The Role of the Black Press during the "Great Migration."

Between the years of 1916 and 1918 southern blacks began populating the urban centers of the north in a movement known as the "Great Migration." This movement was significant to the development of the black press, for it was during this period that the black press became a protest organ and rose to its greatest level of prominence and influence. Some newspapers encouraged the migration while others discouraged it. Considered to be the newspaper that revolutionized black journalism, the Chicago "Defende:" ran cartoons satirizing the pitiful conditions of blacks in the South and success stories were printed of southern blacks who had been successful in the North. It also counseled migrants on dress, sanitation, and behavior, and initiated fund drives for needy families. The conservative principles of Washington, D.C., were reflected in the content of the Norfolk/Tidewater "Journal and Guide." Its stance against migration was reflected in a series of articles, cartoons, and editorials that stressed the poor living conditions, racial discrimination, and false job hopes that existed in the North. The different stances of black newspapers concerning this migration reflect the diversity of a group of people striving for social and economic progress. End notes and a bibliography are appended.

(HOD)
The Role of the Black Press During the "Great Migration"

By

Felecia G. Jones
The University of Georgia

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"
The saga of black people in the United States is a unique, frustrating one. It began in 1619 when a Dutch man-of-war brought some 20 Africans to Jamestown, Virginia and sold them into slavery. Since that time, the experiences of black people have been interwoven with reneged promises of full citizenship rights. These experiences have been chronicled in the numerous black-oriented newspapers and periodicals that influenced and asserted the cause for full civil liberties for blacks. The period of time between 1916 and 1918 began a significant chapter in the black experience. For it was during this time that blacks started populating the urban centers of the north in a movement known as the "Great Migration."

This movement was also significant to the development of the black press. For it was during this period that the black press became a protest organ and rose to its greatest level of prominence and influence. It played an important role in the intensity of the migratory movement. Some newspapers encouraged it while others discouraged it.

This paper will focus on the role of the black press during this period. It will pay particular attention to two newspapers that had opposite stances on the migration: the Chicago Defender which encouraged it and the Norfolk Journal & Guide which discouraged it.

There will be overviews of the "Great Migration" and the black press and of the newspapers encouraging and
discouraging the movement. The sections focusing on the Chicago Defender and the Journal & Guide will review the establishment and development of those papers, the philosophies of their editor/publishers and the methods these newspapers used to influence this movement.

Overview of the Black Press and "Great Migration"

The development of the black press is a result of two interrelated trends: the rising tide of black protest and the increase of black literacy. The development of the black press can also be divided into the following stages: the period before Emancipation, the Reconstruction period, the World War I and II periods and the civil rights period. This overview will describe the black press' development through the World War I period which is the period that coincided with the "Great Migration."

The black newspapers before Emancipation protested slavery and were actually a "black branch of the Abolitionist propaganda organs of the North." The first black newspaper in the United States was Freedom's Journal, which was established in 1827 in New York City by John B. Russwurm and Samuel Cornish. Its slogan was, "We wish to plead our cause. Too long have others spoken for us." This newspaper was followed by some 24 journals. The most famous of them was the North Star, edited by Frederick Douglass. The name was later changed to Frederick Douglass' Paper. This newspaper
protested the slavery that existed in the South and the racial discrimination that existed in the North.5

After Emancipation, black newspapers toned down their protest fervor and adapted the conciliatory course of Booker T. Washington. Washington advocated that blacks try to "seek the friendship of whites"6 as a means of making progress. However, by the turn of the century, the protest function of the black press returned with the establishment in 1901 of William Monroe Trotter's, Boston Guardian.

The World War I period was an important one for the black press and the black experience. Despite the injustices committed against blacks, the black leaders and the black press encouraged the participation of blacks in the war.

The leaders were hoping that because the United States went to war "to make the world safe for democracy,"7 blacks participation in the war might yield a little of that democracy to them at home.

But in spite of the fact that some 400,0008 blacks were called to military service and made significant contributions to the Allied war effort,9 the injustices continued against blacks in the United States. The black press did not hesitate to make its readers aware of the hypocrisy of America's democratic principles. For example, the Houston Informer printed:

"...since THE BLACK MAN FOUGHT TO MAKE THE WORLD SAFE FOR DEMOCRACY, he now demands that AMERICA BE MADE AND MAINTAINED SAFE FOR BLACK AMERICANS."10
World War I not only made blacks more conscious of their civil liberties, but also made them aware of economic opportunities in different regions of the country. The outbreak of World War I caused a shortage of labor in the industries located in the urban centers of the North. The withdrawal of many white men from the labor force for military service along with pressure for increased production presented a need for black laborers. Because most of the black population was located in the South, agents from the northern industries went South to recruit blacks to fill the shortage of labor.

