

The Coverage of World War I  
by the Radical Black Press, 1917-1919

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*The Chicago Defender's* coverage of the entrance of the U.S. into World War I began with a picture of a flag, an African-American soldier standing at attention in full regalia, and a declaration of loyalty to the war effort of the United States.<sup>1</sup> As *The Chicago Defender's* coverage of the war was ending, coverage of the race riots of 1919 began. Alarmist headlines read "Riot Sweeps Chicago" and "Ghastly Deeds of Race Rioters Told."<sup>2</sup> The 1919 race riots raged throughout many large cities during the summer of 1919, of which the one in Chicago was the most explosive of that summer, resulting in hundreds of injuries and deaths.<sup>3</sup> Although the *Chicago Defender's* attitude toward the war can be described as hesitant optimism, the stark contrast between these images of heroic loyalty and violent conflict are an indication of how the *Defender* had hoped the war would affect African-Americans in the United States and how it actually did affect African-Americans. *The Crisis* approached World War I with a similar attitude of optimism. However, the conclusion of coverage of World War I did not contain the same disillusionment exhibited by the *Defender*. Immediately after the riots, the *Defender* began to link the cause of the riots to the war, offering the explanation that troops returning from racially tolerant Europe were now frustrated by the racial discrimination they faced at home.<sup>4</sup> How could a war which began with two of the leading African-American periodicals enthusiastically advocating participation end with those same periodicals documenting the violence and unrest that ensued as a result?

World War I was a paradox not only for African-Americans, but for the rest of the world as well. It is now regarded as the most futile and ambiguous war of the modern era,<sup>5</sup> and the United States' delayed entry into the war was a result of this ambiguity. The war had already been raging in Europe for over two years when the United States joined the conflict in 1917. After the U.S. entered the war on the side of the Allies, mobilization further slowed the entrance of U.S. soldiers into the fight. While Wilson had run his re-election campaign using the slogan "He kept us out of war,"<sup>6</sup> he became increasingly sympathetic to the Allied cause.<sup>7</sup> Wilson, like many Americans, identified with Great Britain and the democracies of the Western Allies, as opposed to the authoritarian governments of the Central Powers.<sup>8</sup> Public support for U.S. involvement in the war increased after the sinking of the British ocean liner, the RMS *Lusitania*. Anti-German sentiment was again strengthened by the release of the intercepted "Zimmerman Telegram," in which the German Foreign Secretary Arthur Zimmerman promised Mexico financial aid to reclaim

“the lost territory of New Mexico, Texas and Arizona” if the United States entered the war.<sup>9</sup> In addition to this telegram, German U-boats were continually attacking American merchant ships.<sup>10</sup> American neutrality finally came to an end on April 2, 1917, when Wilson appealed to Congress to make a declaration of war against Germany, claiming “the world must be made safe for democracy.”<sup>11</sup> Soon after Wilson’s address, the Senate and the House overwhelmingly voted in support of going to war.<sup>12</sup>

After the United States entered the war, the question of the place of African-Americans in this newest conflict was still uncertain. The African-American population had fought in all American wars from the American Revolution onward. At the onset of the war, both the African-American community and the rest of the nation grappled with the issue: in what capacity would African-Americans serve in the Armed Forces? The Red Cross? The home front?

Though African-American periodicals *The Chicago Defender* and *The Crisis* took strong positions from the beginning of mobilization, accepting the call to duty on behalf of African-Americans, the issue of World War I was not the most pressing one during the years of 1917 to 1919. Often news of the war took a back seat to coverage of lynching, violence in the south and migration of blacks to the northern United States. The issues of segregation, labor and what later came to be known as the Great Migration received more coverage than the war. According to a survey by historian Lester Jones, only 26.55 percent of *The Chicago Defender*’s editorials were on the subject of World War I;<sup>13</sup> *The Crisis* reported on the war even less. Many of the editorials found in the publication focused on domestic issues, especially those concerning the South. Accordingly, it is important to view the coverage of the war by these two periodicals in the context of their larger goals.

The treatment of World War I by the *Defender* and *The Crisis* offers an important snapshot of the sentiments of African-Americans about their place in America during the years of American involvement in the war (1917-1919). The war was an important political moment for the early black civil rights movement. As African-American radicals were faced with the decision of supporting the war or not, they would come to place their support or opposition in the context of how it would ultimately help the African-American population. The two publications surveyed in this paper, *The Chicago Defender* and *The Crisis*, had differing styles, but both pursued an agenda of advancement of civil rights for African-Americans. Their coverage of World War I revealed the strategies they used to pursue their goal of gaining civil rights. The evidence of these strategies found in the war coverage of these publications helps us to understand the strategies of the wider civil rights movement of the time.

The *Defender* and *The Crisis* were both northern-based publications with similar civil rights goals; however, they had very different beginnings. The turn of the century’s climate of “race” journalism was tepid. The scene was dominated by periodicals such as the *New York Age*, the *Colored American* and the *Conservator*.

## Radical Black Press

These publications were all either controlled by or aligned with accommodationist black activist Booker T. Washington and the Tuskegee organization.<sup>14</sup> Washington's attempts to build influence in the print media began with his purchase of shares in the Colored Co-operative Publishing Company in 1901. He then went on to secretly purchase controlling shares in the previously radical *Colored American Magazine* in 1904; the publication's politics then changed radically to reflect Washington's beliefs.<sup>15</sup> Despite Washington's considerable influence, there was also room for other more radical periodicals.<sup>16</sup>

During this time, W.E.B. Du Bois made his first foray into publishing with the periodical *Moon Illustrated Weekly*. The weekly only lasted from December 1905 to the summer of 1906, but it provided Du Bois with a journalistic forum for his ideas influenced by his participation in the Niagara movement.<sup>17</sup> The weekly was not ultimately successful in attracting many subscribers,<sup>18</sup> so his message remained relatively unheard. In January 1907, Du Bois went on to found *Horizon*, another radical publication with a political emphasis. Again the provocative political content of Du Bois' magazine alienated many, especially those in the more conservative accommodationist black press.<sup>19</sup> The magazine served as a tool to help Du Bois gain surer footing as a journalist, with a more complete sense of how to incorporate politics, art and culture into a single publication.<sup>20</sup> No doubt, Du Bois was eager for his new enterprise to survive. He began an aggressive effort to raise money for the small, ambitious magazine, declaring in May 1910 (the periodical's last issue) that the numbers of subscribers needed to be increased by 500 and then by 1,000 in consecutive months.<sup>21</sup> Du Bois failed to reach this goal, and the magazine ended its run.

Instead of private investors, Du Bois now turned to the NAACP to fund his latest magazine. *The Crisis*, founded in 1910, was declared the official publication for the NAACP. Many scholars still declare it as such,<sup>22</sup> but Du Bois was fiercely protective of the magazine's independence. As Du Bois later explained, "A literary and news journal must be free and uncontrolled; in no other way can it be virile, creative, and individual."<sup>23</sup> Du Bois also claimed that the circulation of *The Crisis* was greater than the membership of the NAACP at the time.<sup>24</sup> And *The Crisis* criticized the NAACP itself, taking positions which were unpopular among some of its members.<sup>25</sup> Unlike the *Moon Illustrated Weekly* and *Horizon*, *The Crisis* became successful, building its circulation from 41,000 to 74,000 during the war years of 1917 and 1918.<sup>26</sup> The paper reached its peak in 1919 with a circulation of over 100,000, a higher circulation than mainstream magazines such as *The Nation*.<sup>27</sup> In *The Crisis*, Du Bois continued writing ambitious editorials on the treatment of blacks in the U.S., as well as publishing politicized art and literature.

