

## Selling the American Dream Myth to Black Southerners: The Chicago *Defender* and the Great Migration of 1915-1919

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After the broken promises of reconstruction, African Americans looked towards the North as a place where their dreams could be fulfilled. From towns and farms they poured into northern cities in pursuit of the American Dream. The apex of this diaspora lasted from 1915-1919 and is referred to as "The Great Migration." Literature dealing with this exodus is dominated primarily by economic determinism and socio-emotional explanations. While both explanations supply valuable insights, both neglect the role of rhetorical discourse in constructing social reality. This study addresses that omission by showing that the Chicago *Defender*, a black, nationally distributed newspaper, sought to persuade discontented southern blacks to migrate to the North by waging a migration campaign that utilized the recurring themes found in the American-Dream Myth.

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AFTER THE BROKEN PROMISES OF RECONSTRUCTION, African Americans looked towards the north as a place where their dreams could be fulfilled. From towns and farms they poured into northern cities in search of the American Dream. "Harlem emerged as the intellectual Mecca for blacks," the historian James Grossman wrote, "as home to such luminaries as W.E.B. DuBois, Langston Hughes, and Marcus Garvey. However, in much of the deep south, it was Chicago that captured the attention and imagination of the masses of restless black Americans" (Grossman, *Hope* 4). One man from Hattiesburg, Mississippi, observed, "You could not rest in your bed at night for Chicago," and a migrant from Alabama recalled that "Regardless of where someone stopped on the way, the Mecca was Chicago" (Grossman, *Hope* 4).

Before 1910, 90% of the nation's black population lived in the southern states. "Estimates of the net migration of blacks out of the south indicated a volume of less than 100,000 in the 1870s and 1880s.

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This increased to nearly 200,000 in the 1890s and 1900s, 522,000 in the 1910s, and 872,000 in the 1920s" (Taeuber 174). Carole Marks argues that "10% of the black population fled the South during this period" with the large majority leaving during the period 1917-1919 (161).<sup>1</sup> New York's black population grew from 91,709 in 1910 to 152,465 in 1920; Detroit's small black community of 5,741 in 1910 mushroomed to 40,838 in a decade; and Chicago's black population grew from 44,103 in 1910 to 109,458 in 1920 (Grossman, *Hope* 4). Scholars and governmental agencies have attempted to explain this phenomena known as "The Great Migration" according to two main theories: the Push-Pull Theory and the Socio-emotional or Sentimental Theory.

### Theories of the "Great Migration"

#### *The Push-Pull Economic Theory*

The Push-Pull Theory of "the Great Migration," also referred to as economic determinism, asserts that blacks were primarily motivated by economic considerations to leave the South (Ravenstein 3). As the theory's name implies, black migrants are seen as agents who were "pushed" from rural areas by factors such as unfavorable terms of trade, unequal distribution of property and income, and the pressures of rural poverty, while simultaneously being "pulled" by some especially attractive features, such as employment, fair pay, or the acquisition of property (Goodwin vi).

James H. Dillard, Emmett J. Scott, and George E. Haynes, whose studies dominated discussion of the migration during the first half of the twentieth century, regarded economic considerations as "primary," "fundamental," and "paramount." Twenty years later, sociologists St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, in their classic *Black Metropolis*, similarly concluded that the migration's "basic impetus has remained economic" (99-100). As a result of these early, influential studies, the Push-Pull hypothesis emerged as the dominant explanation of the migration.<sup>2</sup>

The Push-Pull hypothesis, however, is not without its critics. Lawrence Levine, for example, argues that "the tendency to overemphasize economic motivations has quieted many who would otherwise go beyond the conventional framework in attempting to understand the meaning of the movement of black Americans from the South" (264). Levine maintains that African Americans are "seen once again not as actors capable of affecting at least some part of their destinies, but primarily as beings who are acted upon—southern leaves blown north by the winds of destitution" (265). Levine insists that many migrants were as interested in renegotiating their life situations as in acquiring better jobs.

Other concerns expressed about the Push-Pull theory include its tendency to over-homogenize the interests and problems of migrants.

The theory implies that most, if not all, migrants were moved by the same causal factors. However, as Marvin Goodwin argues, this simply does not mesh with the historical record. "The results of such studies are imprecision and oversimplification in this important area of black American historiography" (45-46).

#### *Socio-Emotional Theory*

The Socio-emotional or Sentimental Theory of the Great Migration stands (in many respects) in direct opposition to the Push-Pull Theory.<sup>3</sup> Scholars subscribing to the socio-emotional explanation of the Great Migration argue that *social* injustice and *personal* ties primarily motivated migration.<sup>4</sup> They find the *social* motivations for the migration in the racist social and political conditions in the South, conditions that included violence, lynching, Jim Crow laws, unsatisfactory crop settlement, the lack of legal redress in the courts, and black Americans' general sense of social outrage (Goodwin 18). Furthermore, they find *personal* motivations for the migration in the desires of southern blacks to join their friends and relatives who previously had migrated to northern cities to maintain family and communal ties and to be part of a social network (Goodwin 18).