Meanwhile, the social and economic conditions in the South made the agents' offer of employment very appealing. The injustices against blacks were very pervasive. According to Emmett J. Scott in his study entitled, *Negro Migration During the War*, blacks distrusted the courts and had to depend on the influence of their aristocratic white friends. Scott writes:

"When a white man assaults a negro he is not punished. When a white man kills a negro he is usually freed... but the rule as laid down by the southern judge is usually that when a negro kills a white man, whether or not in self-defense, the negro must die."

In a petition presented to President Woodrow Wilson in 1917, it was stated that in the previous 31 years, "2,867 coloured men and women had been lynched by mobs without trial..."

Economically, the conditions in the South were unstable. In the three years preceding the War, the South experienced a
labor depression, extensive damages to the cotton crop and catastrophic floods. Because many Southern blacks depended on the land, these setbacks left many of them homeless and destitute.

Answers to a questionnaire distributed by W.E.B. DuBois revealed the black man's discontent with the living conditions in the South:

"The white man's monopoly of the land . . . have virtually reduced the negro to a position of industrial slavery. 'High rents and low wages are driving the negroes off the farms. The average negro . . . gets little more than the very mule he ploughs with . . . when it comes to food, the mule fares better than the negro.'

The migration of blacks began long before World War I. It actually began after the Civil War when rural blacks (like southern whites) began to move to the urban centers of the South. As early as 1880, black migrants began to show up in cities outside the South. The movement towards the North intensified in the 1890s; however, "it was the migration of blacks during World War I that shaped the distribution and character of the black population more profoundly than any previous demographic shifts." Between 1916 and 1918, approximately 500,000 blacks moved from southern to northern states.

The influence and development of the black press came to the forefront during this World War I/"Great Migration" period. A full generation of blacks born after Emancipation existed, and the education and literacy of blacks were at an all-time high.
Blacks were interested in being informed and some 100 periodicals sprung up to accommodate this need for knowledge. Blacks wanted to read about employment opportunities and the flow of migration. They wanted to know how the black soldiers were faring in the war. They also wanted to know about the various racial confrontations that existed during that time. In his introduction to The Voice of the Negro, 1919, Robert T. Kerlin stated, "The colored people of America are going to their own papers in these days for the news and for their guidance in thinking."

The growing importance of black newspapers was also noticed by the federal government. In 1918 a group of black leaders, including 31 newspapermen, were called together by the War Department and the Committee on Public Information to discuss the relation of the black to the War. The leaders drew up a "Bill of Particulars" embodying a number of items including a denunciation of mob violence, the continuation of training camps for black officers and that blacks be allowed greater participation in the war effort.

The "Great Migration" is considered to be both a result and a cause of the increased activity of the black press. The newspapers were divided in their stances. Some were opposed to the migration and others were in favor of it. The next section elaborates on these differences.
Viewpoints of Newspapers on the Great Migration

Before the development of the black communities in the northern cities, the few existing black newspapers had small circulations. The prospect of more readers unquestionably provided the northern black press an incentive for encouraging blacks to move to northern communities.

Many of the papers emphasized the availability of jobs. The New York Age's article about job opportunities provided for blacks in northern tobacco fields stimulated letters to the editors from southern blacks interested in moving to the North. The New York News, in an article on the National League on Urban Conditions conference, said that the move to "supplant foreign labor with native labor" would open many employment opportunities for blacks. The New York Age supported the stance of the conference and urged the Department of Labor to place "unoccupied men of other parts of the country where labor is needed."

The southern and northern black newspapers used the migration as a means to protest the injustices committed against blacks. A South Carolina newspaper urged the northward movement as a reaction to a recent lynching:

"The lynching of Anthony Crawford has caused men and women of this state to get up and bodily leave it. The lynching of Mr. Crawford was unwarranted and uncalled for and his treatment was such a disgrace that respectable people are leaving daily..."