*The Chicago Defender* began in a very different way, with a very different founder. Robert S. Abbott was born in Savannah, Georgia and was raised by his mother Flora and his stepfather, German immigrant John Sengstacke. Sengstacke was a staunch Christian and instilled in Abbott a respect for education and charity.<sup>28</sup>

After attending Claflin University in Orangeburg, South Carolina, he went to the Hampton Institute to learn printing techniques.<sup>29</sup> After studying law and being rejected from a black law firm in Chicago for being “a little too dark,” Abbott started his own newspaper.<sup>30</sup> Unlike intellectual and activist W.E.B. Du Bois, Abbott saw his first foray into publishing as a commercial effort, which was the norm rather than the exception in the black publishing industry.<sup>31</sup> *The Chicago Defender* began in 1905 as a four-page gossip and special interest paper.<sup>32</sup> The publication did fairly well the following four years; in 1909, Abbott stumbled onto what would be his journalistic specialty: muckraking. He wrote a piece which exposed the dealings of the red-light district in Chicago’s black South side.<sup>33</sup> This new style propelled the middling paper to greater success. The growing readership of *The Chicago Defender* forced Abbott to hire a larger staff; previously, he had done all the work himself. When J. Hockley Smiley joined Abbott as managing editor, the paper, which had previously only focused on scandal and gossip, now incorporated themes of racial advancement into its stories.<sup>34</sup>

Abbott’s platform for *The Chicago Defender* was as follows:

1. Obliteration of American race prejudice.
2. Racially unrestricted membership in all trade unions.
3. Equal employment opportunities in all jobs public and private.
4. True representation in all school segregation.
5. Establishment of open occupancy in all American housing.
6. Federal intervention to protect civil rights in all instances where civil rights compliance at the state level breaks down.<sup>35</sup>

Abbott claimed his politically ambitious platform was drafted in 1905; however, it was not until Smiley joined Abbott that the paper grew both ideologically and aesthetically.<sup>36</sup>

*The Chicago Defender’s* now famed migration campaign also began during this time period. The campaign, which began in 1917, encouraged blacks to move north in order to receive better jobs and escape southern violence. To facilitate this campaign and its goal of black migration north, the circulation of *The Chicago Defender* was not only increased in size but in scope. Again working with Smiley, Abbott developed methods of distributing his paper across the country, especially into the South. By 1919, the *Defender* was being received in 1,542 towns across the South, including small towns such as Bibsland, Louisiana, and Tunica, Mississippi.<sup>37</sup> During World War I years of 1917-1919, the circulation reached 230,000 per week, making *The Chicago Defender* the most widely read black newspaper in the U.S.<sup>38</sup>

## Radical Black Press

Following the death of Smiley in 1915, Abbott exercised tight control over the publication, carefully monitoring its message.<sup>39</sup> The *Defender* never gave up its muckraking roots; the periodical commonly featured sensationalized headlines such as “100 Negroes Murdered Weekly in United States by White Americans”<sup>40</sup> and stories of violence, prostitution and scandal.

The *Defender*, like Du Bois’ periodical *The Crisis*, also had its detractors. Marcus Garvey saw Abbott as a “race defamer...who publishes in his news paper week after week the grossest scandals against the race,”<sup>41</sup> Du Bois similarly dismissed Abbott’s journalism as sensationalist garbage. And though the *Defender*’s headlines focused on scandals such as murder and vice, the contents of the paper were wide-ranging from theatre and society to politically charged editorials and pieces covering national politics. At the same time, the *Defender* adopted many of the Hearst empire’s yellow journalism techniques, such as double-ruled headlines and concentration on personalities.<sup>42</sup> However, it also featured radical and thoughtful journalism during its coverage of World War I from 1917-1919.

These two periodicals, while very divergent in tone and reputation, share certain traditional characteristics of black journalism. Both sought not only to supplement mainstream “white” periodicals, but also to evoke feelings of “race pride” in its readers.<sup>43</sup> These publications flourished during the period of “uplift” for the black activist community. Due to their commitment to racial “uplift,” the response to World War I was a complicated one. While Abbott and Du Bois’ perceptions of the war did not always intersect, the two men overlapped on many important issues. Both supported the war, as well as black participation in it; both understood (in different ways) the implications for black progress if their support of the war aided U.S. victory; and both displayed a growing sense of black nationalism as exemplified by the formation of a pan-African identity.

Currently there are few satisfactory explorations of the response of the radical black press to World War I. Historians often only take note of the protests over segregation of troops, or deferment of many activists’ civil rights goals during the war, thus failing to portray the complexity of the black press’ beliefs. These periodicals did not see World War I as an obstacle to black progress. Rather, they saw it as an opportunity to achieve their goals. *The Crisis* and the *Defender* used both patriotism and protest during the war to claim their status as Americans, believing that African-Americans not only deserved all the rights of American citizens, but that they should fight for them as well.

### “My Race, My Country, My Flag”: Mobilization and Support for the War

The coverage of World War I began in both the *Defender* and *The Crisis* with an immediate endorsement. A February 10, 1917, letter to President Wilson in the *Defender* read: “[We] send you this expression of loyalty, the deepest sympathy and the earnest and constant prayers of the churches and lyceums of the city of

Chicago.”<sup>44</sup> Similarly, the announcement of war in *The Crisis* was also met with total support: “War! It is an awful thing! It is Hell...But German domination is worse...We fight shoulder to shoulder with the world to gain a world where war shall be no more.”<sup>45</sup>

Not all black periodicals supported the war. In the radical socialist publication *The Messenger*, one story announced, “We would rather make Georgia safe for the Negro” than make the world safe for democracy.<sup>46</sup> Black endorsement and participation in the war was not guaranteed. The question then becomes: Why did two radical, activist publications such as *The Chicago Defender* and *The Crisis* immediately and enthusiastically advocate black participation in the war? An examination of how these periodicals characterized mobilization, the home front and President Wilson provide an indication of the extent of their support of the war. A thorough investigation of the interests of black radicals in the war will also shed light on the issue. In addition, the readership of these two periodicals will be taken into account.

The mobilization of black troops during World War I was encouraged by the *Defender*. In addition to featuring advertisements and announcements calling black men to enlist in the army, the initial coverage of the war also featured the saga of Illinois’s all-black Eighth Regiment. The regiment’s progress was tracked from training, to embarkation, to arrival in Europe. Every step of the way, the *Defender* used its characteristic animated style to paint the Eighth in a heroic and positive light. The only small exception is a report that the regiment may have been headed for training camps in the “Jim Crow” South.<sup>47</sup> The *Defender*’s demonization of the South during its migration campaign seeped into this story, painting the regiment’s placement in the South as a tremendous blow. Ultimately the Eighth was not sent south, to the relief of the *Defender*, and this story was only a small blemish in the paper’s patriotic depiction of the activities of the Eighth regiment.

The coverage of the home front was similar to the positive characterization of military mobilization. The Liberty Loan campaign was given the same significance as the mobilization of troops. One headline read, “Get Ready for the 4<sup>th</sup> Liberty Loan. The Boys ‘Over There’ Are Giving Their Lives; What Are You Doing?”<sup>48</sup> In a *Defender* article advocating enlistment by members of the “race,” buying Liberty Bonds was recommended as not only as a good investment, but also as a duty to the nation and more importantly to the “race” men abroad. In addition to Liberty Bonds, the work of mobilization on the home front, such as production, healthcare and rationing were also highlighted. The story of one young woman’s effort to found a “Mother’s Comfort Club” was celebrated as a patriotic contribution that women could make to the war effort.<sup>49</sup> Even the efforts of children were applauded; one photograph showed an interracial group of students tending a “war garden.” The *Defender* touted this activity as “real democracy,”<sup>50</sup> not only for its benefit to the war, but also because it featured blacks and whites working side by side.

This enthusiasm translated even to the *Defender*’s coverage of President

## Radical Black Press

Wilson. In rare cases, glimpses of disapproval for Wilson's policies were apparent, but for the most part the *Defender* was extremely supportive of President Wilson himself. The paper commanded total loyalty to Wilson and his policies during the war. There was no questioning of any of his declarations. The questioning of any president during wartime was deemed unpatriotic by the publication, which emphatically declared unwavering support for Wilson during the conflict.<sup>51</sup>

The support of Wilson is even more striking when compared to the pre-war reporting on Wilson. In one editorial the *Defender* criticized Wilson, proclaiming, "We have heard so much of 'strict accountability' and have seen so little put in actual practice, that we are losing faith in our chief executive."<sup>52</sup> As a figure who adopted a "separate but equal" policy for employees of the federal government, Wilson did not have much support in the African-American community, due to his segregationist policies.<sup>53</sup> Despite the protests of the NAACP, Wilson considered segregation to be beneficial to both blacks and whites. While Wilson did appoint blacks to government posts during his presidency, the percentage of African-Americans working in the federal government fell from six percent to five percent while he was in office.<sup>54</sup> However, the *Defender* neither referred to Wilson's segregationist policies, nor expressed open criticism of the president during wartime.