Taken together, these two dominant explanations assert that southern blacks moved north between 1915 and 1919 for three reasons: to find jobs to buy food and shelter; to escape political and social oppression; and/or to live with or near loved ones who had previously moved north. While these three motivations certainly played major roles in the migration, as explanations for the migration they are incomplete because they fail to account for how southern blacks obtained the information they used to make their migration decisions. To understand how these motivations were actualized I posit a rhetorical explanation which illuminates the ways in which specific rhetorical texts engage audiences in order to produce practical effects. As Karlyn Kohrs Campbell simply but succinctly put it: a critic grapples with rhetorical acts "to understand what they are, and who and for whom they work" (19).

At the end of the nineteenth century, individual African Americans throughout the South certainly understood first-hand that they were oppressed; likewise, they knew economic hardship through intimate personal experience. However, for such experiences to be mobilized into action, African Americans had to understand the omnipresence and the intransigence of their oppression and they had to see a way to deliverance. Rhetorical discourse (in the forms of oral histories, magazines, newspapers, radio broadcasts, speeches, sermons, and barroom and barbershop interpersonal contact) created the ideas, images, and narratives through which southern blacks constructed alternative dreams, dreams whose mythic promises of a better life provided just such motivations. And no rhetorical text was more pervasive, more

overtly dedicated to encouraging the mass exodus of blacks out of the south, or more fervent in its promotion of northern virtues than was the black, weekly newspaper, the *Chicago Defender*.

In this essay, I use mythic criticism to analyze all advertisements, editorials, political cartoons, reprinted letters, investigative reports, and cover stories that appeared in the *Defender* from January 1915 through December 1919 in order to identify the rhetorical strategies and techniques used by the paper to stimulate northern migration within the framework of the "American Dream" myth.

#### The Chicago Defender

In 1905 a force began to stir in Chicago that had a profound impact on twentieth-century United States. By 1915, it influenced an estimated 50,000 southern African Americans a week (Grossman, *Hope* 79).<sup>5</sup> This force was not the boll weevil, famine, or the Klan; it was a Chicago-based black newspaper, the *Defender*. Carl Sandburg wrote in the *Chicago Daily News*: "The *Defender* more than any other one agency was the big cause of the northern fever and the big exodus from the South" (Henri 63). A Georgia paper called the *Defender* the "greatest disturbing element that has yet entered Georgia" (Henri 63). The United States Department of Labor said that in some sections of the country the *Defender* was probably more effective in carrying off labor than all the agents put together: "It sums up the Negro's troubles and keeps them constantly before him, and it points out in terms he can understand the way to escape" (Henri 63).

The founder, owner, and chief editor of the *Defender* was Robert S. Abbott. Born and raised on Simon's Island, a segregated enclave outside of Savannah, Georgia, Abbott was educated by his step-father, the town preacher, educator, and sage (DeSantis 64). After 20 years of his father's tutelage, Robert sought formal training in printing and personal independence by studying at the Hampton Institute, located in Hampton, Virginia. After graduation, motivated by the drive to leave the oppressive South and the idea of a better life, he migrated to Chicago, where he decided to put his trade to practical use and started a local paper.<sup>6</sup> Three hundred copies of the first issue of the *Defender* appeared on May 5, 1905, printed at a cost of \$13.75.<sup>7</sup> These early issues were handbill size and consisted of only four pages (Wolseley 37).

By 1909 the *Defender* had evolved into the popular paper of choice for black Chicagoans. As Felecia G. Jones observed, "Prior to the establishment of the *Defender*, the black newspapers appealed only to black intelligentsia and a few sympathetic whites. The *Defender* was the first major newspaper that appealed to the masses" (11). By 1916, it had become the largest selling black newspaper in the United States. Weekly circulation during the peak of the Great Migration has been estimated to be as high as 250,000 a week, with the large majority of

the copies distributed south of the Mason-Dixon Line (DeSantis 65-66).<sup>8</sup> James Grossman elaborated on the paper's popularity among a diverse black readership:

In Savannah, Reverend Daniel Wright regularly sold twenty-five copies to his congregation. A South Carolina itinerant preacher carried the newspapers to sell through the state. In Rome, Georgia, the *Defender* was available at all barbershops. New Orleans readers could purchase it on the jitney buses. By 1919, three news dealers in that city were selling one thousand copies weekly. (*Blowing* 87-88)

The *Defender* was not read solely by blacks living in the major southern cities, however. In 1919, its shipping manifest included over 1,542 small towns and cities throughout the south such as Fry's Mill, Arkansas; Bibsland, Louisiana; Tunica, Mississippi; Yoakum, Texas; and Palatka, Florida, which each bought over one hundred copies of the *Defender* per week (Grossman, *Hope* 79). With such a vast and devoted southern readership, the *Defender* quickly emerged as the most read black newspaper in the United States.<sup>9</sup>

