school even though it offered only a rude secondary education. He never mentioned his experience at Beach to his parents, but the prejudice he felt seemed to have left on him a lasting impression.⁴

It was not without some joy that Robert left Beach and was admitted to Claflin University in Orangeburg, South Carolina. His stay there lasted only six months, for Robert decided he wanted to learn a trade. Hampton Institute accepted him, and he entered the school six days after his twenty-first birthday. At Hampton, Robert took up printing. His achievement there was not spectacular, for he managed only to finish the normal five-year course in seven.⁵

After graduation Robert returned home to work part time as a printer and also as a teacher. John Sengstacke founded the Woodville Times in 1889, and Robert helped him edit the

³Roi Ottley, The Lonely Warrior ((Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1955), p. 43.

⁴Ibid., pp. 61-64.

⁵Ibid.

paper. It was while he was teaching that he fell in love with a former classmate of his at Beach, Catherine Scarborough. Although she was a mulatto, Robert asked her to marry him. Outraged that his daughter might even consider marriage to a black, Catherine's father drew the color-line.⁶

Turned down in marriage and finding no means for financial success in Savannah, Robert decided to seek his fortune in Chicago. It was only by acquiring money that Robert felt he could overcome his blackness.⁷ Seeking a career in law, he enrolled at the Kent College of Law in 1897. Two years later with a Bachelor of Laws degree Robert sought to start a practice in Chicago. Edward H. Morris, one of Chicago's most prominent lawyers and a Negro, advised Abbott that he was "a little too dark to make any impression on the court in Chicago." Instead, Abbott tried to set up a practice in Gary, Indiana. It failed.⁸

Back in Chicago Abbott eked out a living doing odd jobs while seeking the means to a fortune. He shunned the lowest elements of society and was excluded from the highest. During this period Abbott became more and more obsessed with the idea of founding a newspaper. John Sengstacke died in 1904, but Robert still remembered how his stepfather had described

⁶Ibid., p. 75.

⁷Ibid., p. 76.

⁸Arna Bontemps and Jack Conroy, Anyplace But Here (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966), pp. 103-04.

the power of the press.⁹

Finally, Abbott made up his mind to start the newspaper. With a total capital of only twenty-five cents, he succeeded in getting his first issue of the Chicago Defender to the streets on May 5, 1905. His friends vowed it would fail. Three other Negro papers were already operating in Chicago. Besides, what originality could Abbott add to the field? Indeed, he added little innovation to Negro journalism for the first couple of years. The Defender's stock in trade was folksy news items.¹⁰

Not until 1909, when the Defender began its determined policy of defending Negro rights, did the paper come into prominence. Later Abbott was to write:

Our aim has been, and is, to defend the rights of the Negro whenever they are right rights, and to aid, abet and record his advancement by the line of least resistance.¹¹

It was for such a policy as this that Gunnar Myrdal credits Robert S. Abbott with starting a newspaper "which was destined to revolutionize Negro journalism."¹²

After four years of operation the Defender had not missed a single weekly issue. Still, the paper was struggling. The folksy news being published was interesting and informative to the Negro community, but it hardly engendered much

⁹Redding, Lonesome Road, p. 196.

¹⁰Ottley, Lonely Warrior, pp. 86-88.

¹¹Editorial, Chicago Defender, Oct. 12, 1912, p. 4.

¹²Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1962), p. 914.

enthusiasm. During these first years Abbott concentrated on the news he alone could cover. The Defender was still almost exclusively a one man operation.¹³ If there were problems of a social or racial nature, it was not apparent from reading the Defender. The type of sensational news that would later characterize the paper was totally lacking. Abbott's clumsy diction and long sentence structure did not improve the paper's promise of success either.¹⁴

But in 1909, Abbott awoke to the benefits of a muck-raking crusade. In that year the Chicago Vice Commission reported the extent of the city's Red Light District. Most of it was centered in the Negro section, and a majority of the establishments employed blacks. The paper leaped upon this issue and began its own reform movement. Week after week editorialized news articles demanded an end to the "sinful" practice. It was not until 1912 that prostitution went underground, but Abbott had received his first lessons in reaching the bulk of the public. He discovered also a need in himself to educate and uplift his own people.¹⁵

The Defender's new policy of sensationalism received a further boost with the hiring of J. Hockley Smiley who became the managing editor under Abbott. Smiley was a natural for the type of journalism which the Defender was about to enter. If a story had a sensational or a muck-raking side,

¹³Ottley, Lonely Warrior, p. 88.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 90.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 98-99.

Smiley was sure to find it. He seemed to thrive on exploiting the racial aspects of even quite innocent news items.¹⁶

The Defender could never lay much claim to objectivity in its early days. There was an attempt in the latter part of the decade to curb some of the more biased articles. However, merely by expressing protest, the Defender magnified its impact. Abbott knew the odds against the Negro, and he felt the race had nothing to lose by building its case up as much as possible. Another factor also influenced the objectivity of the Defender, and that was the means Abbott used to collect the news. Although several reporters were hired after Smiley, many persons contributing stories to the paper were unpaid. Of particular interest were the waiters and railroad porters. They came into a great deal of information during the course of their work. Some of it was factual; some of it was not. However, factual or not, if it suited Smiley or Abbott it became news.¹⁷

From 1910 through 1920, the Defender took up many issues and causes in behalf of the Negro. At times Abbott's attacks seemed irresponsible. Julius Rosenwald once described him as a mindless "monkey with a shotgun, who will hurt anybody."¹⁸ Yet, Abbott saw his crusading zeal only in a positive light. If the paper hurt a few, it also helped many. Actually, it did both.

¹⁶Redding, Lonesome Road, pp. 204-05.

¹⁷Ottley, Lonely Warrior, pp. 100-05.

¹⁸Redding, Lonesome Road, p. 207.

CHAPTER II

THE STATE OF THE NEGRO PRESS

When the Defender was founded in 1905 the Negro press in the United States already had a long history. Its development followed two trends: Negro protest and the increase in Negro literacy. The abolitionist crusade gave birth to the Negro press. Freedom's Journal, the first Negro periodical, appeared in 1827. The policy of the Journal was to show that blacks were not inferior and that differences between the two races came only from lack of education, refinement, and wealth.¹⁹

Although this paper failed in 1830, twenty-four other Negro newspapers are known to have existed before the Civil War. However, most of these appeared so irregularly that they might merely be considered as pamphlets. The anti-slavery agitation in the North kept these papers alive, but many of them were protesting against discrimination in the North as well as slavery in the South.²⁰

After the war, Negro papers could be sold in the South. With the growth of literacy and culture, Negro journalism

¹⁹Frederick G. Detweiler, The Negro Press in the United States (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922), pp. 35-36.

²⁰Ibid., p. 39.

found an ever increasing public. From ten newspapers in 1870 to 154 in 1890, the number of journals continued to expand. The more famous of these papers were the Washington Bee, the Cleveland Gazette, and the New York Age.²¹

While the Negro printed word continued to expand, the press was generally following the non-belligerent course laid down by Booker T. Washington. A change back to the more militant abolitionist tradition occurred when William Monroe Trotter launched the Boston Guardian in 1901. This move was followed by the Defender and the NAACP's Crisis which began publishing in 1910.²²

In Chicago in 1905, Robert Abbott was facing competition from three other papers: Julius C. Taylor's Broad Ax, S. B. Turner's Illinois Idea, and Ferdinand L. Barnett's Conservator. Two other newspapers from outside Chicago also claimed a circulation among the city's Negro community: the Indianapolis Freeman and the New York Age.²³

By 1909 Abbott's competition had grown to four Chicago based papers with an estimated total circulation of 16,000.²⁴ Yet, the Defender had two points in its favor. First, Chicago's Negro population was growing. From 1900 to 1910 the number of Negroes in Chicago rose almost 47 per cent to

²¹Myrdal, American Dilemma, p. 913.

²²Ibid., pp. 913-14.

²³Ottley, Lonely Warrior, p. 86.

²⁴American Newspaper Annual (Philadelphia: N. W. Ayer & Sons, 1909), pp. 150-64.

a level of 44,103.²⁵ In the next ten year period this figure more than doubled to reach 109,458.²⁶ While this growth was occurring, the illiteracy rate for Negroes in Chicago had fallen to 3.1 per cent. Although this rate increased to 3.9 per cent in 1920²⁷ due to the large influx of Negroes from the South, it still compared favorably with national illiteracy rates for Negroes in 1910 of 30.4 per cent and 22.9 per cent for 1920.²⁸ Thus the Defender had a rapidly increasing reading public. Second, the paper as managed by Abbott knew how to reach that public. His paper was to prove a financial success for himself and a boost to the aspirations of many Negroes, North and South.

²⁵U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910: Population, II, 505.

²⁶U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920: Population, III, 261.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920: Population, II, 1150.

CHAPTER III

THE BASIC ISSUES

Like any other newspaper the Defender's coverage of events ranged over a wide spectrum. Yet, there were certain issues which were more fundamental than others. It was to these that the paper turned time and time again, and it was on these that Abbott unleashed his most virulent attacks. An examination of the two most basic issues will serve to illustrate.