Support of Wilson was constant even when he made a decision which opposed the *Defender's* position on racially motivated violence. On August 23, 1917, a dispute between a few men turned into a full-scale riot in Houston. The conflict began when white guards on a military training base attacked two black members of the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry. After the skirmish, one of the victims was falsely reported as dead, which spurred a violent response from other black troops. Soon after, the white guards – who consisted mostly of armed police and citizens hired to patrol the base – were firing against the enflamed crowd of black infantrymen. The conflict continued to escalate, resulting in the deaths of seventeen people.<sup>55</sup> In the trials that followed, only the black soldiers were charged. Forty-one men were sent to prison, and after President Wilson reviewed their cases, eighteen were hanged.<sup>56</sup>

The first reports of this story by *The Chicago Defender* were highly sympathetic to the black soldiers, proclaiming that the violence was a result of the "inhumane treatment of two members of the Twenty-fourth by the Houston police,"<sup>57</sup> and that the soldiers were therefore justified in their actions. The early coverage of the incident was slightly inflammatory against whites in its defense of the soldiers, arguing that the riot was the result of racist "rednecks" whose use of firearms was overzealous and unwarranted.<sup>58</sup> The violent outburst of the soldiers was also linked to the history of oppression they had been subjected to due to their race.<sup>59</sup> The paper's coverage of the incident and ensuing trial also included a transcript of the appeal of a committee of advocates for the black troops to President Wilson. This committee pleaded for the convicted soldiers to be spared from the death penalty. Initially Wilson suspended the death penalty for the five soldiers, but then allowed their execution.<sup>60</sup> The *Defender* did not report this decision with the

same outrage on behalf of the black soldiers as it did in initial coverage. There was no criticism of Wilson's approval of the death sentence, though the paper opposed even charging the soldiers when the story ran at the outset. This contradiction in reporting further highlights the loyalty of the *Defender* to President Wilson.

Another indication of the *Defender's* support of World War I was its coverage of Germany. Germany was depicted as completely depraved and an eminent threat to the U.S. without explanation of its offense. One editorial claimed:

The reasons why this country voluntarily entered the conflict have been set forth so many times that only the densely ignorant, or those with pro-German tendencies, would ever raise the issue in a nutshell, the Kaiser and company are attempting to force upon the rest of the world Prussianism, the very antithesis of liberty. What American with an ounce of red blood in his veins will stand for the slightest curtailment of his God-given rights.<sup>61</sup>

The colorful language and black and white description of a complex political situation was characteristic of the *Defender's* style. In another piece, the *Defender* labeled Germans as "child murders [*sic*]"<sup>62</sup> The paper also questioned if the German public knew what it was fighting for, claiming that ninety-five percent of the population was ignorant of its government's goals.<sup>63</sup> These exaggerated claims reflect the paper's total acceptance of the government's rationale and alliances in World War I.

The threat of being labeled as pro-German in the quotation above was particularly significant for the *Defender*. During the war, the government was highly suspicious of its political affiliations, with the Justice Department labeling the paper as possible German propaganda.<sup>64</sup> The government had expected black resistance to the war effort from the beginning. Government organizations such as the Post Office Department and the Bureau of Investigation of the Justice Department investigated "negro" journals for possible acts of treason, which were defined as any newspaper or other publication "containing any matter advocating or urging treason, insurrection or forcible resistance to any law to the United States."<sup>65</sup> The Bureau of Investigation, paranoid about black subversion, used the vague Espionage Act of 1917 to closely monitor the *Defender*, falsely believing that the periodical would not support the war.<sup>66</sup> *The Chicago Defender*, aware of this surveillance, was exposed not only to threats but also persuasion through conferences held for prominent black editors. The government made a concerted effort not only to threaten the radical black press into support for the war, but to aggressively court them as well.<sup>67</sup> The necessity of these methods must be questioned, as *The Defender* and *The Crisis* both exhibited truly patriotic sentiments.

A prime example of this patriotism is found in Du Bois' well-known



## Radical Black Press

“Close Ranks” editorial. The outspoken and radical black activist advocated that his race “close ranks shoulder to shoulder with our own white fellow citizens.”<sup>68</sup> This declaration is surprising for Du Bois, whose previous radical positions had led the Bureau of Investigation to fear Du Bois’ opposition to the war.<sup>69</sup> Du Bois’ editorial also argued that blacks should “forget our special grievances” while the war was being fought.<sup>70</sup> At the time of the publication of the influential “Close Ranks” editorial, the *Defender* speculated that Du Bois’ commission as a captain in the army was responsible for his loyalty during the war.<sup>71</sup> Du Bois’ declaration has led many historians to claim that he advocated that blacks wait to pursue their civil rights until the war was over.<sup>72</sup> Mark Ellis makes a more convincing case in his argument that Du Bois saw the war as a battle between colonial powers, and among those powers he saw the Allies to be less of a threat to the “darker peoples” who were colonized.<sup>73</sup> Support of the Allies in this circumstance would ultimately help blacks’ interests, not ignore them.

The alignment of the U.S. with the Allies was acceptable to Du Bois because he preferred their colonial rule to that of the Triple Entente. The *Defender*’s endorsement of cooperation during the war, however, was due to different causes. The *Defender* did not have a leading intellectual at its head. Instead it was the vision of the educated, but not cerebral, Robert S. Abbott.<sup>74</sup> Instead of focusing on the colonial nature of the war or its global political implications and origins, the *Defender* focused on the stake all Americans had in the outcome of the war, arguing “this war is as pregnant with meaning to our race as it is to any other group of American citizens.”<sup>75</sup> Accordingly, the *Defender* emphasized the Americanness of blacks. The black population, the *Defender* argued, had more history, more investment and more to lose than many newly immigrated white Americans.<sup>76</sup> In addition, blacks were surprisingly characterized as especially responsible for the outcome of the war and the victory of the Allies because they themselves had been subject to an abusive rule like Germany’s.<sup>77</sup> However, this explicit linking of Germany’s colonial oppression to racial oppression in the U.S. partially contradicts the *Defender*’s contention that blacks were full American citizens.

The difference in perceived motivations for black participation in the war was due to the difference not only in the leadership of these two publications, but also in readership. *The Chicago Defender* was an enterprise designed to be profitable for its owner, Robert S. Abbott. This does not mean that money was its sole purpose, but it was the most important. The style of the *Defender* indicated this; it was flashy, salacious and lowbrow. The paper featured a lot of pictures and large graphics. The *Defender*’s stylistic antithesis was *The Crisis*. The magazine had few pictures, and what photographs it did feature were formal and posed. The headings were small and sensible, stories and articles were serious, and there was a total absence of sensationalism. Du Bois’ primary interest in publishing was “research into the Negro problem” while maintaining reader interest.<sup>78</sup>

The readership for *The Crisis* was widely believed to be middle-class and

black. As Du Bois himself said, he wanted “a high class journal to circulate among the Intelligent Negroes.”<sup>79</sup> The complex political philosophies of Du Bois would only be accessible to a sophisticated reader (for example, in order to understand the astute assessment of international politics in the “Close Ranks” editorial). The preference for an educated readership was also supported by the advertisements featured in the magazine, many of which were for colleges and universities. Du Bois has often been criticized as an elitist, limiting his message only to other middle-class or “bourgeois” blacks.<sup>80</sup> However, Du Bois was also an advocate of the “uplift” of all blacks, and this “uplift” began in raising the consciousness of a large number of blacks to form a powerful union to produce change. Though the readership of *The Crisis* was always assumed and intended to be educated and middle-class, one reader response in a January 1917 issue of the journal read, “I am a poor, working man and a constant reader of THE CRISIS.” Though there is no way to discover if this reader is a rarity or an accurate representative of *The Crisis*’ readership, it is at least one exception to this perception of *The Crisis*.