While these circulation figures are impressive in their own right, they do not account for two informal modes of paper circulation—borrowing and communal reading. Copies of the *Defender* often were shared among family members, friends, church congregations, and even members of other communities who could not afford the luxury of buying a newspaper. As one borrower wrote, "Copies were passed around until worn out" (Grossman, *Hope* 79). The second mode of informal paper distribution was communal reading. Illiterate southerners often heard the paper read at a local church, barbershop, or saloon (Marks 148-61).<sup>10</sup> This example of public orality is a pragmatic extension of the African-American oral tradition discussed by such scholars as Thomas Kochman, Walter J. Ong, and Molefi Kete Asante, who have argued that oral interaction in public is deeply rooted in what Asante has called the Afrocentric idea. This communal interaction was so predominant in 1915 that John Sengstacke, Abbott's nephew and Chief Editor of the *Defender* from 1940 to 1998, estimates that "For every one *Defender* purchased, five to seven others either read or heard it aloud."

The paper quickly gained the reputation of being the most radical and racially conscious black newspaper in America. The *Defender* regularly reported and editorialized about white on black hate crimes and called for open retaliation from its southern readers. However, it was the paper's unflinching call for northern migration out of the "RACIST AND CURUPT SOUTH" that gained the most national attention during this period (2 December 1916, 12).

With such "inflammatory" rhetoric, it is easy to understand the panic that reverberated throughout the white community. This anxiety was especially felt by white southerners who had grown accustomed to cheap African-American labor. In almost every state in the deep South, the *Defender* generated severe white reaction. Whites attacked and

killed two *Defender* distributors in Alabama. An Arkansas judge issued an injunction restraining circulation of the *Defender* in Pine Bluff and Jefferson County, and the governor of Georgia announced that he would ask the postmaster general to exclude the paper from the mail. White citizens of Longview, Texas, even blamed the paper for making them riot after a local black teacher was caught covering a lynching for the *Defender* (Davis 248-49).

#### Critical Framework

Michael C. Leff has observed that "texts simply do not yield up their own rhetorical interpretation." Interpretation "requires a means to justify the identification of significant features in the text and to explain the interactions among these features" (304). This analysis of the *Defender* uses the construct "The American Dream Myth" as an interpretive framework. While there is some debate as to how restrictive the theoretical conception of myth should be, most scholars agree that myths 1) are understood in narrative form; 2) are found in all cultures; and 3) supply answers to a culture's most fundamental questions.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, such socially circulated narratives act as a kind of cultural glue: "Their functions are to provide meaning, identify a comprehensive understandable image of the world, and to support the social order" (Fisher 161). As Henry A. Murray has observed,

Myths are instruments by which we continually struggle to make our experience intelligible to ourselves. A myth is a large, controlling image that gives philosophical meaning to the fact of ordinary life; that is, which has organizing value for experience. A mythology is more or less an articulated body of such images, a pantheon. . . . Myth is fundamental, the dramatic representation of our deepest instinctual life, or primary awareness of man in the universe, capable of many configurations, upon which all particular opinions and attitudes depend. (qtd. in Doty 11)

A myriad of academic scholars, popular writers, politicians, and street poets have argued that one of the most pervasive of such myths in the United States is known as "The American Dream." This powerful yet elusive mythic narrative is one of the most ambiguous, handied-about enthymemes in the United States.<sup>12</sup> To some, the concept of the American Dream is an object of satire or contempt. To others, argue Fossum and Roth, "It signifies self-determined success, wealth, and the good life of modish clothes, sports cars, and hot tubs—in a word the latest thing touted by Madison Avenue." (5). To still others, it connotes a unique set of religious and moral ideals. On the one hand, the American Dream myth inspired Martin Luther King, who associated his dream of freedom and equality with it; on the other hand, this dream "also engendered a colossal hubris" in international affairs, according to James R. Andrews, and has "sanctified Babbitism" at home (*Nationalism* 26).

A review of the literature from a myriad of disciplines (e.g. sociology, philosophy, anthropology, communication, and folklore) reveals over

thirty individual concepts that make up the conception of the "American Dream." If, however, one takes into account the interrelated and repetitive nature of many of these conceptions, a set of eight distinct themes emerges. These eight themes are the "stuff this dream is made of:"

- 1) *Freedom*: The promise that one can live without the threat of arbitrary physical or mental abuse.
- 2) *Equality*: The promise that one will have equal access to all rights and privileges.
- 3) *Democracy*: The promise that one can determine one's own political and social state through elections.
- 4) *Religious Independence*: The promise that one can determine one's own religious affiliation.
- 5) *Wealth*: The promise that one can procure money, property, and the good life that accompanies such acquisitions.
- 6) *Puritan Work Ethic*: The promise that one is able to find meaningful work.
- 7) *New Beginnings*: The promise that one can start anew.
- 8) *Consumption and Leisure*: The promise that one can secure products and services that aid a lifestyle marked by relaxation and self-indulgence.