Racial Pride

Pride in one's race was essential if any kind of progress was ever to be achieved. Abbott himself suffered for his blackness. Through his paper he tried to show that every black man could look with pride to the past and present accomplishments of the race. But in doing this the Defender arrived at a problem in identification that has troubled Negroes for years. What term should blacks use to call themselves? This question was to trouble the paper throughout this entire period. At first many different terms were used at random. "Negro," "colored," "black," and "Afro-American" were all tried. Finally in 1910 the term "race" came into general use. "Race" connotes more group identification than any of the other terms, and it became a standard policy of

the paper to use this term when referring to most groups and individuals. Thus a Negro church was called a "race church." A Negro politician became a "race politician."

This policy lasted until early 1914 when "race" was largely dropped in favor of "Afro-American." The reasoning behind this change is not exactly clear, but part of it may have been due to the trouble with Mexico that was beginning to take shape. There were several Negro army units stationed in the Southwest, and the Defender was quick to point out that these units were composed of true Americans helping to defend their country.²⁹ Also, part of the explanation may lie in the feeling that "race" symbolized too great a divisiveness from the whites. That Negroes were an integral part of America was a constant theme of the paper.

Whatever the reason the use of "Afro-American" had a shorter life span than "race." In 1916 another shift occurred. This time all reference to "Afro-Americans" was abruptly dropped, and the Defender went back to its original confused state of using several different terms. The reason for this change seems more clear. It was at this time that the nativist drive against hyphenate Americans was starting to gain real momentum. The Defender had witnessed Negroes being called many things, but it did not want to see them accused of being only half American. Abbott would hardly have wanted the progress attained by the Negro jeopardized by the simple use

²⁹Editorial, "Wearing the Uniform of Blue," Chicago Defender, May 9, 1914, p. 12.

of a hyphen.

The Defender also promoted group solidarity by printing news from many different communities, especially from the South. Seldom did a week go by without some article telling of the local events in Little Rock, New Orleans, or Memphis. The reporter in these instances was a local correspondent who would gather the area news, write it, and send it into the Defender. Since the paper was spreading its circulation into the South, the inhabitants there could read about themselves in a big town newspaper.

All types of articles were used to boost the morale of the Negro. Once the paper ran a story with a large headline telling of a black railroad porter in New York City who was arrested for speeding. When the porter was able to put up a \$20,000 bond in real estate, the judge was described as "shocked." Abbott then took the opportunity to put in a good word for the railroad workers and also to issue a warning.

This is nothing new in New York for a porter or sleeping clerk to own a car for it seems that there is a new class of men getting into the service. They are bringing up the standard of work and people should recognize the twentieth century sleeping clerk as a real man and not the grinning monkey who cuts up didoes to get a tip. . . . The time for grinning has passed and the sooner the Negro as well as the Southern white gentlemen(?) learn it the better.³⁰

Work in the Pullman cars was one of the more lucrative careers open to the Negro. Abbott sought to increase pride in this field but not at the expense of degrading the race.

³⁰"Rich Pullman Car Clerk Stuns Judge," Chicago Defender, March 26, 1910, p. 1.

Jack Johnson, the heavy weight boxing champion of the world, provided the paper with thousands of words of copy. For months on end weekly issues would have at least some mention of the fighter. Johnson was hailed as a man of supreme virtue and an example for young and old to follow. Johnson's every activity received notice. From his motoring around the city in a sports car to his marriages, all received big headlines and photographs.

Before the Jackson - Jeffries fight in Reno on July 4, 1910, the paper described how the Presbyterian Ministerial Association was working to have the fight prohibited in Nevada. It would have been a national disgrace for a white and a black to fight on an equal basis. Calling their effort "hypocritical" The Defender advised the ministers to devote less attention to trying to stop a prize fight and spend more time in trying to prevent injustices to Negroes.³¹

After Johnson won the fight the Defender took the opportunity to criticize white newspapers for characterizing the fight as a battle between the races. Abbott was careful lest this impression also become the opinion of blacks. The paper maintained that Negroes viewed all of Johnson's fights as merely physical tests of strength and skill between two worthy opponents.³²

³¹"A National Disgrace," Chicago Defender, May 28, 1910, p. 1.

³²"Jack Johnson the Unafraid," Chicago Defender, May 28, 1910, p. 1.

Later, the Defender again used Johnson's name to invoke racial pride when the paper told how another Negro fighter, Sam Langford, had conspired with James Corbett to "steal" Johnson's crown. The plot, according to the story, was simple. A fight between the two Negroes was to be arranged, and Johnson was then to be drugged. Langford would win the crown, but would deliberately lose to Corbett in a later fight in order to give the championship back to the whites. The paper issued a stern warning to Langford.

Get an education and give a little time and thought to how to place the Negro above suspicion as Jack Johnson has done, and if [you] will but walk in the noble footsteps of the first colored champion of the world, [you] will teach these petty whites that the time for buying and selling Negroes has passed.³³

The crusade for racial pride took many forms in the Defender. While consisting mostly of trying to instill a sense of unity and a feeling of accomplishment in the Negro, the paper did not hesitate to combat any attempt on the part of the whites to defeat this aim. Such combativeness is best illustrated by the campaign the Defender waged against the showing of the movie Birth of a Nation. This was actually a nationwide campaign conducted by much of the black press.

In Chicago the Defender fought hard against the movie, its producers, and the author of the book on which the film was based. To Abbott it was all a deliberate attempt on the part of some whites to unjustly downgrade the Negro both in

³³"Sam Langford to Sell," Chicago Defender, Aug. 13, 1910, p. 1.

the past and in the present. "Lies" such as these only prevented blacks from recognizing their true role in American life. With the help of various civic organizations and influential persons in city hall, the movie was finally banned from Chicago.³⁴

This did not stop the crusade against the showing of the film in other parts of the country. The Defender kept up a running attack on the movie and jubilently reported the cities which had banned its appearance.³⁵ With time the issue waned, but the paper had shown just how much emphasis it placed on the Negro getting a fair hearing. Racial pride could never be achieved if "lies" concerning the Negro were not uncovered and shown to be false.

Abbott was not above attacking whites or blacks who degraded the race, but his most bitter attacks were reserved for the blacks. It was assumed that whites would try to detract from and prevent Negro progress, but when a Negro brought scorn on his own people it was doubly worse. When a Negro lieutenant, George Thomson, was dismissed from the army for making false statements and for questionable moral conduct, Abbott was disgusted. The lieutenant was in a position to help his race, for he was one of the few Negro officers in the army. When so many people were looking for

³⁴"'Birth of a Nation' Will Not Be Shown in Chicago," Chicago Defender, May 1, 1915, p. 1.

³⁵"'Birth of a Nation' Run Out of Philadelphia," Chicago Defender, June 5, 1915, p. 1.

him to represent them with honor, his lack of virtue "fills one with disgust devoid of pity, regardless of who the man is."³⁶ The Defender showed real hate when the Negro's pride was injured. It could react just as swiftly when the question of equality was involved.

Equality

When W. E. B. DuBois called for a black economic nation within a nation, Abbott stated such a program was not only "irrational" but a mere "dream."³⁷ He knew the fundamental law of the country was ultimately on his side. Because Abbott was for absolute legal equality, he also differed with Booker T. Washington. Abbott wanted nothing to do with a "separate but equal" strategy. That was strictly Jim Crow.

Although he criticized both men, Abbott also saw merit in each of their teachings. This became readily apparent when the Defender began to promote the program of the NAACP. In doing so Abbott rejected the "misguided zealots" who felt the only way for the association to move ahead was to assail Booker T. Washington.

There is nothing that is really counterwise to the other in either of the two great movements — one to educate the hand along with the head, and the other to maintain or recover our constitutionally vouchsafed rights. The first is designed to assure just what the second agitates.³⁸

³⁶"Lieutenant George S. Thompson," Chicago Defender, Aug. 13, p. 1.

³⁷Metz P. T. Lockhard, "Robert S. Abbott — 'Race Leader,'" Phylon, VIII, (1947), 131.

³⁸Editorial, "The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People," Chicago Defender, Jan. 10, 1914, p. 1.

Both means toward equality were to be pursued by the Defender. The paper never ceased fighting to halt what it considered illegal encroachments on the Negro's civil rights or to promote the Negro cause by helping the individual to elevate himself.

The Defender's policy on civil rights was complete equality — nothing less, nothing more. Abbott's own dictum was "absolute integration." From the President's cabinet to a baseball team, the races should mix. Separation was unnatural and would prevent the desired result of a unified nation.

Once when he learned that trains were leaving Chicago with signs reading "white" and "colored" in the cars, the Defender ran a long article calling for swift action. It was the duty of every race man to prevent such "outrage" from entering the state of Illinois or any other northern state. The sub-headline of the story even read — "STRIKE BACK EVEN UNTO DEATH."³⁹

Although Abbott sounded as if he were preaching extremism, he was actually against any kind of confrontation which might lead to violence. Often the Defender would use such words as "kill," or "hang" to describe what should be done to people who violated Negro rights. These would appear to have been only metaphors in Abbott's own mind, but they might have been taken more seriously by others. For that

³⁹"Jim Crow Cars Running Out of Chicago," Chicago Defender, June 11, 1910, p. 1.

reason their use was probably a dangerous tactic.