*The Chicago Defender* has an opposite reputation to *The Crisis* among historians;<sup>81</sup> it is painted as a paper of the people. The paper is seen as a champion of the working class, roundly escaping the elitist tenor of *The Crisis*. Placing the readership of *The Crisis* and the *Defender* as strictly opposite to one another is oversimplifying both papers, but the characterization of the *Defender* as the more accessible periodical does have some validity. The *Defender*’s campaign for inclusion of blacks in labor unions<sup>82</sup> indicates the working class made up at least a significant section of the newspaper’s readership. The *Defender*’s distribution also included an informal component; copies were shared among members of the community, which were read aloud in public places for those who were illiterate. It is also probable that the paper was passed around to readers who could not afford it. The informal distribution highlighted above also allowed the influence of the publication to reach much further than its buying readership.<sup>83</sup>

*The Chicago Defender*’s more informal distribution and wide popularity among many members of the black community helps explain the publication’s sometimes contradictory rationale for black participation in the war. The *Defender* did its best to articulate its position on the war in ways that would honor its concept of black identity, but it could not escape the pressure of the nation’s popular patriotism. Unlike *The Crisis*, it did not form a coherent *raison d’être* for black participation in World War I. Instead, it provided a palatable appeal to blacks which would serve both the divergent ideas of the black community and the nation at large. These publications had to carefully weigh where “[their] best interest [lay].”<sup>84</sup> *The Chicago Defender* and *The Crisis* believed that patriotism and participation in the war would not delay black progress. Rather, their actions would ultimately result in black integration into American society.

“The War Over Here”: The *Chicago Defender*’s Position on Segregation in

## Radical Black Press

### the War Effort

A poem appearing on the editorial page of *The Chicago Defender* in June 1918, written by a reader, featured the harshest criticism of the war in the newspaper's entire coverage of World War I.<sup>85</sup> The poem argued that although the war was fought to "make the world safe for democracy," the United States had yet to make all of its citizens part of its democracy. The poem also touched on a deeper issue which questioned the fundamental goodness of a people who treated fellow citizens as white Americans treated blacks. It effectively pointed out what most of the press had been avoiding: how the U.S. was able to fight for democracy abroad while the nation still did not practice universal democracy at home. The *Defender* struggled with this contradiction during its coverage of the war. Because of its strong advocacy of the increase of rights for black Americans, it was required to acknowledge the shortcomings of the United States. For the most part, the condemnation of racial inequality was aimed at the South, while the North was painted as racially inclusive. The *Defender* carefully navigated this contradiction by depicting the South as the primary repressor of rights, specifically in the form of segregation, while characterizing the North and the federal government as just. As long as federal policy never embraced segregation, the paper accepted the ideological inconsistency of the United States during World War I.

As mobilization for the war began, one of the *Defender's* first stories exposed racial discrimination in the U.S. Navy, writing "the United States government discriminated against the members of the Race in joining the navy." The story goes on to say, "No law against enlistment of colored men in navy. Their enlistment is restricted by department practice to mess attendants."<sup>86</sup> This story strongly opposed the institutionalization of racism in the U.S. military. This first protest of segregation in World War I identified the source of discrimination as "department practice" rather than U.S. "law." In short, the former was a result of racist *individuals* and the latter of the nation and its authority. It was acceptable, or rather, expected for individuals in the United States to be racist, but it was more dangerous for blacks if the federal government of the United States was racist.

Another protest of racial discrimination in the U.S. military was found in the *Defender's* March 31, 1917 issue. It featured a political cartoon with an illustration of a black man staring at a billboard which read, "The Navy Will Not Enlist Colored Men"; above this picture was the caption, "If anything happens, don't blame us."<sup>87</sup> The cartoon implied that the discrimination against "race" troops relieved black citizens of whatever duty they had to fight in the war. This ultimatum made service during the war contingent on the treatment of blacks in the military. An article above the cartoon compared the discrimination of blacks in the navy to the discrimination against blacks fighting for the Union during the Civil War (eventually the Union was forced to use black troops in its armies). The ban was characterized as counterintuitive because blacks had the most to benefit from a

Union victory in the Civil War.<sup>88</sup> This characterization of the Civil War is similar to the coverage of World War I, in which the *Defender* portrayed blacks as having the most to gain from a victory for the Allies (or at least as much as all other Americans).

After the *Defender*'s protests against a segregated navy abated, the opposition towards the assignment of "race" troops to southern training camps began. There is little ambiguity in the *Defender*'s position against this practice. Unlike the stance against the U.S. Navy, the position against placement of black troops in the South had little potential for controversy. Since the beginning of the *Defender*'s campaign for black migration north, the periodical had painted the South as fundamentally bad for blacks. There was little risk in declaring that stationing in the racist South would be detrimental to black troops. The result of stationing troops in the South would be the *de facto* segregation of troops under federal command due to southern law. This was presented not as a federal problem, but a regional one which would ultimately morph into a federal one if discrimination took place under the watch of the federal government. While this campaign lacked the resolve of the *Defender*'s attack on the policies of the U.S. Navy, it played an important role in the paper's advocacy for blacks during the war.

The next battle to be fought over discrimination in the military concerned the segregation of training camps. The importance of the issue of segregated training camps to the *Defender* is revealed in its veiled criticism of President Wilson. The September 15, 1917, edition featured a lengthy front page address to the president urging him to have integrated training camps in light of the fact that the armed forces were planning to use the exemption process to separate white and black soldiers and form racially segregated regiments.<sup>89</sup> The *Defender* labeled this practice as "unjust, unconstitutional and un-American."<sup>90</sup> It countered everything the war was supposedly about. The address went on to state that "the functions of our national government should be exercised in its dealings with all citizens without distinction based on race, religion or any other condition not listed by the constitution."<sup>91</sup> Again the responsibility of the federal government to uphold equal protection was stressed. This time the *Defender* alluded to the authority of the Constitution in order to legitimize its fight for integration. The conduct of the federal government during World War I was an important indication of how it would deal with future demands for rights by blacks. It was a critical moment for the black population – a litmus test of how the country would move forward and whether or not the war would aid blacks in their struggle for equality.

African-Americans also initially experienced racial discrimination in the Red Cross. The agency refused to hire black nurses.<sup>92</sup> After a *Defender* campaign against this practice lasting months, the paper announced that due to its campaign, as well as the protests of other organizations, the Red Cross had begun to accept black nurses in 1918.<sup>93</sup> This decision is presented as a triumph for the "race" as well as a triumph of the efforts of *The Chicago Defender*. The *Defender* used the decision to

## Radical Black Press

include black women in the Red Cross as an example of empowerment of the black race resulting from its participation in the war. These campaigns for integration were rare, however. There were many more stories about the refusals of the Army to segregate than there were stories bringing to light military segregation. In the article “Promoter of ‘Jim Crow’ Camp Meet with Failure,” the power of the black community was implied to have forced integration. By refusing to be trained in a segregated camp, the “race” soldiers entered service on their own terms. Another article recalled the disciplining of military captain E. Rowan, for segregating troops “in the interest of the pride and morale of his own men.”<sup>94</sup> Rowan was later dismissed for “refusing to obey an order issued by the brigadier commander.”<sup>95</sup> Rowan’s fate was used as a proud example of the federal government supporting integration of black troops in the military.

There was a discrepancy between *The Chicago Defender’s* coverage of the integrated nature of the military and reality. While the *Defender* was lauding the fact that black soldiers did not have to train in segregated camps, the truth remained that 150,000 black soldiers were segregated while overseas.<sup>96</sup> The *Defender’s* failure to acknowledge the status of Illinois’s all-black Eighth Regiment and Buffalo’s famous 367<sup>th</sup> Infantry as all-black meant that the campaign to desegregate the U.S. military was ultimately a failure.

### The “Negro” Soldier: Uplift and Integration

The importance placed on the bravery of black troops in *The Chicago Defender* illustrates how black radicals believed World War I could be used as a springboard for progress. Coverage of the war aimed to uplift the image of blacks in the eyes of their own community, as well as in the eyes of whites. Both *The Crisis* and the *Defender* viewed the war as a prime opportunity for black soldiers to prove themselves as equals to whites, both on the battlefield and off. Equality on one was seen to be followed by equality on the other. By proving themselves to be equal in their performance of civic duties, blacks could also demonstrate that they were worthy of equal citizenship to whites. While many scholars focus on how black participation in the war obstructed black activists’ efforts to desegregate,<sup>97</sup> an examination of *The Chicago Defender* and *The Crisis* indicates that black participation in the war was not an obstacle to black activists’ goals of integration. Instead, it was perceived as a method to achieve this integration.