Together, these eight themes suggest that the American Dream is a mythic story which posits that with effort, hard work, optimism, and egalitarian cooperation, *anyone* in America can morally achieve material success and enjoy the freedom, leisure, and religious and social independence that attend wealthy economic status. However, as Walter Fisher had noted, these themes reveal two apparently dichotomous drives: for wealth and comfort and for the more spiritual values of equality and tolerance. Fisher argues that this American Dream myth consists of "two dreams, or, more accurately, it is two myths, myths that we all share in some degree or the other and which, when taken together, characterize America as a culture" (160). This tension between the value poles of the "material" and the "moral" together constitute what has been called "altruistic capitalism." James R. Andrews agrees and notes that "One of the most persistent strains to which Americans have been subjected is that of dealing with the demands placed on them by professed moral imperatives while, at the same time, experiencing the strong urge to succeed" (316). Andrews argues that "in this constant conflict [between competing demands] persuasive rhetoric functions as a practical art concerned with reconciling differences, promoting progress, and facilitating change without destroying the structure of society" (324).

These eight value-themes, then, constitute a framework whereby the *Defender's* migration campaign can be perceived and understood. Using these themes to analyze the *Defender's* editorial and advertising

content from January 1915 through December 1919 enabled me to identify three stages in the *Defender's* rhetorical push north.

#### Stages in the *Defender's* Rhetorical Campaign: An Overview

In the three stages of the *Defender's* rhetorical campaign, the paper's discourse moved from intensifying and highlighting those elements of black southern life that fostered black discontent, to depictions of the North—especially Chicago—as a place of increased opportunity for blacks, to an explicit call for action through actual migration. These stages may best be viewed, however, as cognitive stages through which readers were invited to pass, rather than as narrow chronological patterns of development in the rhetorical messages themselves. These stages, emphasized in different ways and at different times throughout the migration campaign, can be metonymically characterized as 1) Southern Discontentment, 2) the Land-Of-Hope, and 3) a Call-To-Action.

#### *Southern Discontent Stage*

The Discontent Stage began in early 1915 and lasted until the end of the campaign in 1919. Discontentment was aroused in a variety of creative ways, including recurring editorials, articles, and cartoons that described and illustrated 1) the general lack of human rights; 2) lynching and other acts of violence; 3) oppressive Jim Crows laws; 4) the lack of proper educational and health facilities; 5) the unequal distribution of wealth and labor exploitation; and 6) the unjust legal system experienced by southern blacks. In short, the *Defender* portrayed, in uncompromising terms, the difference between the life that most blacks were forced to live in the South and the promises of the American Dream.

#### *Land-Of-Hope Stage*

The Land-Of-Hope Stage created an alternative for the discontented southern reader—a promised land called Chicago. Prior to the start of the migration campaign, readers received well-balanced and objective accounts of Chicago in the pages of the *Defender*. It was not uncommon, for example, to find a story about Chicago's south side's housing problems alongside a report about a new 600-seat movie theater. In spring 1916, however, balanced reporting gave way to what can best be described as a public-relations campaign for the city of Chicago.<sup>13</sup> Examples of what southern readers encountered in the average *Defender* from 1916–1919 include 1) a story about a new, desegregated high school with indoor plumbing, an auditorium, and a gymnasium; 2) an interview with Louis B. Anderson, a local black politician; 3) advertisements for time-saving labor devices, beauty products, toys, cars, and radios; 4) articles about blacks taking whites to court and

winning; and 5) reports about local black youths attending the University of Chicago, Harvard, and Stanford. In short, the *Defender* depicted Chicago as a "land of hope" that offered to all equal access to the American Dream.

#### Action Stage

In summer 1916, the *Defender* initiated the Action Stage of its migration campaign, the rhetorical task of which was overtly to call for action in the form of migration to Chicago. While discourse specifically aimed at persuading blacks to migrate north was published as early as 15 January 1916, the bulk of these appeals began appearing in late July 1916. During this final stage, patrons read 1) editorials from the *Defender* staff that called for the immediate migration of all southern blacks; 2) political cartoons that clearly illustrated, through irony and sarcasm, the advantages of the northern exodus; 3) reprinted letters from migrants testifying to the soundness of their decision to leave; 4) poems and photographs that persuasively detailed the merits of the migration; and 5) stories of the "Great *Defender* Migration Drive" of 15 May 1917 (the paper's call for a one-day, united mass exodus). In summer 1919, however, the paper's call for southern migration stopped as riot-filled Chicago exploded in racial hatred and frustration. This carnage marked the abrupt end of the *Defender's* migration campaign.

This three-stage campaign structure appealed to the imperatives of southern black life. As I argue below, the rhetorical power of the *Defender's* national campaign lay in the skillful integration of these stages with the lure of the eight themes of the "American Dream myth."

#### The *Defender's* Three-Stage Synthesis of the American Dream Myth(s)

##### *The Moralistic Myth and The Discontent Stage*

Fisher argues that the moralistic dimension of America's social myth is "well expressed in the basic tenets of the Declaration of Independence" and stresses the concepts of charity, tolerance, and compassion (161). Its themes "serve to inspire cooperative effort to benefit those who are less fortunate than others" (162). Of the eight recurring themes that constitute this myth, those of *equality, freedom, democracy, and religious independence* may be seen as "moralistic" concepts, and these were the themes that the *Defender* primarily used in the Discontentment Stage of its campaign.