A more sincere expression of Abbott's ideas of justice was shown in a series of articles printed about the same time as the one on the Jim Crow trains. A case arose in which one of Chicago's more prominent Negroes was refused a seat on the first floor of the Colonial Theater. The man hired a lawyer and sued the theater. The verdict was in favor of the defendant. Abbott took the opportunity to print a long article about rights in general. He admitted that there was a lawless or a "Jim Crow crowd" among the race. Still, that did not give anyone the right to discriminate. Behind the shiftless and lazy ones, Abbott maintained, came a much longer procession of blacks marching abreast with civilization, honoring their homes and dignifying their positions. This was to be the class of Negroes who would break down the barriers and build a country where "the flag could fly over the free and the brave."⁴⁰

A week later a similar case was tried against the same theater. This time the jury decided in favor of the plaintiff. The Defender was jubilant. Abbott felt this victory had given the city's blacks a new outlook on life. The Negro must fight for his rights, Abbott claimed. If the Negro could not get them voluntarily then "go to the courts and

⁴⁰"Mr. George A. Wilson," Chicago Defender, June 4, 1910, p. 1.

fight for them."⁴¹ The paper advised every member of the race to stand together until the color-line was broken.

In championing other cases though, Abbott revealed some of his own prejudices. The Defender came down hard on the State Department for not offering a Cincinnati Negro a consular post even though he had placed sixth in the entrance exam. Because the first five examinees were accepted, the paper felt it was a clear case of racial discrimination. There were no nationalities mentioned in the article, but the paper claimed that Negroes were always made to take a "back seat" to Japanese, Chinese, and Filipinos. The Defender stated that if Negroes did not do something, they would wake up one morning and find that "every white man and Chinaman will be kicking him about. . . ."⁴² At times Abbott had little sympathy for nationalities subject to many of the same injustices as the Negro.

Another inconsistency in the policy of equal rights is revealed in the attack on the major newspapers of Chicago. Every time a crime was committed by a Negro the newspapers, the Defender claimed, would print "colored" or "Negro" next to the name. The press never did the same for whites, Irish, or Polish. This tended to give the impression that blacks

⁴¹"Hon. E. H. Morris Win Color-Line Suit Against Colonial Theater," Chicago Defender, June 11, 1910, p. 1.

⁴²"Consular Service Bars Colored Man," Chicago Defender, Feb. 19, 1910, p. 1.

were a very criminal group.⁴³ Abbott would seem to have had a valid complaint. But if he had ever studied his own paper, he would have found the exact same policy being followed except with "white" and "Irish" designations. Abbott chose not to consider his own prejudices, only those of others.

These inconsistencies do detract from Robert Abbott's humanitarian stature and rightly so. He was not fighting against all injustices, merely those against the Negro. It can correctly be said that he was not fighting for all Negroes either. For those of his race who were satisfied with shabby treatment, Abbott believed they deserved what they received. He sought to help only those who desired aid and would help themselves. Those too ignorant to know better were to be left to serve the whites and suffer accordingly.⁴⁴

Up until 1912 the Defender publicized discrimination occurring mostly in Chicago and a few other local areas. Indeed, there was enough there to occupy its time fully. But from 1912 onward the Defender gradually gave more emphasis to the nationwide fight for civil rights. This shift demonstrates in part a realization that the Defender was no longer merely a local paper but one with national distribution. Its readers were interested in the racial situation of Negroes throughout the United States. More importantly, the Defender

⁴³"Newspaper Injustice to the Negro," Chicago Defender, Aug. 19, 1911, p. 1.

⁴⁴For the best expression of this attitude read the paper's defense of the Illinois civil rights law in an editorial, Feb. 11, 1911, p. 1.

indicated a recognition that discrimination and abuse of civil rights were more than a local or state problem but one greatly attributable to a federal government less than willing to exercise its powers in defense of the Negro.

The Wilson Administration demonstrated just how unwilling the government could be. Abbott had not supported Wilson's candidacy and had even warned about dire consequences should a Democrat be placed in the White House. Yet, when the election was over and the results in, the paper assumed an optimistic position concerning Woodrow Wilson's future policies toward the Negro.⁴⁵ Actually there was really nothing else for it to do. No one knew exactly what direction the new administration would take, and it certainly could do no harm to voice hopes which might give Wilson some idea as to what the Negro expected.

This optimistic wait-and-see policy lasted only until mid-year 1913. It then became evident that Wilson was in no way an advocate of Negro rights. In fact, his views on this subject were quite conservative. Because he felt it would take many decades before the animosities toward the Negro were dissolved, Wilson believed the blacks should be given only sympathetic aid in helping themselves, and such aid should come only when it would not increase the already deep prejudices of the southern whites. With this reasoning Wilson allowed segregation to be practiced in many government

⁴⁵Editorial, "In the Saddle," Chicago Defender, Nov. 9, 1912, p. 4.

departments and even condoned the dismissal of many Negro government workers. If it would pacify the southerners and allow his reforms to be enacted, Wilson felt the blacks would be further aided in the long run.⁴⁶

Abbott responded with all the force he could muster. In true Defender style he struck out against both blacks and whites. "Cowards," the paper claimed, were working for the government. Those hundreds of Negroes being discriminated against in the Treasury and Post Office Departments were not putting up a big enough protest. No wonder few whites objected to the separation of the races when the blacks themselves allowed it to go on with little voice raised.⁴⁷

As for Wilson himself, the paper lumped him into a category with racists like James K. Vardaman and Cole Blease. Still, the editorial page showed that it was not completely certain about Wilson's true motivations in allowing the segregation to continue in the various departments.

Our esteemed President is either in the hands of his enemies or his friends. In either case the result is the same, as far as his attitude toward the colored race is concerned.⁴⁸

The Defender wanted to hear something from the President himself, to hear his own explanation. Such was not forthcoming.

⁴⁶Henry Blumenthal, "Woodrow Wilson and the Race Question," Journal of Negro History, XLVIII (Jan., 1963), 5-9.

⁴⁷"5,000 Colored Cowards Work for the Government at Capitol," Chicago Defender, Aug. 9, 1913, p. 1.

⁴⁸Editorial, "Vardaman-Bleese-Wilson Policy," Chicago Defender, Feb. 7, 1914, p. 8.

Although Wilson never publicly voiced disapproval of the discrimination within his administration, the liberal, white segments in the North forced him to curb some of the more blatant acts. With time segregation was rooted out of many departments and even the Treasury Department abolished some of its harsher restrictions.⁴⁹ The Defender's attitude toward Wilson's racial policy remained cold, but after 1913 its attacks against the government were leveled less directly at him.

It was 1918 before the Defender found anything in Wilson's attitude to warrant praise. On the occasion of Wilson's speech against mob action on July 26 of that year, Abbott could not lavish enough praise on the President. Admitting Wilson's weakness in dealing with previous periods of violence, the Defender was ecstatic that the President had now finally condemned mob law. It only hoped he would continue to press against those who took the law into their own hands.⁵⁰

Indeed, mob action was prevalent during this period. It was the grossest attack on civil rights that a majority could inflict on a minority. Lynching of blacks in the South was a common occurrence. In the North riots occasionally broke out as did the one in Springfield, Illinois in 1908 and in Chicago in 1919. As long as racial crimes were condoned

⁴⁹ Arthur S. Link, Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1954), p. 66.

⁵⁰ Editorial, "Our President Has Spoken," Chicago Defender, Aug. 3, 1918, p. 16.

and racial passions smoldered, the blacks could never hope to recover their constitutional rights.

Articles about racial violence as perpetrated by whites were standard fare in the Defender. In some issues, especially in the first years of publication, such stories composed the bulk of the paper. Reporting these events certainly helped dramatize the plight of the Negro. They were vivid reminders to everyone that American society fostered and condoned a racist climate. But there was also a secondary reason for printing so much information on violence. It sold newspapers.

The following is a sample of some of the headlines used:

SOUTHERN WHITE GENTLEMAN
RAPES COLORED LADY;
IS KILLED BY HUSBAND

RACE MAN DIES FOR
RESENTING AS INSULT

100 NEGROES MURDERED
WEEKLY IN UNITED STATES
BY WHITE AMERICANS

200 BLACKS KILLED
AND MANY WOUNDED IN
RACE WAR IN TEXAS

GOV. SHOULD STOP DAILY LYNCHING

When the Mob Comes and You Must
Die Take At Least One With You

A frequent theme of many of these articles was the white man's lust for black women. This theme appeared over and over again until it almost seemed as if the Defender was trying to generate some form of repercussion on its own. Often the descriptions of the violence were so written as to inflame the reader with a desire for revenge.⁵¹

Indeed, Abbott himself had expressed fear lest some blacks lose all hope and turn solely to violence. He wrote that if the Negro ever lost faith in his own efforts to achieve equal status, it would:

. . . create a white hand anarchist among a certain obsolete element of the colored race who would then have nothing to hope for but pride in meeting death even as an assassin. If the souls of black men ever become to be totally the white man's burden, then the black race will have no fear in life, but bravery, and therefore no need of pity.⁵²

Why Abbott never saw the danger in his own inflammatory journalism is an intriguing question. Perhaps he felt he was merely reporting the news as it happened. Yet, nearly every front page article was editorialized to some extent. Perhaps he felt there was really no chance of the Negro losing hope.