Black activists were not alone in understanding the implications of having blacks trained in combat. Those opposed to racial equality also took note of the power military training would give blacks. One Mississippi senator, James K. Vardaman, opposed the drafting of black troops because it would leave a problem “more difficult of solution than the emancipation of negro slaves.”<sup>98</sup> The *Defender* told its readers that Vardaman’s position should “strengthen your convictions and arouse efforts.”<sup>99</sup> Stories similar to the one above exhibited two reactions to

segregationist objections to black military service. First, *Defender* stories argued that blacks should fight in the war just to spite segregationists like Vardaman. But more importantly, *Defender* stories about segregationist objections to black service echoed the sentiments of Vardaman, arguing that the war would make the “Negro” a “new man.”<sup>100</sup> An April 1917 editorial read “The southern press fears universal military training because it will, in their judgment, place the black man on an equal footing with the white man, and because a man with a gun is apt to receive more respect and fair treatment than a man without one.”<sup>101</sup> These stories reinforced the belief that World War I could be a turning point for the self-respect of blacks and that the honor of serving in the war could greatly change how blacks perceive themselves.

The primary emphasis in the *Defender*’s coverage of “race” soldiers was on their heroism. Each article or caption featuring a black soldier was embellished with positive details that made the subject even more admirable. One caption read, “the finest body of ‘fighting men’ in the world.”<sup>102</sup> Another passage described the all-black 367<sup>th</sup> Infantry: “the uniforms looked as if they had just come home from the tailors in time. You looked at the soldiers and thought nothing could be straighter or shiner or dashing than them.”<sup>103</sup> The romanticization of the troops illustrated in this passage was common in many articles. The images of black soldiers were prominent and highly symbolic. Black men were transformed into bravery and honor personified. The heroic deeds of “race” soldiers were lauded, and the paper kept a comprehensive record of medals and accolades received by black soldiers.

*The Chicago Defender* painted the deeds of black soldiers during World War I not only as heroic, but also as progressive. An April 13, 1918, story reported the entrance of 22 black soldiers into aviation school.<sup>104</sup> The article called the event a “great epoch in the history of our people,” a demonstration of how the war was “working.”<sup>105</sup> These comments illustrated how the paper viewed the progress of blacks. The war was “working” because it was the engine that allowed this progress. The notion of progress is an important component in *The Chicago Defender*’s efforts of uplift. The black population not only had brave role models to emulate but also a better future ahead of it.

The “Negro” soldier’s success of the battlefield was not only utilized by the *Defender* as a form of uplift for the black community, it also was used to demonstrate their equality with whites. A good “race” soldier not only matched the abilities of his white counterparts, he surpassed them. In one story the *Defender* highlighted the claim that the all-black regiment 367<sup>th</sup> Infantry was the best in its division.<sup>106</sup> Another report about rates of military acceptance revealed that “out of every 100 Colored citizens...36 were certified for service...whereas, out of every 100 whites called, 25 were certified.”<sup>107</sup> By showing black soldiers exceeding the performance of white soldiers, the *Defender* asserted that black soldiers were more than equal to whites on the battlefield. The praise of black soldiers by white elites was also often featured. A quotation from General Prushing said, “he could

## Radical Black Press

not commend too highly the spirit shown among Colored combat troops.”<sup>108</sup> The emphasis on both the commendable performance of blacks on the battlefield and the growing acceptance and gratitude of whites were indications that blacks *were* gaining equality on the battlefield and that they should be able to gain equal status as their white counterparts.

The *Defender* contended that black soldiers had proven themselves to be deserving of equal status to whites and denounced any denial of that status. A February 1918 story criticized the military for burying a black soldier without military honors.<sup>109</sup> When a young black private in the Ninth Ohio battalion was buried by private citizens without the recognition of his fellow white and black officers, it was seen as a denial of his status as a soldier.<sup>110</sup> When official demonstrations of status were withheld from black soldiers, it threatened the recently obtained status of blacks. The publication also criticized the U.S. government’s previous treatment of black soldiers, arguing that “In the past the man of color had been denied equal chance as a soldier except when the opportunity was presented to hold himself up for target.”<sup>111</sup> The treatment of black soldiers as expendable was another example of an attack on the status of a soldier. The position of a soldier is a respected one; to use soldiers simply as cannon fodder demeaned the position.

The assertion of the equality of black troops in World War I was central to the *Defender*’s strategy of achieving integration. The *Defender*’s advocacy for integrated status of soldiers fighting in war was ultimately in service of the ultimate goal of black radicals: integration at home. This is one of the reasons why the paper promoted military integration so aggressively. The *Defender* argued that blacks should integrate because they are equal to whites. Fighting in the war itself was also one form of integration. By participating in civic activity, black soldiers had achieved the status of full citizens. By participating in that activity on a level equal with whites, blacks were fully exercising their American citizenship; they were fully integrated into the “white” civic system.

*The Crisis* shared some of *The Chicago Defender*’s strategies for uplift and integration. However, it did not share the bombastic characterizations of heroic soldiers or triumphant battles. Instead, its coverage of the “negro soldier” was far more sober, focusing on troop movements, appointments and public events. Du Bois’ magazine shared the *Defender*’s hopes for the implications of victory in the war: “Out of this war will rise, too, an American Negro, with the right to vote and the right to work and the right to live without insult.”<sup>112</sup> Again, military participation was equated with exercising other civic rights. The center of Du Bois’ ideology was integration; participation in the war was a means to achieve integration. The participation of black soldiers encouraged equality, a rise in status and the attainment of full citizenship. These achievements were all precursors to the full integration of blacks into American society.

While the fight by black radicals for equal status is commendable, there is also a negative angle to this endeavor for integration. In several of the advertisements

found in *The Chicago Defender* there was a connection between military service and whitening. In one advertisement, a pressing comb claimed to declare war on “bad hair.”<sup>113</sup> The link between social mobility and whitening is again emphasized in an advertisement for Kashmir “whitener and cleanser,” which claimed to cure “ugly skin and bad hair.”<sup>114</sup> The ad featured a black Red Cross nurse and asked “will prejudice give her chance to prove her worth?”<sup>115</sup> Connecting the changing status of African-Americans with their acceptance of European standards of beauty reveals how much blacks were willing to change in order to be accepted into society.

The high-stakes struggle for integration by black radicals ultimately ended in failure. The *Chicago Defender*'s coverage of the return of the troops from overseas was markedly optimistic. Large parades were thrown in honor of returning troops, and the *Defender* chronicled the exuberance of well wishers and family members. The political outlook for blacks was optimistic as well. A political cartoon featuring Uncle Sam fitting a new jacket labeled “Civil Rights” on a “race” man is captioned as “A Perfect Fit.”<sup>116</sup> The time for the advancement of blacks had perhaps finally come. However, there was an air of hesitation. Blacks were aware of the rigidity of racial castes in the United States, especially in the South. Soon stories appeared about the segregation of black and white troops on trains returning home. These trains were called “Kaiser on Wheels”;<sup>117</sup> an obvious parallel between the German oppression of colonies and American oppression of blacks. Black Americans had done everything in their power to prove themselves; they had fought valiantly against the Central Powers, supported the war at home, and contributed to the war effort on the home front. However, their dream of equality was wavering in the balance.

The *Defender* noted that returning troops had come home with experiences of relative equality in European countries like France. The *Defender* explained how these men faced disillusionment on returning home: “Those who have been to France have acquired new thoughts, new ideas, new hopes and aspirations. They can never return to nor fully accept conditions to which they had become before they went abroad.”<sup>118</sup> Another article explained that “American Negroes came to France in thousands and mixed in our public and national life like any one else, entering cafes, where their business was solicited, and eating at whatever restaurants they pleased.”<sup>119</sup> Europe did not abide by the same rules of racial segregation found in the United States. During the war, the differing treatment of blacks in the U.S. and abroad was consistently noticed. One caption of a photograph of black troops in France claimed, “France knows no color.”<sup>120</sup> These editorial remarks were made even though on April 26, 1919, the *Defender* ran a story on the poor treatment of African colonial soldiers in Britain. The *Defender* told of the “seething revolution...the day is not distant when the people will awaken to the enormity of the injustices committed on them by the alleged superior races.”<sup>121</sup> The stories about positive experiences in Europe heavily outweighed the negative ones. There was a particular sense of disbelief in some of the stories that there were places where



## Radical Black Press

racial discrimination was absent. The experiences of black American troops abroad transformed their frame of reference. It provided a concrete model for blacks of how things could be for them in the United States.