##### *The Materialistic Myth and The Land-Of-Hope Stage*

The antithesis of the concern for society, humanity, and equality comprise what Fisher calls the materialistic dimension of America's social dream myth. The materialistic dimension of the American Dream myth is grounded in the basic premise of individualism, and it entails the values of effort, wealth, persistence, and initiative. Fisher

argues that "unlike the moralistic myth, the materialistic myth does not require a regeneration or sacrifice of self; rather, it promises that if one employs one's energies and talents to the fullest, one will reap the rewards of status, wealth, and power" (161). Of the eight recurring themes of the American Dream, the themes of *wealth, the Puritan work ethic, new beginnings, and consumption and leisure* fall under the rubric of "materialism," and these were the themes primarily employed in the Land-of-Hope Stage of the *Defender's* campaign.

#### *The Balanced Moralistic and the Materialistic Myth and the Call-To-Action Stage*

Because of the power and omnipresence of this myth in U.S. culture, it is impossible for any citizen to entirely escape the dream. As a result, Fisher asserts "there is a sense in which the two-fold nature of the dream leads to schizophrenia. When one of the myths tends to dominate, whether in the culture or in an individual, the other myth is always hauntingly there in the background" (163). The ideal situation for our culture, according to Andrews and Fisher, is to have both myths equally balanced. For one mythic dimension to dominate would mean an imbalance in and a distortion of the American Dream. Fittingly then, in the Call-To-Action Stage, the *Defender* skillfully balanced and negotiated the two competing myths in its overt calls for migration.

The *Defender's* use of the recurring themes of the American Dream, whether intentional or unintentional, is not surprising. After all, Abbott and his staff were products of the "American" society, a society whose ideas and character emerged from the tension produced by the dualism of the American Dream Myth. As sagacious journalists, the *Defender's* staff simply used the dominant ideas and values of their culture to guide their editorial and persuasive decisions.

In the next section of the paper, I demonstrate how the three stages of the *Defender's* migration campaign (Discontent, Hope, and Action) used the material and moral mythic components both independently and in tandem with one another. Figure 1 provides an overview of the

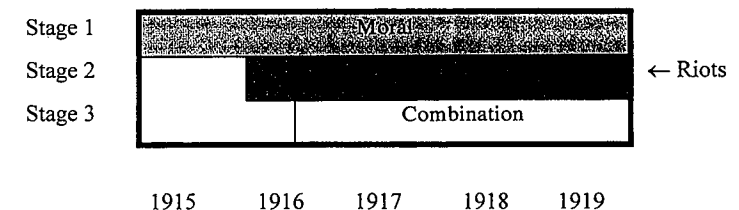


Figure 1.  
Duration and Use of Stages and Mythic Dream Themes

duration of the migration campaign's stages and its incorporation of the two binary aspects of the American Dream myth.

#### Stage One—Southern Discontent

In the first stage of the *Defender's* migration campaign, from the beginning of 1915 through the summer of 1919, the *Defender* employed editorials, cover stories, political cartoons, poems, pictures, and investigative reports to highlight the oppressive moral situation in the South.<sup>14</sup> While southern blacks did not need the *Defender* to make them aware of their conspicuous lack of empowerment, the *Defender's* coverage went beyond creating awareness. The *Defender*, as James Grossman observed, "demonstrated that these incidents were systematic and unremitting" (*Blowing* 85). According to Metz Lochard, lifelong friend of Abbott's, the *Defender*, during this first stage, was a paper that "dared to articulate in print what southern Negroes were afraid to whisper. It gave them courage to acknowledge their dissatisfaction" (125). The question left unanswered by Grossman, Lochard, and others, however, is how the *Defender* rhetorically exploited this sense of discontent.

During the five years of the migration campaign, the *Defender* published 191 separate items that focused on the negative aspects of the South. Analysis of these documents revealed that the moral themes of "freedom," "equality," and "democracy" dominated the Discontent Stage. As Table 1 indicates, over 85% of the documents focused on these three moral themes. In the analysis of this first stage which follows, I discuss the two most often-used themes: freedom and equality.

#### Freedom

Freedom implies the right to live without threat of slavery, oppression, unprovoked violence, unjust incarceration, and arbitrary exercise of power. The *Defender's* reports of unprovoked white on black violence

TABLE 1  
Frequency of American Dream Themes in the Discontent Stage

Dream Themes	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	Total
1) Freedom (Moral)	32	19	13	23	22	109
2) Equality (Moral)	8	12	3	7	5	35
3) Democracy (Moral)	1	3	4	4	4	16
4) Wealth (Material)	0	3	4	3	4	14
5) Work Ethic (Material)	1	0	0	5	3	9
6) New Beginnings (Material)	1	0	2	2	1	6
7) Religious Independence (Moral)	0	0	0	0	2	2
8) Consumption (Material)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	43	37	26	44	41	191

functioned rhetorically to emphasize the arbitrary nature of southern justice and the precarious position of southern blacks. As a strategic vehicle for emphasizing the oppression of black freedom, ironically lynching served the *Defender* well.