On the other hand, some entities of the black press viewed migration as "a serious and sad mistake." Many editors acknowledged the problem of blacks in the South but
described the problems in the urban environment as being worse.32

The Delta Leader invited any blacks who could not make a living in the city to move back to the farm. The South was viewed as the historical home base for blacks and it held the most promise for them.33 The Star of Zion of Charlotte, North Carolina said, "...There are some things which the Negro needs far more than his wages or some of his rights... He needs conservation of his moral life."34

The 26th Annual Tuskegee Conference dealt specifically with the migration issue. The members' opposition to the mass exodus reflected the viewpoints of several black leaders. The advantages of the South were pointed out including the ability of blacks to own property with minimal capital and the potential job opportunities that existed in developing southern communities.35

Chicago Defender

The Chicago Defender is considered to be the newspaper that "revolutionized" black journalism.36 It was established during the period at the turn of the century when the style of the black press was changing from its conciliatory tone to its militant tone. The foundation of the NAACP and the establishment of the civil rights organ, The Crisis, occurred during this period and contributed to this transition.

Prior to the establishment of the Defender, the black newspapers appealed only to the black intelligentsia and a
few sympathetic whites. The Defender was an early newspaper that tried to appeal to the masses.

It was established in 1905 by Robert S. Abbott, a transplant from the South, whose "entire bankroll was a 25 cent piece." The first copies were handbill size in which Abbott distributed himself.37

In 1910 Abbott, who had hired an innovative staff, added several features that had never been used in black newspapers. The Defender was one of the first black newspapers to use headlines printing them in red ink. It also introduced departments such as drama, sports and special features.38 At first other black newspapers ridiculed this style, but soon they followed the lead.39 Another important feature of the Defender was its use of sensationalism as a means of attracting attention. Examples of sensationalism included such gruesome headlines as, FAMILIES BURIED ALIVE° and DROWNS PLAYMATES IN THE BATHTUB.41

Although these devices tended to increase the circulation and distinctiveness of the Defender, it was the paper's stance against racial discrimination and its promotion of mass migrations from the South that made the Defender the most popular black newspaper in the country. By the end of the first world war, the circulation was more than 100,000.42

The Chicago Defender was "a concrete expression of Robert S. Abbott's personality and philosophy"43 as reflected by his upbringing and role models.
He was born four years after Emancipation in a cabin in St. Simon's Island, Georgia. His father, Tom Abbott, died while Robert was an infant. His mother, Flora Butler Abbot, later married the only father Robert knew, John H.H. Sengstacke.44

Sengstacke had a profound influence on Abbott's philosophies and practices. Sengstacke, a mulatto German immigrant, fought for the underdog, who in southern society, was the black person. He converted his home into a classroom where he taught children and adults and was an ordained minister. Writing in the Defender, Abbott, said this of his stepfather: "My father taught the people (Negroes) not only how to live in fellowship of God, but how to live comfortably and intellectually under handicaps."45 Sengstacke also told Abbott that a good newspaper was one of the best instruments and strongest weapons to be used to defend a race deprived of its citizenship rights.46

Abbott's earliest venture in the newspaper business was at Hampton Institute where he studied printing. It was also through Hampton that he visited Chicago on a tour with the Hampton quartet. In Chicago he went to the Colored American Day being celebrated at the World's Columbian Exposition. He heard speeches from the black leaders of the day such as ex-slave, Frederick Douglass and anti-lynching crusader, Ida B. Wells, who described how a white mob destroyed her Memphis newspaper and drove her out of town.47
After graduation, Abbott returned to Chicago where he pursued his career as a printer and studied law. But the overt racism of the day blocked his legal aspirations. He became acquainted with people who also had negative racial experiences and found it frustrating not to have a vehicle for denouncing it. Recalling his father's advice on using a newspaper to vent grievances, Abbott decided to start his own paper. Thus on May 5, 1905 the Chicago Defender was born. Abbott's primary purpose was revealed in this slogan: "American race prejudice must be destroyed!"

It is not really known why Abbott felt so strongly about migration. Many individuals who personally knew Abbott believed his motives were to uplift the race. Apparently he used the migration as a way to protest racial discrimination.

Abbott had repeatedly cried: "Come North, where there is more humanity, some justice and fairness!" After using several powers of persuasion, Abbott decided to use the Defender to launch "The Great Northern Drive" setting May 15, 1917 as the kick-off day.