This newfound disillusionment upon returning home came to a head during the violent summer of 1919, when race riots affected 20 major American cities, the worst of which occurred in Chicago. The riot began when black bathers entered the 29<sup>th</sup> Street beach, which had been unofficially designated whites only.<sup>122</sup> Soon white bathers began throwing rocks and shouting insults, chasing the black bathers away. A larger group of blacks returned, overpowering the white crowds. This incident stirred unrest on both sides, and the violence spread to another beach where a black teenaged boy was struck by a brick and killed by a white man.<sup>123</sup> Retaliation followed, and violence continued to sweep the city as gangs of whites (most notably Irish) roamed the city intimidating and attacking blacks.<sup>124</sup>

Even at the time of the riot, speculation of its cause turned to the war and its demobilization. One theory advanced by the *Defender* was that the rapid rise in unemployment due to demobilization and the resulting competition between whites and newly returned blacks for jobs had caused rising racial tensions. Another theory proposed by the French assumed that after living in their “color free” society, returning blacks wanted more respect than they were getting in their home country.<sup>125</sup> Historians have later explored the economic, political and complex ethnic roots of the race riot.<sup>126</sup> Despite its dense and complicated causes, the 1919 race riot in Chicago provides a poignant illustration of how little African-American loyalty during the war advanced the cause of integration and racial equality in the United States.

## A New Internationalism

Though the experiences of black troops abroad did not ultimately encourage integration as the *Defender* and *Crisis* had hoped, it furthered the scope of black identity. Scholars have argued that The *Chicago Defender*'s coverage of World War I was not framed in an international context.<sup>127</sup> A careful reading of its coverage suggests, however, that both the *Crisis* and the *Defender* took a special interest in Africans and black West Indians. In many ways, the characterization of foreign black troops was almost identical to that of American black troops. The black American identity was strongly linked not only with other peoples of African decent, but with all non-whites. Uplift of all people of color and more specifically all people of African decent added a new layer to black identity during this time period.

*The Chicago Defender* began highlighting the excellence of colonial African troops before the entrance of American blacks into the war. The French colonial troops were described as showing “remarkable bravery.” The French embraced these colonial troops; “[they] are showered with flowers and kisses as they walk erect along the boulevards. Every one wears a medal of honor.”<sup>128</sup> Passages like

these had an aim of uplift, similar to coverage of black American troops. This uplift was not for the benefit of the subject of these articles. The heroic descriptions of these colonial blacks were written for the purpose of uplifting black Americans. The implication was that American blacks would be uplifted because of the gains of their race across the world. Historians label Pan-Africanism as “the attempts by African peoples to link up their struggles for their mutual benefit.”<sup>129</sup> The *Defender* and *The Crisis* attempted to link the struggle of all people of African descent for their mutual uplift. American black identity was tied to the entire identity of the Pan-African “race.” As Du Bois explained, he was struggling to aid the “purpose of all black humanity.”<sup>130</sup>

The parallels drawn between black Americans and other colonial peoples further encouraged the expansion of black identity. The prejudice faced by blacks in America paralleled the prejudice experienced by colonial Africans in Britain: “since the close of the war England finds herself confronted with a condition fostered by prejudice kindred to that which exists in America.”<sup>131</sup> There were other parallels made as well. A *Crisis* editorial proclaimed “The sympathy of Black America must of necessity go out to colored India and colored Egypt. Their forefathers were ancient friends, cousins, blood brothers.”<sup>132</sup> All non-white peoples were seen as sharing a common bond, an association strong as “blood” or a racial bond. Indeed, non-whites shared the unique position of being disempowered in a white-dominated world. The notion of black identity was not only based on race but also the sharing of an identity as oppressed people.

This complicated new definition of black American identity has similarities to the ideology of Garveyism. Unhappy with the lack of political activism in his home country, Jamaica, black nationalist Marcus Garvey found the political consciousness of American blacks refreshing.<sup>133</sup> Scholars have interpreted his nationalist philosophy as equating to an insistence on a mass exodus to Africa.<sup>134</sup> Historian David Levering Lewis, however, has argued that the cornerstone of Garvey’s philosophy was the belief that “racial liberation and empowerment were inherent in racial opposition and alienation.”<sup>135</sup> His philosophy is echoed in the definition of black American identity in the *Defender* and *The Crisis* as both a descendent of Africa and as one of the oppressed peoples of the world. Indeed, the similarities underlining the beliefs of integrationist black activists such as Du Bois and of separatists who espoused black nationalism during World War I become apparent.

The depiction of colonialism in *The Crisis* and the *Defender* further complicates the understanding of black activists’ construction of their own racial identity. The successes of French colonial troops were often reported by the *Defender*, with a focus on the positive response to these troops by their colonial rulers. The relationship between the colonists and the colonized was characterized as one of intense camaraderie. A caption of a photograph of marching black soldiers read, “A convoy of French colonial troops on the march to lend aid to their French

## Radical Black Press

brothers in driving back the Huns.”<sup>136</sup> The description of their relationship as a kind of brotherhood was in contrast with that of blacks and whites in the United States. In the coverage of black American troops, there were no depictions of camaraderie between blacks and whites. There was little portrayal of interaction between American blacks and whites in the war unless there was a conflict between the two groups.

Colonial African troops were presented as content in their status as a colonized group in the *Defender*. Another *Defender* article recounted the incredible performance of the “joyeux of Africa” or “the happy ones of Africa” as they successfully attacked German lines.<sup>137</sup> These troops were described as “daredevils” who bravely retrieved the body of a commander under heavy fire. The label of “happy ones of Africa” was not seen as patronizing or distasteful, but rather charming. The profile of these troops interpreted colonial life as positive and unobjectionable. There was no indication that colonial Africans were unhappy with their low status. The reporting on colonial troops by *The Crisis* included a lengthy *London Spectator* article which highlighted the significant contributions of the “black man” in the war.<sup>138</sup> The African colonial subjects of Britain were numbered at 44 million, and an additional 1.7 million “Aframericans” of the West Indies. The article praised these men’s “help, freely and loyally tempered.”<sup>139</sup> In addition to ignoring the reason for the patriotism of these colonial subjects of Britain, the *Defender* failed to even examine the colonization by the U.S. of Haiti.<sup>140</sup> These stories were superficial explorations and did not question the conditions of colonialism. The positive depictions of colonialism are contradictory to the understanding of black American activists’ identification with other oppressed peoples’ struggles.

While the majority of articles found in the *Defender* did not carefully examine the implications of colonialism, *The Crisis* paid greater attention to international politics. As a result there was a more insightful and skeptical portrait of colonialism in Du Bois’s magazine. Du Bois’s support of the war was originally the result of his belief that German colonization would be more unpleasant than Allied colonization. In an editorial advocating black support of the war Du Bois stated, “You [colonial peoples] are not simply fighting for Europe; you are fighting for the world, and you and your people are a part of the world.”<sup>141</sup> Du Bois’ plea continued, “Out of this war will rise, soon or late, an independent China; a self-governing Indian, an Egypt with representative institutions; an Africa for the Africans, and not merely for business exploitation.”<sup>142</sup> While Du Bois wanted to see the end of colonialism, as a compromise during the war he advocated cooperation with Allied colonial powers rather than a rejection of colonial powers altogether.

After the end of World War I, Du Bois began advocating independence for African nations previously under German occupation.<sup>143</sup> Du Bois argued “Africa must ultimately be returned to the Africans. They are the best custodians of their lives and ideals.”<sup>144</sup> He criticized the European exploitation of raw materials in Africa. Indeed he further believed that the justification of the colonization of Africa

was essentially racist. One effort to address the problem of African colonization was the Pan-African Conference, which was covered by both *The Crisis* and the *Defender*. During this conference, prominent black leaders from all over Africa met to discuss the future of African nations after the conclusion of World War I. The coverage of the Conference was positive in both papers, encouraging African nations to make efforts to gain their independence.<sup>145</sup>

The place of the “darker races” in the League of Nations was the focus of most of the coverage of the League by the two publications. The *Defender* reported that a senator from Missouri opposed the League of Nations because of the potential influence of the “darker races.” Like segregationist opposition to the enlistment of blacks in the war, the opposition of this racist senator strengthened the *Defender*’s support for the League of Nations. However, its support of the League of Nations only existed while it appeared as if traditionally less influential “darker” nations would be treated equally to more powerful white ones. When a Japanese proposition that all nations be recognized as equal was turned down, the *Defender* ended its support of the League of Nations.<sup>146</sup> The *Defender* then featured a cartoon which depicted the League as dividing Africa only among Europeans, and not among “the race.” The continued disregard for African sovereignty by European nations was frowned upon by the *Defender*.