⁵¹There are many examples of this type of article, but for one of the most vivid see: "Lynching Must Be Stopped With Blood," Chicago Defender, March 4, 1916, p. 1.

⁵²Editorial, Chicago Defender, May 21, 1910, p. 1.

But if that was the case, why should he exhibit his own fear of just such an occurrence? Robert S. Abbott was a complex man. Perhaps no one really understood his motives except himself.

When a riot broke out in Chicago on July 27, 1919, Abbott saw at first hand just how inflammatory the racial climate had become. The Defender had always considered Chicago to have better than average race relations, but as the days of looting and fighting continued, the paper was struck by the intense hatred on all sides. Much to its discredit the Defender carried grisly stories of black women and children being killed and injured. The content of these articles, whether true or not, could only have further incensed the black rioters.⁵³ As the rioting continued Abbott realized that such reporting was only prolonging mob action. Reversing himself, he had 30,000 handbills run off pleading with the people to stay in their homes and refrain from taking part in the disturbances.⁵⁴

What most troubled the paper was the cause of the riot. Mass violence had always occurred outside Chicago and usually committed by whites. Faced now with an ever explosive environment in its own city, the Defender seemed a bit perplexed. Never in the past had there been reported any real seeds for such an outbreak of violence in Chicago, and the Defender,

⁵³See the front page of the Defender for Aug. 2, 1919.

⁵⁴Ottley, Lonely Warrior, pp. 182-84.

sincerely or not, did not feel the blame lay with the city's own race relations. Admitting that Chicago citizens were responsible for the spark setting off the riot, the Defender placed the primary blame on the race poison put out by the white South.⁵⁵ The South had always been the most prominent villain and the one most often attacked by the paper. Abbott now seemed unable to face the fact that race problems were growing in the North as well as the South. One thing for certain was demonstrated in the Chicago riot. Intense passions on both sides would help block the Negro's drive toward equality in civil rights for many years to come.

While the struggle was continuing in defense of constitutional rights, the Defender was also pushing for equality on the other level by helping the individual elevate himself. Legal guarantees of equality were a necessity, but they could do nothing more than open the doors. The real test was whether the race could take advantage of the opportunities being offered.

We have had faith, we have extended charity and now our only hope and salvation lies with ourselves. The masses must be educated, we must acquire wealth, and above all we must stick together as a unit.⁵⁶

These were the three main elements stressed by the paper throughout all its efforts toward economic and social equality.

Making a fortune had been an obsession with Abbott, for

⁵⁵ Editorial, "Another Angle of the Trouble," Chicago Defender, Sept. 6, 1919, p. 12.

⁵⁶ Editorial, Chicago Defender, Feb. 15, 1913, p. 4.

it was the only way he knew to gain respect as a black man. But likewise Abbott understood that if the Negro was to ever rise out of poverty, it would have to come through better jobs. A larger paycheck meant the difference between a life of hopelessness and a life of hopefulness. No one knew that better than Abbott who experienced both lives.

If Negroes were to ever aspire to better jobs, education was essential, and the Defender never let its readers lose sight of that important point. The paper was proud of Chicago's school system. Whenever the opportunity arose, the paper encouraged its readers to exhibit their pride in education. Community effort was necessary in maintaining a proper atmosphere conducive for learning.

One of the problems which annoyed Abbott was the habit of allowing children to quit school on the pretext of adding to the family income. Any mother or father placing immediate family gain ahead of their child's welfare was merely chaining their children to jobs with little future. A high school diploma, the Defender maintained, was worth more than any small amount earned as a child laborer. That diploma meant more than acquisition of knowledge; it was a symbol of success. It demonstrated that the person had met and conquered one of life's hard trials.⁵⁷

For those who would continue their education past high school, the Defender urged them on. Since his graduation

⁵⁷"1,000 Children Out of School," Chicago Defender, Sept. 9, 1911, p. 1.

from Hampton Institute, Abbott continued to have a high regard for industrial training. It was Abbott's belief that for the race as a whole it was essential to stress trade school training over the more academic pursuits. In this regard, Abbott and Booker T. Washington were in complete agreement. Given the stage of development of the Negro, both felt it would be putting the cart before the horse to talk about university degrees.⁵⁸ To that end the Defender continually emphasized the training offered at schools such as Hampton and Tuskegee.

The Defender itself tried to educate the people on several topics. One was the handling of their savings. The practice followed by many blacks of hiding their money in the home was greatly discouraged. The paper urged everyone to deposit their savings in banks.⁵⁹ Another lesson stressed was that poor people should not spend their money foolishly.

It is the quality of our people that they strive to imitate, but their imitations are not genuine in character or living anymore than they are in coins. They are easily recognized and as hard to pass. Let us give more attention to a status which our means justify and which insures growth and honesty and forget baneful strivings after craven images of pretense and luxuries, which only keep us in the midst of debt and indecency.⁶⁰

Abbott felt there was great potential in Chicago's Negro neighborhood for new businesses of all kinds. Yet, acquisition of enough capital to finance such enterprises was a difficult

⁵⁸Lockhard, "Robert S. Abbott," p. 131.

⁵⁹"Which? The Bank or the Stocking Leg?" Chicago Defender, Jan. 29, 1910, p. 1.

⁶⁰Editorial, "Craven Images," Chicago Defender, May 3, 1913, p.4.

task. The paper criticized severely the white financial institutions for not being more receptive to requests for loans from blacks. When these banks did loan money, the paper claimed that either the rate of interest was higher than that for whites or the person could not receive what the value of his collateral warranted. When the Negro owned Northern Assets Realization Company opened in Chicago, the Defender recommended it to the entire black population. Finally, declared Abbott, blacks would benefit blacks.⁶¹

Still, being able to acquire needed capital did not guarantee a successful concern. Proper methods had to be employed to attract customers and keep them satisfied. Some Negro businesses, the Defender claimed, had no idea what ingredients went in to make a business. Many owners felt that just because they were black they should get the patronage of the Negroes in the neighborhood. Such was not the fact, and the Defender told how blacks would rather shop at white establishments in order to take advantage of better service and products. If Negro businesses were to survive they would have to improve and perfect their method of operation.⁶²

While the Defender continued to promote and encourage private business, its principal concern remained the welfare of the bulk of the city's Negro population. For that reason

⁶¹"When You Need Money," Chicago Defender, Jan. 29, 1910, p. 1.

⁶²"Eliminate Mock Businessman," Chicago Defender, May 10, 1913, p. 1.

the Defender emphasized the need for more better paying jobs for blacks. One of the targets for this appeal was the unions. The building trades unions of Chicago and Gary denied any attempt at discrimination, but the paper termed this denial as "hypocrisy." The Defender stated that the unions boasted of good working conditions for the Negro in the North, yet refused to grant union membership to competently trained blacks. Why, the paper asked, should unions criticize white southerners for the same practices they themselves were imposing on skilled Negroes? If the unions would only live up to their word, it would give the race a great boost economically.⁶³

The struggle with the unions was a hard one, for the paper was up against a determined adversary. The AFL, the largest labor organization, was a federation with only limited control over the individual unions and locals. Samuel Gompers would have accepted the Negro as an equal partner in the labor movement had he not been confronted with strong opposition. Rather than face the threat of the affiliated unions withdrawing from the federation, Gompers felt it was better to organize the Negroes into separate unions. Still, the labor movement largely neglected the Negro and excluded him from many jobs.⁶⁴

⁶³"The Unions vs. The Negro," Chicago Defender, March 25, 1911, p. 1.

⁶⁴Philip Taft, Organized Labor in American History (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1964), pp. 667-70.

In his fight with the unions, Abbott used an argument which struck at the heart of organized labor. Editorial after editorial claimed the unions were blind to their own best interests by not allowing blacks equal participation. If the unions did not open their doors, the Negro would be forced into becoming the enemy of organized labor and a friend of business. There would be no other choice. The Defender stated it did not want its people working for lower wages or strike-breaking, but there was no other alternative unless labor relented from its policy of exclusion.⁶⁵

The problem over union acceptance of Negroes was further aggravated by the influx of southern Negroes into the North. In this, Abbott and the Defender took a direct lead. The paper had long urged blacks to journey northward and escape the tyranny imposed upon them in the South. By 1916 economic conditions provided additional reasons for leaving. Negroes remained in a depressed state in the South while the North began to cry out for labor. The decline in immigration and the increased production brought on by the war in Europe meant industry would go to great lengths to obtain workers. Labor agents combed the South for anyone who would leave and work in the North.⁶⁶

The part played by Abbott and the Defender in aiding this move was quite large. The paper had a substantial

⁶⁵Editorial, "The Labor Market," Chicago Defender, Sept. 30, 1916, p. 12.