Abbott used many methods to aid the migration. He urged people to form 10- to 15-member clubs and arranged "club rates" with the railroads. Schedules were set up. Usually the days for leaving followed pay days.

The Defender used sensational headlines that read:

SAVED FROM THE SOUTH
Charged with Murder, but His Release is Secured by Habeas Corpus
Cartoons were run satirizing the "pitiful" conditions of the blacks in the South and success stories were printed of southern blacks who had made good in the North. The Defender also printed pictures of the best homes, parlors and schools in Chicago next to pictures of the run down facilities of that type in the South.

The response to the migration campaign was just as intense. It caused the black population of Chicago to increase from 40,000 to 150,000 in a period of a few years. Most of the blacks came from Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, Tennessee, Louisiana, Georgia, and Texas because the railway lines led into the city.

The movement of blacks from the South greatly reduced that region's labor force. Some southerners tried to forcibly stop the migration. For example, Macon, Georgia imposed a $25,000 fee for a labor recruiting license. In Montgomery, Alabama, jail sentences were given to those who tried to entice blacks into leaving the city. In some cities, the Defender was removed from the newsstands.

The white newspapers also tried to discourage the movement by playing up the vigors of the northern winters. In response to the white press' descriptions of black migrants freezing to death in the North, the Defender counteracted by printing: "If you can freeze to death in the North and be free, why freeze to death in the South and be a slave..."
The new migrants, however, created new problems for themselves. The rapid population growth resulted in overcrowded housing, crime, health and educational problems. Black family life completely collapsed in the North.

But the Defender did not abandon the people it recruited to the city. It printed a column, "The Onlooker," counseling migrants on dress, sanitation and behavior. It initiated fund drives for needy families and vigorously supported the Chicago Urban League, a social and welfare agency whose purpose was to assist the migrants.

The Norfolk Journal and Guide

The Norfolk Journal and Guide was a distinct departure from the style and viewpoints inaugurated by the Chicago Defender. The Guide did not use sensationalism and it did not support the black migration to the North. The newspaper's approach to journalism and the issues concerning blacks stemmed from its location in Tidewater, Virginia and the influence of educator, Booker T. Washington, on its editor/publisher.

The Journal and Guide was established (1900) at about the same time as the Chicago Defender. Originally called the Lodge Journal and Guide, it was the mouth-piece of the Supreme Lodge Knights of Gideon, a fraternal order. In 1907, the Lodge hired a plant foreman to assist in printing the publication. The foreman, Plummer Bernard Young, would eventually buy the publication and develop it into one of the
the most respected black newspapers of its era ranking as the fourth best in the country.64

P.B. Young was born a little more than one hundred years ago, July 27, 1884, in Littleton, North Carolina. He began his newspaper career at the age of 15 when he worked as an office boy for a local white newspaper. He continued his journalistic interests at Saint Augustine's College in Raleigh where he taught printing and was in charge of school publications. After college, Young became a printer for his father's weekly newspaper, the True Reformer.65

He then moved to Norfolk, Virginia where he began his career at the Lodge Journal and Guide making $12/week. Young became involved in the journalistic aspect of the newspaper when its editor failed to write the weekly editorial and Young wrote one in his place.66 Because of this initiative, Young was made an associate editor. In 1910, Young bought the plant of the Lodge's publication, which was failing, and changed its name to the Journal and Guide.

Within weeks of Young's ownership, a four-page fraternal tabloid became an eight-page, 40-column weekly.67 Two years later, Young made it into a family business naming his wife, Eleanor, associate editor, and his brother, Henry, secretary and superintendent of printing.

The Guide was more conservative in expressing issues concerning blacks. The topics of its editorials ranged from international law and lynching to morality, economics, public policy and race relations. The format for the editorials
consisted of an explanation of the problem, background information and ended with an objective discussion of alternatives or various viewpoints.68

Booker T. Washington and Young's father, Winfield Young, greatly influenced the philosophy he adopted while in charge of the *Journal and Guide*. Young believed that blacks should own land, strive for economic self-help, be involved in politics and work toward better race relations.