In contrast, Du Bois fully supported the League of Nations, deeming it the “salvation of the Negro race.” In a May 1919 editorial, Du Bois endorsed the League of Nations as an important tool in achieving racial equality for black Americans. He argued that the League would fight discrimination by opposing the doctrine of racial inferiority, and that the African and other non-white nations would be a “civilizing” influence on the United States. In addition it would also help the United States to understand different cultures and civilizations.<sup>147</sup> After Du Bois heard of the rejection of Japan’s proposition for equality among nations, he criticized the League, but did not end his support of it. This was in sharp contrast to the reaction of the *Defender*, which called the dismissal of the Japanese proposition “not only a slap in the face to Japan, but at all other races that are not Caucasian.”<sup>148</sup>

Du Bois’s continuing support of the League of Nations revealed his strong belief in paternalism as a means to fight racial inequality. While advocating for the independence of African nations, he asked that “the guidance of *organized civilization*”<sup>149</sup> be included in the process. Du Bois labeled African culture “folk-custom,”<sup>150</sup> thus revealing his lack of respect for Africans. He requested guidance for new African nations because of their primitive nature but then described American and European civilizations as immoral for their treatment of black Americans. Similarly, he saw the cooperation of nations as positive for all those involved; he did not see equality among nations as a prerequisite to helping black Americans. This contradiction was the result of Du Bois’s two not incompatible beliefs of paternalism and racial equality.

Du Bois also believed in the white paternalism of American blacks. He

## Radical Black Press

believed that the world faced two possibilities: “Africa must either be assimilated completely by Europe on the basis of absolutely equal political, civil, and social privileges for its black and white citizens or Europe must allow the rise of an autonomous ‘great African state’.”<sup>151</sup> The first solution to colonialism greatly resembles the goal of many black American activists. They desired a complete inclusion into white America. Du Bois’s use of the term “assimilation” is troubling, since assimilation provides no retention of previous culture or values. Du Bois indicated that the only means Africans could attain equality with their European colonizers was through assimilation, or the total relinquishment of their identity. Because Du Bois had the same strategy for attaining equality for American blacks as he did for colonial Africans, one could argue that Du Bois believed in the same outcome for American blacks: assimilation.<sup>152</sup>

## Conclusion

*The Chicago Defender* and *The Crisis* are considered to be two radical periodicals of the World War I period. The definition of radical is relative. The United States government considered these publications to be radical for their criticism of federal policies during the war.<sup>153</sup> However, their criticism was greatly tempered by an enthusiastic support of the war. These periodicals were also considered radical because of the men who controlled them. Both men were activists in their own ways. During the World War I period, much of the country considered Du Bois to be radical. Compared to more conservative African-American activists such as Booker T. Washington, Du Bois’s position on integration was indeed radical. Robert S. Abbott, not as well known as Du Bois, was considered to be a radical activist as well, mostly because of his migration campaign. These two men also shared similar beliefs, even though Du Bois did not approve of Abbott’s paper.

These two periodicals represent two influential views in the black community. Although *The Crisis* did not have a vast following, the magazine was only one outlet for Du Bois’ views. He was an educator at Harvard as well as other universities; he also published books and gave lecture tours around the world.<sup>154</sup> Abbott’s paper had the highest circulation of any black periodical of the time. Both of these men had great influence over a wide audience.

An exploration of these two papers helps not only to explore the beliefs of the black community, but also that of the black activist community. The black activists of the early twentieth century were extremely varied in their viewpoints. Booker T. Washington’s conservatism and economic separatism were in stark contrast to Marcus Garvey’s radical black nationalist perspective. Du Bois and Abbott fall somewhere in between. They advocated integration and equality, but Du Bois also believed in tempering this process with paternalism. Abbott believed that racial discrimination could be escaped by migrating away from the Jim Crow South.

The complicated and contradictory nature of World War I tested these

beliefs. The war began at a crucial time when both publications were first becoming successful. The response of the black press to the war reveals how black activists hoped World War I would act as a catalyst to further help them achieve their goals. Their immediate commitment to support the war did not equate to an approval of all the actions of the U.S. government, such as segregation and the League of Nations, but they understood they could benefit from demonstrating their loyalty.

The war, as some have previously suggested, was not a postponement of the black activist agenda. Rather, it was a reform of that agenda. Activists supported a government which did not grant blacks full rights; in return, they believed that their support would help blacks earn those rights. In short, a new integrationist strategy formed during the war. These periodicals were founded on the principle that protest was the best method to integrate blacks more fully into American society. During the war, there was a slight break from these tactics. Abbott and Du Bois no longer employed outright protest of segregationist and discriminatory policies. Instead, they believed that the war itself would aid in reaching these goals. They hoped the success of black soldiers would not only uplift the self image of blacks, but it would also prove to white Americans that blacks were worthy of full citizenship. They struggled desperately for the integration of the troops and of the Red Cross, hoping it would initiate the spread of integration across the United States. Black activists also believed that a united sense of identity with other non-white peoples would foster further success for their goals. Unfortunately, none of these hopes came to fruition; one could argue that prospects for African-Americans actually worsened as post-demobilization violence swept the country. African-American activists would have to wait another twenty-five years, until the end of the Second World War, for another post-war wave of optimism to finally produce the changes they had so desperately desired.

I wish to thank Professors Jeffrey Cox and Kevin Mumford for their guidance and support during the research of this work. I am also greatly indebted to Professor Leslie Schwalm, not only for her invaluable advice during the research and writing of this work, but also for helping to inspire my interest in African-American history. The suggestions and constructive criticism of Seo-Young Lee during the revision of my work are also greatly appreciated. This work would not have been possible without the support of my aunt, Bea Hicks, as well as my parents, James and Bonnie Hicks, who taught me the importance of understanding my own history.

## Endnotes

1 *Chicago Defender*, February 10, 1917.

2 *Ibid.*, August 2, 1919.

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.*, July 12, 1919

5 Michael J. Lyons, *World War I: A Short History* (Englewood Cliffs and New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1994), 66. Lyons argues that the war was sparked by an international crisis which could have been defused (the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand). However Europe's Great Powers

## Radical Black Press

had faced many long term tensions such as growing nationalism, disputes over imperial possessions, an arms race, border disputes as well as a complex system of secret alliances which escalated any conflict between two nations (Austria-Hungary and Serbia) into a conflict between many. The tragedy of this war was compounded by the incompatibility of modern weapons with outdated military strategies. Lyons calls World War I the first modern war. Indeed, many of the nations involved had no idea of the length and ultimate human cost of the war when they entered it. Lyons also notes that historians have linked the cause of the Second World War to the mishandling of The Treaty of Versailles.

6 *The Chicago Defender*, March 31, 1917.

7 Lyons, *World War I*, 249.

8 *Ibid.*, 246.

9 *Ibid.*, 251.

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.*, 252.

12 *Ibid.*

13 Lester M. Jones, "The Editorial Policy of Negro Newspapers of 1917-18 as Compared With That of 1941-42," *The Journal of Negro History* 29, no. 1 (Jan. 1944): 24-31, 27. This survey maybe slightly inaccurate because some of the *Defender's* issues are missing.

14 Washington's politics were moderate compared to that of Du Bois; Washington advocated economic separatism and patience for the acquisition of civil rights.

15 Arthur Johnson and Ronald M. Johnson, "Away From Accommodation: Radical Editors and Protest Journalism, 1900-1910," *The Journal of Negro History* 62, no. 4 (Oct. 1977): 325-338, 327.

16 Johnson, "Away From Accommodation," 325.

17 Elliot M. Rudwick, "The Niagara Movement," *The Journal of Negro History* 42: 3 (July 1957): 177-200. The Niagara Movement was founded by W.E.B. Du Bois and 28 other black radicals who wanted to explore more progressive solutions to the problems faced by African-Americans. The movement created a platform in a secret session in Fort Erie, Ontario in July of 1905. The platform included objectives such as creating a radical and unsubsidized black press, providing an ideological challenge to Booker T. Washington's beliefs, obtaining voting rights equal to whites, abolishment of racial caste systems, equal education and employment for blacks, and the strategy of constant protests to secure these goals. Their platform was printed in papers across the country to initiate the creation of local branches of the movement.