⁶⁶Myrdal, American Dilemma, pp. 193-96.

circulation throughout the South, and blacks there placed great faith in what it said. Starting in 1916 Abbott made a determined effort to encourage Negroes to leave their homes. Every argument was used.⁶⁷ In 1917 Abbott created a formal campaign called the "Great Northern Drive." Clubs were organized in the South and special rates negotiated with the railroads. Abbott also set about soliciting the help of churches and other organizations in Chicago to aid the people in finding housing and work once they reached the city. May 15, 1917 was the official kick-off day.⁶⁸

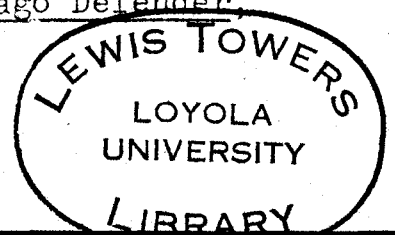
The campaign was fully supported by the printing press. Fears the Negro might have in coming to live in a northern city were countered by stories of success. A deliberate attempt was also made to convince blacks that the climate of the North was really not as bad as the southern whites led them to believe. One was just as likely to freeze to death in the South as in the North, the paper exclaimed.⁶⁹

The outcome of this general move North as abetted by the Defender was startling. Population in the large northern cities expanded greatly in the latter part of the decade. Chicago became one of the major recipients merely because the railroad lines running through Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee,

⁶⁷For one of the most ardent pleas, see the editorial, "Farewell, Dixie Land," Chicago Defender, Oct. 7, 1916, p. 12.

⁶⁸Ottley, Lonely Warrior, pp. 160-61.

⁶⁹"Freezing to Death in the South," Chicago Defender, Feb. 24, 1918, p. 1.



Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi fed into the city.⁷⁰

Indeed, as previously noted, the number of blacks increased almost 150 per cent in Chicago during the ten-year period from 1910 to 1920.

An influx of thousands of Negroes from a mostly rural background was bound to create problems. If it ever occurred to Abbott that the migration he encouraged would also lead to increased tensions between the races, he never expressed it publicly. His only hope was to further the advance of his people by having them move from a climate of terror to one of relaxed racial harmony. What he failed to realize was the underlying animosity of the whites in the city toward a group threatening to drive them from both home and job. Unionists were greatly alarmed at the mass of unorganized black workers. Hostility was increased when large numbers of Negroes were employed as strikebreakers in many of the post-war labor disputes. This combined with the overflow of Negroes into traditional white living areas produced much of the tension behind disturbances such as the Chicago riot.⁷¹

Abbott seemed unable to comprehend that his most ambitious effort to improve the economic and social status of the Negro had also helped produce violent events previously limited almost totally to the South. The North had always represented somewhat of a haven for him; a place where the

⁷⁰Ottley, Lonely Warrior, p. 161.

⁷¹Myrdal, American Dilemma, p. 568.

Negro could better work out his future in accord with his own ability. It was to make his fortune that Abbott himself had come to Chicago. Now the facts showed there was as much work to be done in the home of the Defender as there was anyplace else.

CHAPTER IV

POLITICS AND THE PRINTED PAGE

The Defender involved itself in domestic politics only when it considered the Negro directly affected and only when it felt the paper might carry some weight. Day-to-day political events on any level were not generally reported unless their importance was of significant distinction to the race. This policy was in line with the make up and size of the Defender. It was strictly a small Negro weekly carrying news and editorials of interest to a small segment of the market.

Of prime political interest were the local and state elections. Whenever held, the paper gave them extensive coverage. Most of the articles urged all eligible blacks to exercise their right of franchise. As practiced many times in regards to other issues, the theme of these pleas was for Negroes to "wake up" and take advantage of the opportunities available.

Hundreds of you never go near the polls, because you don't think it is of much consequence. For the sake of the race . . . arouse from your slumber and realize that on your shoulders rests a responsibility as a man.⁷²

Although this theme characterized much of the coverage of elections, the Defender did not hesitate to endorse men

⁷²Editorial, Chicago Defender, Jan. 29, 1910, p. 1.

it felt worthy of election. In expressing a choice between the many candidates, the signal factor was the man's stand on race issues. Still, party affiliation was important, and it weighed heavily. Almost all the Negroes running for local and state offices throughout the period were Republican, but the paper did recommend to the voter a few Democrats who supported equal rights.⁷³

The most intense campaign waged by the Defender was the attempt to elect the first Negro alderman in Chicago history. The campaign in the Second Ward began in early 1914 with the paper actively supporting a black candidate. Party affiliations were forgotten for the moment because the two major parties both put up white candidates. The Defender saw no reason why a black could not represent black people better than a white man. Besides, the Republicans felt they owned the Second Ward.

Will you not show your race loyalty? Will you not battle with your vote to throw off such masters? A member of the race can do greater work for the Second Ward and the majority of the voters than any of the candidates in the field.⁷⁴

The outcome of the election was not to the paper's satisfaction — the white Republican won. There was much bitterness when the results of the vote were reported, but it was not without some hope for the future. Many Negroes had at

⁷³For a typical endorsement of candidates see especially the issues of April 6, 1912 and Nov. 2, 1912.

⁷⁴"Is the Second Ward a Plantation?" Chicago Defender, April 4, 1914, p. 1.

least shown their independence from the whites.⁷⁵

When elections came around the next year everything was again in readiness. This time three black hopefuls sought to win the Republican nomination. The Defender cautioned Negroes not to split their vote lest they deliver the nomination to a white.⁷⁶ The candidate supported by the paper was defeated in the primary by Oscar DePriest. Quickly switching its endorsement to the winner, the Defender helped promote his victory in April. Oscar DePriest became the first Negro to sit in the city council of Chicago.⁷⁷

While in office DePriest was an avid follower of Mayor "Big" Bill Thompson. It was through DePriest that Mayor Thompson hired numerous blacks for jobs with the city.⁷⁸ Because of this, the Defender gave Big Bill its highest praise. "He has been likened to the immortal Lincoln, a compliment he justly deserves."⁷⁹ Mayor Thompson became one of the few white politicians the Defender actively and enthusiastically supported from one term to the next. Even when the mayor was under investigation for corruption, the Defender claimed it

⁷⁵"Griffen Defeated in Unfair Fight," Chicago Defender, April 11, 1914, p. 1.

⁷⁶Editorial, "A Man to Lead Us," Chicago Defender, Jan. 30, 1915, p. 12.

⁷⁷Editorial, "For Alderman, Oscar DePriest," Chicago Defender, Feb. 27, 1915, p. 12.

⁷⁸Lloyd Wendt and Herman Kogan, Big Bill of Chicago (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1953), p. 147.

⁷⁹Editorial, "Another Lincoln," Chicago Defender, Sept. 25, 1915, p. 12.

was merely an attempt to discredit him because of his high regard for the Negro.⁸⁰ Thompson was instrumental in helping blacks win a toe hold in city employment. After that, he could do no wrong.

On a statewide level the Defender was primarily interested in guarding against any attempt to destroy Illinois' civil rights law. This was the major campaign issue of all the black and white candidates endorsed for offices. For example, the paper claimed that incumbent state legislator, Dr. Lane, helped prevent eight different bills from being passed whose object was the separation of the races.⁸¹ Republican Governor Charles S. Deneen's 1912 reelection was recommended because his "fearless" defense of Negro rights had advanced the race in Illinois.⁸² Four years later, Frank O. Lowden was being touted as the best choice in the gubernatorial race. His previous sponsorship of progressive legislation and steadfast stand on civil rights, the paper claimed, was of paramount importance to Illinois blacks.⁸³

Besides election politics the Defender championed other causes but none as vigorously as two which have almost become

⁸⁰ Editorial, "Mayor Thompson Stands Pat," Chicago Defender, April 15, 1916, p. 16.

⁸¹ "Keep a Colored Man in Legislature," Chicago Defender, March 2, 1912, p. 1.

⁸² "Deneen Loves Chicago, Chicago Loves Deneen," Chicago Defender, March 30, 1912, p. 1.

⁸³ Editorial, "For Governor, Col. Frank O. Lowden," Chicago Defender, Sept. 2, 1916, p. 16.

synonymous with the decade — women's suffrage and prohibition. The campaign for women's suffrage had a brief but hardy life. Ever since the 1890's Illinois women have had the right to vote for a limited number of offices in town and city elections. By the beginning of the decade there was a concerted drive to expand these rights. In many articles and editorials the Defender avidly supported the effort. Illinois was a progressive state and needed the aid of thousands of women voters to keep it on a progressive course.⁸⁴ After the Illinois General Assembly voted in June of 1913 to grant women the right to vote for presidential electors and certain township, county, and state offices,⁸⁵ the Defender rarely mentioned women's suffrage again. No national importance was attached to the issue, and the paper appeared relatively unconcerned about how women fared in the rest of the nation.

Prohibition too was considered more of a local topic than a national one. Abbott was dead set against all forms of alcohol. Using the pages of his newspaper, he accused liquor of being responsible not only for prostitution but for causing children to be born "epileptic, insane, idiotic, deformed, or defective." "The liquor traffic is responsible for three-fourths of the crime, vice, and misery of this country."⁸⁶

⁸⁴Editorial, "Our Women," Chicago Defender, June 12, 1913, p. 8.