The *Defender* published 45 documents, primarily in the form of front-page news stories and investigative reports that informed blacks that lynching occurred methodically and consistently throughout the south. The primary technique used in the paper's coverage of this oppression was to show readers that lynching was practiced by many white southerners, not just a few isolated individuals. A secondary strategy of the *Defender's* lynching coverage was the demonstration that lynching affected all blacks regardless of their age, gender, or class. In employing both stratagems, the *Defender* showed its readers that it was virtually impossible for blacks in the South to escape white oppression and to obtain the freedom promised by the American Dream.

Almost weekly, the *Defender* published front-page articles that detailed the lynching of blacks by southern white mobs. On January 30, 1915, for example, the *Defender* printed the headline, "BOY LYNCHED BY MOB FOR STEALING COW THAT RETURNED LATER." The story alerted readers that "As usual, complete mystery surrounds the identity of the mob of white men who took young Johnson" (1). Similarly, on 10 July 1915, the *Defender* told readers of a violent murder by a white mob: "Will Green and his son, a boy of 17 years, were encountered. They were immediately 'roped' by the infuriated mob, they were strung up on the limb of a near by tree and their bodies riddled with bullets . . . the authorities are undecided on the question as to whether the Greens committed suicide" (1). Again, on 2 November 1918, the *Defender* reported the lynching of a seventeen-year-old boy by a mob of angry white men: "The lynching of Sandy Ray, a seventeen-year-old lad by a crowd of white men is another example of the injustice of the South. . . . His body was found hanging to a tree near the Atlantic Coast Line riddled with bullets" (1).

While black men and boys were the predominant victims of lynching, theirs were not the only bodies found hanging from trees; the *Defender* made sure that its readers also knew of the danger faced by females. For example, on 26 August 1916, a front page *Defender* story told of "Two women dangling from trees by a bloodthirsty crowd." The article concluded by informing readers that "The bodies were left hanging till about 2 o'clock in the afternoon, to be viewed and poked by women and children" (1). On 10 May 1919, the *Defender* published a report claiming that "five women fell victim to mob ruthlessness during 1918 alone, and in no case was any member of the mobs convicted in any courts, and in only two instances were trials held" (1). Similar yearly reports discussing the mob lynching of females were published on 7 August 1915, and 5 January 1918 (2, 2). These stories hammered home the *Defender's*

argument that blacks could never be *free* while at the mercy of vengeful actions glossed over with the veneer of legitimacy. Indeed, the most chilling threat to freedom was exemplified by the stories in which the agents of the law itself were shown to pervert justice.

White on black shootings, reported in vivid, explicitly documented detail in the pages of the *Defender*, indicted southern police and courts as negligent in protecting black freedom; worse, agents of law enforcement often were depicted as active participants in subverting the legal process. On 6 November 1915, for instance, the paper carried a front-page story of Sheriff John Blankenship who "fired the shot that killed innocent Lee Moore and robbed the dead man's wife and young child of their only support" (1). On 29 September 1917, the *Defender* told the similar story of George Parker: "Parker is in the hospital in serious condition as the result of being shot by one of this city's million dollar police force, Detective Bell (white). One shot entered the man's back, the other struck him in the cheek and broke off one of his molars" (1). Finally, on the front page of the 16 October 1915 *Defender*, the paper reported the police shooting seventeen-year-old Edward Shepard: "The policeman claims he shot to scare—Is it necessary to use a gun on a mere babe? . . . This revolting crime—for it is a crime of revolting nature against reason, justice and law—is the climax of hatred, malice, lawlessness and anarchy" (1).

While lynchings and shootings were reported more extensively than other depredations, the most horrifying stories were accounts of human burnings. These narratives were particularly terrifying because they reported the size and behavior of the tumultuous mobs who carried them out. The numbers' ferocity served to depict such savage events as ubiquitous and as actions that received substantial public sanction by whites. In one such example, on 24 May 1919, a front-page *Defender* story informed its readers that "Over 1,000 person's voices rent the air with yells similar to that of cannibals" (1). Again, on December 8, 1917, a front-page story read: "A heap of charred ashes and bones, lying in a vacant lot joining the public square, gives evidence of the horrible murder by 8,000 known persons. 8,000 to one" (1). This number was more than doubled in a 19 May 1916, headline story which told readers that "TWENTY-THOUSAND SOUTHERNERS BURN RACE BOY AT STAKE" (1). Other examples of stories that discussed the burning of blacks by whites in the South appeared on 8 August 1915, 20 May 1916, 8 December 1917, 26 January 1918, 23 February 1918, and 24 May 1919.