18 Johnson, "Away From Accommodation," 333. In its run, the periodical only attracted 250 to 500 subscribers.

19 *Ibid.*, 334.

20 *Ibid.*

21 Johnson, "Away From Accommodation," 335.

22 Roland E. Wolseley, *The Black Press, U.S.A.*, (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1990), 60.

23 W.E.B. Du Bois, "Editing the Crisis," *The Crisis*, Mar, 1951, 147-151.

24 *Ibid.*, 147.

25 Wolseley, *The Black Press*, 60.

26 Mark Ellis, "America's Black Press, 1914-18," *History Today* 41, no. 9 (Sep. 1991): 20-27.

27 David Levering Lewis, "Du Bois and the Challenge of the Black Press," *The New Crisis* (July 1997): 43-45.

28 Alan D. Desantis, "A Forgotten Leader: Robert S. Abbott and the Chicago Defender from 1910-1920," *Journalism History* 23, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 63-72.

29 *Ibid.*, 64.

30 *Ibid.*

31 Wolseley, *The Black Press*, 43.

32 Desantis, "A Forgotten Leader," 64.

## Mary Hicks

- 33 *Ibid.*
- 34 *Ibid.*, 66.
- 35 T. Ella Strother, "The Black Image in the Chicago 'Defender,' 1905-1975," *Journalism History* 4, no. 4 (Winter 1977-78): 137-141.
- 36 *Chicago Defender*, January 31, 1976
- 37 Desantis, "A Forgotten Leader," 66.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 67.
- 39 *Ibid.*
- 40 *Ibid.*, 66.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 63.
- 42 Strother, "The Black Image," 139.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 137.
- 44 *Chicago Defender*, April 16, 1917.
- 45 *Crisis*, March, 1917.
- 46 Ellis, "America's Black Press," 26.
- 47 *Chicago Defender*, August 11, 1917.
- 48 *Ibid.*, September 4, 1917.
- 49 *Ibid.*, March 23, 1918.
- 50 *Ibid.*, June 1, 1918.
- 51 *Ibid.*, March 30, 1918.
- 52 *Ibid.*, March 31, 1917.
- 53 Kendrick A. Clements, *Woodrow Wilson: World Statesman* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1987), 98.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 99-100.
- 55 *Chicago Defender*, Jan 26, 1918.
- 56 *Ibid.*, September 21 1918.
- 57 *Ibid.*, November 1917.
- 58 *Ibid.*, January 16, 1918
- 59 *Ibid.*, March 2, 1918.
- 60 *Ibid.*, April 6, 1918.
- 61 *Ibid.*, May 11, 1918.
- 62 *Ibid.*, December 29, 1917.
- 63 *Ibid.*, May 25, 1918.
- 64 Theodore Komweibel, Jr., *Investigate Everything: Federal Efforts to Compel Black Loyalty During World War* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 2002).
- 65 Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, *Espionage Act of 1917*, 65<sup>th</sup> Congress, Sess I, Chps. 29, 30, 217-230.
- 66 Mark Ellis, *Race War and Surveillance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), xvi.
- 67 Ellis, "America's Black Press," 25-27.
- 68 *Crisis*, July 1918.
- 69 Ellis, "America's Black Press," 24.
- 70 *Crisis*, July 1918.
- 71 *Chicago Defender*, July 20, 1918. The *Defender* also asserted that Du Bois promoted beliefs which were more radical than its own.
- 72 Frederick G. Detweiler, *The Negro Press in the United States* (College Park: McGrath Publishing Company, 1968), 71.
- 73 Ellis, *Race, War and Surveillance*, 1.
- 74 Alan D. Desantis' article "A Forgotten Leader" characterized Abbott as an entrepreneur rather than an intellectual.
- 75 *Chicago Defender*, May 18, 1918.
- 76 *Ibid.*, November 13, 1917.



## Radical Black Press

- 77 *Ibid.*, April 16, 1918.
- 78 Du Bois, "Editing the *Crisis*", 147.
- 79 Wolseley, *The Black Press*, 58.
- 80 E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie: The Rise of a New Middle Class in the United State* (New York: Collier Books, 1957), 149. Frazier goes on to assert that the black press only represented the interests of the "black bourgeoisie" and that it deceived the lower-classes with its medium of mass communication.
- 81 Desantis, "A Forgotten Leader," 71.
- 82 Strother, "The Black Image," 138.
- 83 Desantis, "A Forgotten Leader," 65.
- 84 *Chicago Defender*, April 21, 1917.
- 85 *Ibid.*, June 8, 1918.
- 86 *Ibid.*, February 24, 1917.
- 87 *Ibid.*, March 31, 1917.
- 88 *Ibid.*
- 89 *Ibid.*
- 90 *Ibid.*
- 91 *Ibid.*
- 92 *Ibid.*, July 20, 1917.
- 93 *Ibid.*, July 27, 1918.
- 94 *Ibid.*, April 6, 1918.
- 95 *Ibid.*, July 6, 1918.
- 96 *Ibid.*, April 16, 1918.
- 97 Detweiler, *The Negro Press in the United States*, 71.
- 98 *Chicago Defender*, October 6, 1917.
- 99 *Ibid.*
- 100 *Ibid.*
- 101 *Ibid.*, April 21, 1917.
- 102 *Ibid.*, March 10, 1917
- 103 *Ibid.*, March 30, 1918.
- 104 *Ibid.*, April 13, 1918.
- 105 *Ibid.*
- 106 *Ibid.*, December 1, 1917.
- 107 *Ibid.*, January 9, 1918.
- 108 *Ibid.*, June 29, 1918.
- 109 *Ibid.*, February 2, 1918.
- 110 *Ibid.*
- 111 *Ibid.*, March 3, 1917.
- 112 *Crisis*, June 1918.
- 113 *Chicago Defender*, August 24, 1918.
- 114 *Ibid.*, September 21, 1918.
- 115 *Ibid.*
- 116 *Ibid.*, May 3, 1919.
- 117 *Ibid.*, April 21, 1919.
- 118 *Ibid.*, May 31, 1919.
- 119 *Ibid.*, August 2, 1919.
- 120 *Ibid.*, January 26, 1918.
- 121 *Ibid.*, April 26, 1919.
- 122 William M. Tuttle Jr., *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 4.
- 123 *Ibid.*, 4-6.

## Mary Hicks

- 124 *Ibid.*
- 125 *The Chicago Defender*, September 27, 1919.
- 126 Tuttle argues that the uncertain political climate of the post-war period made unrest more likely in a time of transition for the country. This factor along with long standing racial and labor conflicts caused underlying tensions to erupt to the surface. Tuttle, *Race Riots, 16-22*.
- 127 Jones, "The Editorial Policy of Negro Newspapers," 28.
- 128 *Chicago Defender*, February 23, 1918
- 129 Tony Martin, *The Pan-African Connection: From Slavery to Garvey and Beyond* (Dover: The Majority Press, 1983), 1.
- 130 David Levering, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New York: Holt and Company, 2000), 54.
- 131 *Chicago Defender*, April 26, 1919.
- 132 *Crisis*, June 1919.
- 133 Levering, *W.E.B. Du Bois*, 51.
- 134 Rupert Lewis, *Marcus Garvey: Anti-Colonial Champion* (Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc, 1988), 13.
- 135 Levering, *W.E.B. Du Bois*, 52.
- 136 *Chicago Defender*, September 14, 1918.
- 137 *Ibid.*, June 15, 1918.
- 138 *Crisis*, May 1918.
- 139 *Ibid.*
- 140 *Chicago Defender*, May 24, 1919.
- 141 *Crisis*, June 1918.
- 142 *Ibid.*
- 143 *Ibid.*, February 1919.
- 144 *Ibid.*
- 145 *Crisis*, May 1919.
- 146 *Chicago Defender*, May 3, 1919.
- 147 *Ibid.*
- 148 *Ibid.*
- 149 *Crisis*, February. 1919.
- 150 *Ibid.*
- 151 Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois*, 41.
- 152 Assimilation and paternalism are very similar concepts. Paternalism assumes that a superior population will provide guidance to another. Assimilation is the complete acceptance of the culture and values of a dominate population by a subordinate one. In a paternalist system, oppressed people are more likely to give up their own culture to emulate their superiors.
- 153 Kornweibel, *Investigate Everything*.
- 154 Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois*.

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