⁸⁵Laws of the State of Illinois, Forty-Eight General Assembly (Springfield: Illinois State Journal Co., 1913), p. 333.

⁸⁶Editorial, "Does Drinking Pay?" Chicago Defender, Sept. 11, 1915, p. 12.

In every article or editorial of this kind, Abbott pressed for a vote on prohibition by the state legislature. It was one subject on which he never grew tired of writing.

Coverage of political events on the national level was briefer than on the local and state level. Again elections held the most attention while the day-to-day affairs of the two administrations and the political parties drew less mention. Several favorable comments were made concerning President Taft and his consultation with high Negro appointees on lynching and Jim Crow rules, but the paper was puzzled as to the ultimate direction Taft would take on these issues.⁸⁷ Taft did come under general criticism though when he recommended the South to the Negro. The President was quoted as saying the South, with its growing prosperity, would be better able to solve the race question than those areas which knew little of the problem.⁸⁸ The South represented all the evils of racial injustice to Abbott, and praise of that area would never win a favorable comment from him. As for Woodrow Wilson, outside of the segregation in his administration, the Defender gave little note of his legislative proposals and reforms.

When the policies of the Republican party were discussed, the Defender's attitude before the 1912 election was a best skeptical. It was unsure of the party's position in regards

⁸⁷"Pres. Taft on Mob Rule," Chicago Defender, Jan. 27, 1912, p. 1.

⁸⁸"Taft Commends Negro to South," Chicago Defender, March 19, 1910, p. 1.

to the Negro. Showing its obvious displeasure at broken promises of better jobs and increased Negro patronage, the paper printed several articles by disenchanted Republicans urging blacks to cast a more independent vote. These men claimed the Negro owed the party nothing, for their debt had been repaid many times over.⁸⁹

Abbott continued to press this issue all through 1910 and 1911. Such articles were clearly meant as a warning to the Republicans that Negroes wanted results not promises. Blacks were tired of being merely a campaign issue. Abbott felt the northern Negro bloc had been taken for granted by the top party politicians. Only by threatening an independent stand might Negroes win concrete assurances of action.

If the Defender registered caution regarding the Republicans in 1911, this attitude was quickly changed to one of hope in 1912. The paper wanted absolutely nothing to do with a split in the party ranks, but if one was inevitable, the Defender would not be one to sit on the fence. As early as April, Abbott showed which way he was leaning in the anticipated battle. In a direct comparison, the front page heralded that Taft as Secretary of War under President Roosevelt had almost broken with his chief over the order discharging the Negro soldiers during the Brownsville affair. Unlike Roosevelt, Taft felt the order was unjust. Yet, Taft had been compelled to issue the order. What was worse,

⁸⁹See either the issues of April 30, 1910 or Sept. 17, 1910 for the strongest appeals to independent voting.

declared the Defender, was that Roosevelt had played politics with the order by delaying its issuance until after the 1906 fall elections. Thus Roosevelt was cautious lest he lose the Negro vote.⁹⁰

Abbott laid it on the line; he was against Roosevelt's nomination. As for all the earlier talk about independent voting, when it came down to a choice the paper was staunchly Republican. After the Democratic National Convention and throughout the entire campaign, the Democrats and Wilson were given a secondary role compared to the real battle (as the Defender saw it) between Taft and Roosevelt.

When Wilson's candidacy was mentioned at all, it was invariably linked with any one of three things: economic depression, Southern disfranchisement, or Roosevelt in an "unholy" alliance to defeat Taft. "Professor Wilson, whom Roosevelt is trying to elect President of the United States, is the advance agent of business depression."⁹¹ "A vote for Wilson is a vote for Tillman, Vardaman, and Ollie James."⁹² This was typical of the attack on the Democrats, but even these were few and far between.

The big guns were saved for Roosevelt. Abbott seems to have assumed that most Negroes would at least stay within the

⁹⁰"Rumor Arises in Presidential Fight," Chicago Defender, April 27, 1912, p. 1.

⁹¹"Republican Party and Prosperity Go Hand in Hand," Chicago Defender, Sept. 28, 1912, p. 1.

⁹²"Moosers Allies of Democrats," Chicago Defender, Nov. 2, 1912, p. 1.

confines of what used to be the Republican party. He wanted to make certain they did not stray into the Progressive camp. The drift of Abbott's campaign was evident early. On the paper's front page for August 10, the Progressive party's nominees were announced — in a two-inch column. Across the page a big article played up a reception Taft had given in which Negroes mixed freely with the white dignitaries.

If Taft stood for equality and integration, then Roosevelt stood for everything that would lower the Negro back into slavery. It is not difficult to see why Abbott could have so much fear of Roosevelt and the Progressive party. First, Robert Abbott was a convinced, life-long Republican.⁹³ He could flirt with side issues like independent voting, but his heart lay with the party of Reconstruction. While quick to warn of black antipathy toward lukewarm party policies concerning civil rights, Abbott could not bring himself to break with the party that freed the slaves.

Second, Roosevelt and the Progressive party made it clear to all that in the South it was to be a white man's party. Advisers had warned Roosevelt early to forget the southern Negro if he had any hopes of making inroads into the southern Democracy. The issue came to a head at the national convention when black and white delegates from the South challenged each other's credentials. The party policy was definite. All Negro delegates from the South were excluded.

⁹³Lockhard, "Robert S. Abbott," p. 128.

Although Negro delegates from the North were admitted, Roosevelt and the party rejected a Negro rights plank in the platform. On the question of race, the Progressives had made their stand.⁹⁴

Third, the Defender was frightened by three of the issues championed by the Progressives: Initiative, Referendum, and Recall. For Abbott and the Defender, these three spelled nothing but gloom for the Negro cause. The problem with each was that it was too democratic! With blacks a minority living among the white majority, the Defender was frightened lest the majority limit the minority. Who was to protect the Negro if local government became ever more powerful?

In a strongly worded editorial entitled "To Your Tents, O Israel," Abbott lashed out at Roosevelt and the Progressives. The Initiative, Referendum, and Recall would finish the disfranchisement begun in the South, and it was all due to Roosevelt and his "demagogic" campaign.

Out in the broad light of day and in the courts where publicity obtains, the Negro has a chance for justice, but under the Initiative, Referendum, and Recall, the civil rights of the Negro will be decided in the silence and seclusion of the voting booth, where his enemies may stab him in the back, and none be the wiser, because they will be swallowed up in that concrete majority that Roosevelt likes to call 'the people.'

If the enemy of the race would disfranchise or Jim Crow the Negro in northern states they would simply put the machinery of the Initiative into operation, and then go into the booth and vote for it. If the Negro should appeal to the courts and were successful in securing a decision in their favor, their enemies would

⁹⁴ Arthur S. Link, "The Negro as a Factor in the Campaign of 1912," Journal of Negro History, XXXII (Jan., 1947), 93-96.

need only to apply the Recall, and have not only the decision reversed, but the judge or judges who found it discharged.⁹⁵

This editorial so pleased the National Republican Campaign Committee that it placed an order for 100,000 pamphlets containing the editorial.⁹⁶

The Defender also ran weekly columns written by the Assistant Director of Publicity for the Republican National Committee. Typical of these was one claiming the Progressive National Committeeman from Illinois, a supposed confidant and adviser to Roosevelt, had openly threatened disfranchisement of northern Negroes through the joint forces of the Bull Moose and Democratic partices.⁹⁷

This was the Defender's campaign to deliver a solid Negro vote to the Republicans. It was largely a negative effort, for the stress was placed on knocking Roosevelt and Wilson down rather than building Taft up. Most Negroes did stay within the party, but Wilson emerged the winner. Abbott did not take the defeat easily — not a word was mentioned about the election results in the Defender. It carried its grief in conspicuous silence.

Nothing would quite duplicate the intense feeling generated in the pages of the Defender by the Wilson-Taft-Roosevelt

⁹⁵ Editorial, "To Your Tents,) Israel," Chicago Defender, Sept. 7, 1912, p. 4.

⁹⁶ See the Defender's Sept. 14, 1912 issue, p. 1.

⁹⁷ "Progressive Party Threatens to Disfranchisement the Negro in the North," Chicago Defender, Oct. 12, 1912, p. 1.

battle. In comparison, the one in 1916 was a mere shadow of 1912. Four years of Wilson had given the paper a shell shock attitude toward the approaching election. So befuddled was it that in April of 1916 the Defender was even advocating the nomination of Theodore Roosevelt as the Republican standard bearer. The blackguard of 1912 now seemed the only man available who possessed the strength and appeal to defeat Wilson.⁹⁸ When Charles Evans Hughes received the nod, he was supported but with only a limited effort. It was as if the Defender had lost all hope of defeating Wilson and his host of southern cohorts.

The 1920 election revived some of the old campaign spirit in the paper. Early in the year it declared itself an independent newspaper and stated it would examine all candidates carefully before giving any endorsement.⁹⁹ Despite this rather pious declaration, the Defender could not refrain from speculating on who the Republican nominee would be. When the Republicans named Warren G. Harding, it quickly endorsed him.¹⁰⁰ As for examining all candidates thoroughly, the paper did not even wait to see who the Democrats would choose.