As the preceding examples indicate, reported stories which highlighted the broken promise of freedom focused on three prevalent, violent acts of black oppression: lynchings, shootings, and burnings. While subtle variations were used to discuss particular crimes, the paper's major rhetorical strategies remained constant. First, the paper

stressed that such acts were committed by most white southerners, not just by a few isolated extremists. Second, the paper repeatedly asserted that anyone with black skin, regardless of age, gender, class, or innocence, would be subjected to racist hate crimes in the south.

### Equality

The second most frequently used American Dream myth theme in this first stage of the *Defender's* migration campaign was the theme of "equality," the concept that promises all citizens of the United States (regardless of race, religion, age, gender, or class) equal rights and opportunities. To disprove the validity of this mythic theme for southern blacks, the paper reported the many forms of inequality that existed between privileged whites and impoverished blacks. Augmenting this rhetorical strategy, Abbott's paper demonstrated that the lack of parity negatively affected all blacks in the South, not just the poor and uneducated. The *Defender* denounced this major premise of the moralistic American Dream—the belief that everyone has equal access to America's rights—in 35 articles, mostly front-page stories and editorials, that presented a variety of black victims—including children, adults, and soldiers—of inequality.

One of the recurring topics through which this inequality was illustrated was education. Educational inequality, which was a concern for the community at large, particularly addressed parents who desired a better life for their children. For example, a 20 February 1915 editorial about the inequality of southern black schools discussed the educational disadvantages of raising a child in the South. Its rhetorical use of comparisons and contrasts highlighted the broken promise of equality for all:

It was found that out of 10,118 black children of school age in Atlanta, 2,024 were enrolled. For its 17,000 white children it [Atlanta] furnishes thirty-eight grammar schools, a boys' high school, a girls' high school, a boys' technical high school, a girls' English commercial high school, and five night schools. Our children's school equipment consists of but eleven GRAMMAR Schools with eighty-two teachers against four hundred and twenty-six for the whites. (12)

To reinforce this message, on 14 October 1916, the paper published a photograph of the condemned Cameron School in Montgomery, Alabama. The photograph showed a run-down shack in desperate need of renovation. The caption below simply read: "Jim Crow schools, dilapidated, dirty building, litter all over the yard. White Board of education refuses to appropriate sufficient funds for upkeep" (1). In another example, an 26 August 1916 editorial entitled "Getting an Education," wrote of Georgia's attempt to "keep the black child in the gutter": "Georgia is now wrangling over the question of whether she wants a compulsory education or not. . . . This law would allow our black child to attend school just like the whites, and they are bitterly opposed to giving the latter even a smattering of education" (1). By discussing the

lack of educational opportunities for black children, the *Defender* not only demonstrated southern inequality, it also cast doubt on the possibility of a better tomorrow, for as the paper often asserted in its editorials, "our children's education is the key to a better future" (20 February 1915, 12; 24 July 1915, 12).

The paper also published news stories and editorials that exploited the lack of equality given to black adults—its predominant audience. Interestingly, the *Defender* seemed most outraged by inequality in America's transportation system. In fact, the paper used the topic of "transportation segregation" more than the combined inequalities of black southern housing, food, education, service in stores and restaurants, and safety. On the front-page of the 7 October 1916 *Defender*, the paper commented that "The races have been separated, but the accommodations for the Colored during travel have been inferior to those provided for the whites for the same money. It is a willful disregard of the letter of the law" (1). On 3 November 1917 the *Defender* expanded on this argument and claimed that "there will never be equal accommodations for the races. Separation presupposes and invites inequalities. The Race members will never get as much for their dollar on a southern railroad as a white passenger will get" (12). Portentously, this "separate but unequal" argument, used regularly by the paper but ignored in most legislative and judicial forums of the day, became the legal mantra years later in the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* case that made educational segregation illegal in all public schools in America.

Another topic target the *Defender* consistently used to illuminate the fallacies in the equality theme of the American Dream myth was the black soldier. The last three years of the Great Migration occurred during the war years—1917–1919. The few black men who had been accepted as soldiers were held in high esteem by the black community in the North and South. To dishonor these men was to dishonor the best the black community could offer, and the paper, with its goal of creating discontent, exploited the situation. Unlike its treatment of the previous categories of inequality, however, the paper did not focus on a specific form of segregation which impinged on the black soldier, but rather, it highlighted a variety of general southern inequalities to which black soldiers were subjected. For example, the *Defender* commented on the myriad injustices faced by black soldiers while training in southern military camps. This substandard treatment was further emphasized by contrasting the privileges received by the many arriving immigrants from Europe and Asia. Ironically, the paper resorted to the same xenophobic rhetoric and ethnophobias that historically have plagued black Americans:

Contrary to everything that should rightfully be expected, every privilege that should be accorded them is denied—soda fountains, restaurants, near-beer joints, and theaters are closed to them. Segregated in the dinky street cars and hustled along and jostled [sic] off

the sidewalks, these men, trained to die in defense of these same oppressors, are forced to stand for these humiliations. . . . At the same time, any greasy chink laundry man or foul-smelling garlic eating dago is allowed full privileges, with no demand upon them further than that they pay their way. (23 March 1918, 1)