Winfield Young's life served as an example for his son's philosophy. Young operated a general store and was involved in Republican politics. As disfranchisement grew and black participation in politics was discouraged, Young began promoting Washington's principles of self-help and racial solidarity through the weekly newspaper he established.69

Like his father, Young promoted Washington's principles through the *Journal and Guide* and even developed a personal relationship with the educator. Washington vehemently opposed migration. Instead, he advocated that blacks seek the cooperation of whites and take advantage of the South's soil and climate.70 One of Washington's famous sayings was, "Let down your buckets where you are,"71 meaning own more land and aspire for better farming and better homes. Washington also classified black life in the North as being superficial and temporarily easy.72

Young also believed that the opportunities for blacks in the North were temporary and that after the War, blacks would be fired.73 Furthermore, he believed that black wages in the
Norfolk are a compared favorably with any section in the nation.

The location of the Journal and Guide is in a seaport area in which one of its primary industries is shipbuilding and ship maintenance for the navy. It offered several employment opportunities for blacks as longshoremen, machinists, welders and carpenters.74

The Norfolk/Tidewater area attracted its own set of migrants, the bulk of them coming from eastern North Carolina and Pied "nt, Virginia.75 Furthermore, the shipbuilding industry offered decent wages and job security for its black workers who often remained on those jobs for as many as 30 years.76 Norfolk's black population increased from 25,039 in 1910 to 43,392 in 1920, an increase of 73.3%.77

Like the Chicago Defender, the Guide provided assistance for black newcomers to its city. Its local offices in North Carolina and western Virginia served as traveler's guides helping individuals who were lost, penniless or seeking direction. Upon the arrival of the migrants, the Guide helped them establish credit, find places to live and ameliorate racial disputes.78

The conservative principles of Washington were reflected in the content of the Journal and Guide. His philosophy, "Build up, don't tear down," became the motto for the newspaper.79 The stance against migration was also reflected through a series of articles, cartoons and editorials.
These articles were particularly noticeable in the early part of 1917. Many of the articles stressed the poor living conditions, racial discrimination, and false job hopes that existed in the North.

It even printed affidavits of individuals describing how their experiences in the North forced them to return South. For example, one person told how he was promised "the very best of sleeping quarters" if he accepted a job at a railroad company, "...When I arrived," he said, "I found that the sleeping quarters looked as if hogs stayed there..."30

In contrast to the Defender's cartoons depicting the "pitiful" conditions in the South. The Guide's cartoons had captions such as, "Home Ain't Nothing Like This" and illustrations of people in the North stating, "Back to the South for me."81

Other articles stressed the high cost of living in the North and the deceptive recruiting methods of the labor agents.82 The article also gave figures on the increase in black employment in southern industries. From 1900 to 1910, employment increased 173% and 103% in the textile and transportation industries.83

According to letters to the editor, readers supported the Guide's position. For example, one minister wrote that the city of Norfolk offered "tremendous advantages for blacks in the labor market." The letter also implied that blacks could assert their political rights in the South if they wanted to.84
A letter from a northern resident printed out that the black migrant was not from the dependable productive class of people but came from the "shiftless and floating group." The philosophies that Young endowed through the Journal and Guide yielded some positive results for the black community of Norfolk. While stressing the economic advantages of the Norfolk area, Young also stressed the development of a black entrepreneurial class. By 1920, Young claimed that Norfolk had not only the largest, but one of the most intelligent and wealthiest black populations in the country.

Conclusion

The migration of blacks to the North is one of many activities involving the black press. The different approaches and stances of the press concerning this movement reflects the diversity of a group of people striving for social and economic progress.

Robert Abbott and Plummer Young brought different sets of personal experiences and philosophies to their newspaper. However, the Defender's radical methods and the Guide's conservative methods both made substantial contributions to the uplifting of their publishers' race.
Notes


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3Ibid., 912.

4Ibid., 913.

5Ibid., 913.


9Ibid., 192.


13Ibid., 19.


15Scott, 14.

16Horwill, pp. 299-300.

17McPherson, 185.
18Ibid., 185.
19Ibid., 185.
22Myrdal, 914.
23Ibid., 914.
24Kerlin, ix.
26Detweiler, 72.
27Frazier, 509.
28Detweiler, 74.
29Scott, 54.
30Ibid., 55.
31Ibid., 47.
33Ibid., 187.
34Detweiler, 72.
36Ibid., 65.
37Detweiler, 64.
38Ibid., 65.
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42 Detweiler, 65.


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50 Stroman, 66.


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58 Ibid., 165.

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65 Ibid., 366.


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