Harding's speeches were followed much more closely than Hughes's ever were. Even Harding's decision to make a

⁹⁸Editorial, "Occupying the White House," Chicago Defender, April 22, 1916, p. 12.

⁹⁹Editorial, "Presidential Possibilities," Chicago Defender, March 27, 1920, p. 16.

¹⁰⁰Editorial, "Warren G. Harding," Chicago Defender, June 19, 1920, p. 16.

front porch campaign was agreed with wholeheartedly.¹⁰¹ The contents of his speeches, the Defender thought, "stamped him as a statesman of high rank."¹⁰² It felt he spoke out sufficiently against lynching and for the enforcement of the Fifteenth and Eighteenth Amendments. The only point on which it disagreed with the Republican candidate was his calling for "sympathy and aid" for the Negro. That was exactly what Abbott did not want. "All we ask and insist upon is to have the same rights and opportunities accorded other American citizens, without distinction or discrimination based upon race or color."¹⁰³ This statement echoes what the paper had long declared. It desired only equal treatment. The rest was up to the individual.

After Harding's victory the Defender made certain its readers would not lose sight of the goals for the new administration. Negroes had played a large role in the election, and now they should present their claims. Not in a "beggarly" fashion, Abbott advised, but in a forthright manner asking for a fulfillment of promises made and enforcement of constitutional rights.¹⁰⁴ There was hope for the future in 1920.

¹⁰¹ Editorial, "A Wise Decision," Chicago Defender, July, 1920, p. 16.

¹⁰² Editorial, "Harding's Speeches," Chicago Defender, Oct. 16, 1920, p. 16.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Editorial, "Our New Standard Bearers," Chicago Defender, Nov. 6, 1920, p. 16.

CHAPTER V

ON THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE

When it came to events outside the United States, Abbott rarely voiced an opinion unless the Negro was likely to be involved. But during the decade two international situations were of enough magnitude to cause continued interest by the Defender. They were the Mexican intervention and the World War.

The position of the Defender regarding intervention in Mexico was as confusing as the intervention itself. President Wilson's initial policy of non-recognition of Huerta's regime and support for the Constitutionalists drew a mixed reaction that was to be characteristic of the paper's attitude throughout the many months of controversy. If President Wilson was drifting into a war with Mexico, the Defender stated in early 1914, why should Negroes fight for a leader who allowed discrimination and Jim Crowism in government and elsewhere?¹⁰⁵ This same question was repeated more forcefully after the President ordered the occupation of Vera Cruz.

If Uncle Sam is so anxious to fight, why not take up the South, where they are lynching and burning men at the stake. Why plunge this country into a damnable war because a few sailors were arrested in Mexico, when in

¹⁰⁵"Why Fight for a Flag Whose Folds Do Not Protect?"
Chicago Defender, March 14, 1914, p. 1.

the first year of his reign President Wilson has stood by with his mouth closed along with the CHURCH OF GOD, laughing, as it were, at the writhings bodies of over 2,000 black skinned men, trying to make the world believe this is a GOD-FEARING NATION.¹⁰⁶

These statements would seem to indicate that the Defender wanted nothing to do with a policy of Mexican intervention. This was just not the case. Only one week after the "damnable war" statement was printed, the paper took an extraordinarily belligerent position. It in fact criticized Wilson for not having a large enough armed force to back him up. "The best way to insure peace is to be prepared for war." Summing up this new position, it declared, "If Huerta insists upon being thrashed soundly, Uncle Sam can and will accomodate him."¹⁰⁷

Subsequent editorials even advised those Negroes questioning whether to support the United States against Mexico to do so proudly in word and deed. Not forgetting that discrimination and ill treatment still abounded, the Defender nevertheless felt the Negro owed loyalty to country above all else. "So we wear the uniform of blue and fight shoulder to shoulder with our prejudiced, unjust neighbor against a common foe — 'tis best."¹⁰⁸

What explanation can be given for this apparent contradiction between condemning intervention and enthusiastically

¹⁰⁶ Editorial, "Nero Put to Shame," Chicago Defender, April 18, 1914, p. 12.

¹⁰⁷ Editorial, "Watchful Waiting vs. The Big Stick," Chicago Defender, April 25, 1914, p. 12.

¹⁰⁸ Editorial, "Wearing the Uniform of Blue," Chicago Defender, May 9, 1914, p. 12.

supporting it? It is impossible to know for certain what motives lay behind this swing back and forth. The explanation that seems most readily to fit the facts is that fighting for Negro rights in a time of international emergency was not the easiest feat to accomplish and still maintain a uniform philosophy. In fact it would seem to have produced an identity complex on the Defender. Abbott wanted to continue the fight against discrimination and Jim Crow laws in the South as one of the main goals of the paper. But this objective meant that the Defender would be in continuous disagreement with the national government which permitted these breaches of constitutional rights. Such disagreement was not a disturbing factor in peaceful times, but during periods of international stress the Defender did not want to appear either disloyal or as an internal element agitating against the unity of the nation. This conflict was compounded in the Mexican situation, for the blacks could identify with the weaker Mexicans confronted by an overbearing power out to teach "little brown brother" a lesson. Yet on the other hand, Abbott was also a zealous patriot proud of the Negro's role in building the nation into a world power capable of exercising its immense strength in world affairs. To resolve these contradictions Abbott took both sides, switching from one side to another. It certainly did not present a unified philosophy toward foreign affairs, but it at least expressed his point of view — both of them in fact.

The conflicts in editorial opinion continued through

1915 and on into 1916. One interesting change in attitude came during the debate within the administration on whether to recognize Carranza's de facto regime or to support "Pancho" Villa. The Defender was clearly in favor of Villa. He was of poor origin and represented the peon class fighting against the large landowners. This appealed to the owner of a newspaper struggling on behalf of the poor blacks against the white power centers. Villa's background was probably the main reason for supporting him, but the Defender also had another. In May, 1914 the paper ran an article claiming Villa was an American Negro who had fled the United States Army to seek better treatment in Mexico.¹⁰⁹ Whether Abbott actually believed this story or not is uncertain, but it helps explain his position towards Carranza's government.

While it looked as if President Wilson still favored Villa, the Defender agreed with his policy of consulting with Latin American powers. ". . . President Wilson in seeking the advice and council of our neighbors has shown the world that our intentions are the best and that we will adhere to the Monroe Doctrine."¹¹⁰ But in October when it seemed likely the United States would recognize Carranza as the de facto sovereign, the Defender changed its mind about consulting with other nations and switched to a warlike stand.

¹⁰⁹"Baltimore Minister Brother of General Villa, Mexican Leader," Chicago Defender, May 2, 1914, p. 1.

¹¹⁰Editorial, "To Oust Carranza," Chicago Defender, Aug., 14, 1915, p. 15.

Why it was necessary to call in neighboring powers and consult with them as to the best thing for the United States to do, shows a weakness that every true citizen resents. We are perfectly able to do our own thinking, likewise our own fighting.¹¹¹

Abbott's support of Villa ended inevitably when the Mexican general began his attacks on American citizens. If the Defender was now against Villa, it still found itself in conflict over whether to support the use of Negro troops in punitive expeditions across the border. The Tenth Cavalry Regiment, an all-Negro outfit, was one of the units sent by Wilson to apprehend Villa. Although proud of the black soldier's role, Abbott asked why a Negro should give his life to defend a country that would not defend the Negro in the South. Acknowledging the intense loyalty of the blacks, the paper only wanted to know why a Negro should commit so great a sacrifice.¹¹²

As the events unfolded in Mexico during 1916, the Defender found itself in the same situation it had been in two years earlier. Again, as in 1914, Abbott ultimately became the staunch supporter of American action. By May of 1916 the paper gave its own answer as to why the Negro should fight proudly for his country.

It might be asked why this unfaltering loyalty. Why aid a people who continually oppress you? First of all, we are fighting our own battles, only incidentally are we aiding the whites. It must be borne in mind that THIS

¹¹¹ Editorial, "Our Mexican Policy," Chicago Defender, Oct. 2, 1915, p. 12.

¹¹² Editorial, "Crossing the Border," Chicago Defender, April 1, 1916, p. 16.

IS OUR COUNTRY, no matter what the white man says or does, he is fighting for self-preservation the same as we are.¹¹³

This then was the paper's attitude toward an international conflict. Negroes were first of all Americans. If threatened by an outside force, they would help defend their country, the Negro's country. But implied in this statement is the thought that while helping the whites, the Negro would not forget the injustices done him and would continue to try to eliminate those practices whenever and wherever he could.

When it looked as if the United States might be drawn into the World War, the Defender assumed this same position. Earlier, right after the war began, the paper followed an editorial policy of neutrality. It stressed the warnings of the first presidents to not get involved in European wars, but it was also fearful that the national leaders would do so nevertheless.¹¹⁴ Even though it hated to see Europe in war, the Defender could envision a benefit for American Negroes. The flow of immigrants would be cut off thus eliminating their efforts to crowd blacks out of jobs.¹¹⁵ There was one other bit of pleasant news coming out of the war, and that was the acceptance as equals of black troops by fellow soldiers and civilians. Article after article showed pictures of black French troops sharing facilities with whites. The theme of

¹¹³Editorial, "First in Everything American," Chicago Defender, May 6, 1916, p. 12.

¹¹⁴Editorial, Chicago Defender, Aug. 22, 1914, p. 8.

¹¹⁵"European War Will Take Thousands of Immigrants from U.S.," Chicago Defender, Aug. 15, 1914, p. 1.

all the articles was the great difference between conditions in France and those in America.¹¹⁶

While following a policy of neutrality, the paper did not hesitate to promote a state of preparedness should events become threatening. Aggitating for the build up of American armed forces, Abbott demanded the United States build the largest navy in the world — "Power brings respect." As in most statements a racial argument could not be left out. Everything would be better, the paper claimed, if legislators would stop haggling over how to persecute the Negro and spend more time in deciding how to protect the country.¹¹⁷

As the campaign for preparedness heightened within the nation, it was joined by another nationalistic appeal. Nativism had never been part of the Defender. The Negro, always a prime target for racial prejudice, knew what it was like to feel the fury of "native" Americans. But as the nation recoiled from German sabotage and submarine warfare, the Defender itself mounted a mild nativist attack in its push for preparedness.

The only right principle is to prepare thoroughly or not at all. The only right principle is to avoid hitting, if possible to do so, but never under any circumstances to hit soft. To go to war a little, but not much, is the only absolutely certain way to insure disaster.

There is much speculation as to the part the black man would play in case this country went to war with

¹¹⁶For one of the most representative articles of this type, see: "French Women Embrace and Kiss Black Soldiers," Chicago Defender, Oct. 3, 1914, p. 1.

¹¹⁷Editorial, "Our War Strength," Chicago Defender, Jan. 9, 1915, p. 16.

some other nation, and yet to the reader of history there should be no question. Our record shows for itself. No hyphen ever adorned our name. As a matter of fact we can more truly be termed real Americans than ninety percent of those who claim that distinction.¹¹⁸

Under no circumstances did the Defender want the Negro to appear disloyal. Thus, it even went to the extreme position of denying the use of a hyphen and casting doubt on the loyalty of those who did.

After America's entry into the war, the Defender went all out in support of the military effort. It echoed all the standard slogans and vowed every black would do his part to crush autocracy and establish democracy throughout the world.¹¹⁹ The paper took particular care in commenting on a report in the German press which stated America was forming a black army just to keep whites from getting killed and to rid the country of Negroes. Anyone who believed such evil propaganda was being greatly misled, the editorial page ex-claimed. Blacks wanted to fight on equal terms with their white brothers because America was home to both. The war gave all Negroes another opportunity to demonstrate a brand of loyalty unexcelled by any other group throughout the entire history of the nation.¹²⁰

Full support of the war though did not mean the Negro

¹¹⁸ Editorial, "Hitting Soft," Chicago Defender, June 3, 1916, p. 16.

¹¹⁹ See the editorial, "Doing Our Bit," Oct. 20, 1917, for one of the most vigorous appeals for the war effort.

¹²⁰ Editorial, "Manufacturing Trouble," Chicago Defender, Jan. 5, 1918, p. 12.

would stand for any kind of blatant segregation of troops. The separate training facilities provided for whites and blacks were a big disappointment for the Defender, and it never missed a chance to speak out against them. Insisting that a "half loaf" would not be accepted, the paper wanted equal treatment for all men about to offer their lives in battle.¹²¹

Another case of discrimination the Defender railed against was the exclusion of Negro nurses from the Red Cross serving in Europe. There was no reason why black women could not give as much aid to the wounded as white women. Besides, black nurses were known to be competent in their work.¹²² When blacks were finally admitted into the Red Cross, the Defender wanted an explanation as to why different units were organized to separate the races. "Isn't one helping hand as good as another?"¹²³

Abbott was not able to have a correspondent in the war zone, but he printed every piece of news he could pertaining to the Negro's role in the war. Frequently, letters were reprinted from Chicago area soldiers telling of the different battles and how the various units were conducting themselves. The Eighth Illinois National Guard, an all-Negro unit from Chicago's South Side, was always in the news. Many of the

¹²¹For a typical editorial see: "Jim Crow Training Camp — No!" April 14, 1917, p. 12.

¹²²Editorial, "The Cross Black Nurses," Chicago Defender, June 15, 1918, p. 12.

¹²³Editorial, "Our Nurses in the War," Chicago Defender, July 20, 1918, p. 12.

Defender's regular readers had sons in that unit, and any news from it was given large front page headlines.

After the armistice was signed, the Defender was anxious to bring the men home and get back to more normal conditions. From the cessation of fighting until the end of the decade, the only other event of international proportions to be of much concern was the fight over the League of Nations. At first the paper objected to the proposed League for two reasons. First, the nations of the world had too many conflicting claims. Moreover, they were not even concerned with the equal rights of all nations. A league would only aggravate these problems and provoke more wars. Second, the United States had enough problems of its own without trying to solve those of other nations.¹²⁴ This rather narrow opinion of the League seemed to echo much of the isolationist sentiment of leading Republicans in the Senate.

Yet, this was not the opinion which was to prevail. Just a little over a month after it expressed a dislike for any organization involving the United States in world problems, the editorial page proclaimed its full support for the League. Why this complete about face? The only hint was an editorial responding to a Senate speech made by Senator James A. Reed of Missouri. He was against the League because the white races would be outvoted by the darker races.¹²⁵ The Defender

¹²⁴Editorial, "Let the 'U.S.' Mean Us," Chicago Defender, May 3, 1919, p. 12.

¹²⁵U.S., Congress, Senate, 66th Cong., 1st sess., May 26, 1919, Congressional Record, CI, 236-46.

apparently did not want to be on the side of anyone advocating such racist ideas. It now embraced everything it had earlier condemned.

Its ratification means an end to fratricidal strife for many years to come. It spells disarmament on a large scale and a curtailing in a vast degree of the enormous expenditures for military and naval purposes. This in itself will prove a priceless boon to many tax-burdened countries. Should the treaty fail of adoption the world will see a race in military preparations and in naval construction that will stagger the imagination.¹²⁶

The Defender was often inconsistent when it came to foreign affairs. Actually they were outside the realm of its interests of fighting for Negro rights and advancement on the domestic front. Whenever it got involved in foreign events the domestic issues got entangled also. In trying to be consistent with its main interests, the Defender was many times inconsistent on its other policies. Abbott's Defender is a perfect example of the difficulty in trying to fight two battles at once.

¹²⁶ Editorial, "The League of Nations and the Darker Races," June 7, 1919, p. 12.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The Defender and its owner and publisher, Robert S. Abbott, can not be separated. His policy was the paper's policy. This relationship was not changed until his death in 1940. From 1905 until 1940 the Defender was Robert Sengstacke Abbott. If it had weaknesses or shortcomings, they can be traced to the man. Likewise, the strengths and successes of the paper were also those of its owner. Actually, the Defender had both, weaknesses and strengths, shortcomings and successes.

At times Abbott did resemble Julius Rosenwald's description of a "monkey with a shotgun." The paper dealt in few subtleties, and Abbott was not one to ponder too long the different ramifications of his articles. Many of the Defender's stories were written with little proof of authenticity. Bias was more its trademark than objectivity. Fiery journalism had its place within the Negro reading market. Its public would doubtlessly have not responded to a more sophisticated and objective press.

Shortcomings there were, but it would not be fair to dwell solely on these. The Defender was a voice calling for reform and change in a nation where reform was fast becoming accepted by many as a national goal. Yet, the Negro had few

national figures to speak out against the grave abuses of the time. There was no strong leadership among the blacks. True, there were leaders like DuBois and Washington, but they divided the Negro almost as much as they united him. It would be many years before the Negro became a more cohesive group. Long before that time Abbott and the Defender were voicing problems and seeking solutions.

Abbott was an optimist or he could not have continued his work. He saw a brighter future for the blacks, but he also saw the stumbling blocks in their path. Nevertheless, it was this vision of the future that led him to seek ways to make it a reality. Promoting racial pride was the first means to that end. Nothing could be accomplished as long as the race had no unity of action. Secondly, the Defender sought to break down the official barriers erected by racial prejudice and tried to aid the people in taking advantage of those opportunities already open to the blacks. These goals were the heart of the Defender; they were reflected in everything else it did. When Abbott strayed away from his primary aims, it was only for brief periods of time. Politics and international events were of considerable importance at particular moments, but neither, with the exception of maybe local politics, had the immediate impact of the day-to-day struggle for unity and equality. These were the essentials.

In summation, Robert Abbott and his paper must be acknowledged as a powerful force in both Negro journalism and in Negro reform. Abbott helped set the stage for what was

to come. The Defender knew the problems of its people and attempted to find solutions the best way it knew how. At times it stumbled, but it never fell.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Mr. Henry C. Vander Voort has been read and approved by the director of the thesis. Furthermore, the final copies have been examined by the director and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content and form.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

October 7, 1978
Date

Ralph Eldin Minger
Signature of Adviser