The paper also discussed the unequal and segregated situation of black soldiers returning from war. In these stories, the *Defender* often highlighted the tragic irony of black men fighting for equality in Europe while being denied that right in the "Land of the Free." "If we are good enough to stand shoulder to shoulder with our white comrades in the trenches," Abbott editorialized, "we are good enough to enjoy the fruits of our sacrifices" (13 September 1917, 12). On 18 March 1916, the paper discussed the humiliation ex-soldiers faced at the post office: "Men who are old soldiers who gave their lives that this Union might be well served, they have to go to a Jim Crow window to receive mail. Think of it, men who fought . . . heroic and brave black soldiers have to use a black only window" (1). A similar story on 12 July 1919, told of the unfair and unequal treatment of retired soldiers at the American Legion: "Soldiers of our race who came here as delegates to the state convention of the American Legion of Louisiana were barred from entering the convention hall." The story continued: "After offering their credentials as delegates they were told that the southern branch of the American Legion would remain as 'white as a lily,' and that no black face would be permitted to take part in its movements" (2). Such reports led the *Defender* to question, "Is this the Kaiser's Germany or America?" (8 September 1917, 12).

In summary, the first stage of the *Defender's* migration campaign highlighted the moral disadvantages of living in the South. In its unrelenting and systematic iteration of the lack of freedom and equality experienced by southern blacks, the paper refused to let its readers become apathetic or forget the covenants of Radical Reconstruction—the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution, and their country's Dream. Specifically, the paper demonstrated that the American Dream myth's promises of freedom, equality, democracy, and religious independence were not fulfilled below the Mason-Dixon Line. However, the Discontent Stage, while a necessary aspect of the persuasive process, alone was not rhetorically sufficient to stimulate migration. An alternative to the oppressive South needed to be rhetorically constructed for readers. The second stage of the *Defender's* migration campaign supplied such an alternative: the city of Chicago as "the land of hope."

#### Stage Two: The Land of Hope

In juxtaposition to the oppressive South portrayed in the first stage of the *Defender's* migration campaign, the *Defender's* second stage featured the North as a "land-of-hope," a place where all the "material" promises of the American Dream waited to be seized by blacks. These



materialistic themes, according to James Andrews, are the concepts that create our nation's "competitive, success goals" ("Reflections" 320). Elaborating on this, Walter Fisher claims that the materialistic myth "relates to the values of effort, persistence, 'playing the game,' initiative, self-reliance, achievement, and success" (161).

The paper, however, often drew no clear lines of demarcation when it came to publishing and arranging the competing moral and material aspects of the American Dream myth. In fact, readers regularly found the Dream's binary forces augmenting one another on the same page. James R. Grossman has elaborated on this rhetorical practice: "Alongside descriptions of lynching, torture, and everyday oppression in the south, the *Defender* counterpoised articles picturing Chicago's black community as influential, prosperous, and modern" (*Hope* 81). As a result of this disposition, the *Defender* established a vivid contrast between the morally barren South and the materially rich North.

Indeed, over 95% of the documents of stage two of the *Defender's* campaign which I examined emphasized material themes. As Table 2 shows, the three dominant themes were the material themes of consumption and leisure, new beginnings, and work ethic. The five remaining themes (wealth, religious independence, democracy, freedom, and equality) were used in less than 5% of the documents combined. The discussion of this second stage focuses on the two most often-used themes of "consumption and leisure" and "new beginnings."

#### Consumption and Leisure

At the turn of the twentieth century, the United States underwent what T. J. Jackson Lears has called a "fundamental cultural transformation." Simply put, the moralistic American Dream expanded to include the theme of "consumption and leisure." Before this period, most U.S. citizens viewed the American Dream as involving "perpetual

TABLE 2  
Frequency of Dominant Dream Themes in the Land-of-Hope Stage<sup>15</sup>

Dream Themes	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	Total
1) Consumption and Leisure (Material)	3000	3010	3030	3045	3060	15145
2) New Beginnings (Material)	62	57	57	57	55	288
3) Work Ethic (Material)	52	53	52	53	52	262
4) Religious Independence (Moral)	52	52	52	52	52	260
5) Democracy (Moral)	7	4	2	3	1	17
6) Equality (Moral)	8	4	2	0	0	14
7) Wealth (Material)	3	0	4	2	1	10
8) Freedom (Moral)	5	0	1	1	1	8
Total	3189	3180	3200	3213	3222	16004

NOTE: The numbers for "consumption and leisure" are close estimates because of the overwhelming numbers of advertisements published and their repetitiveness.

work, compulsive saving, civic responsibility, and a rigid morality of self-denial." By the turn of the twentieth century, however, that outlook gave way to a new set of values that encouraged periodic leisure, compulsive spending, and individual fulfillment. As Lears asserts, "The older culture was suited to a production-oriented society of small entrepreneurs; the newer culture epitomized a consumption-oriented society dominated by bureaucratic corporations" (3). James Potter sums up this dramatic change in early twentieth-century United States in his observation that "the bread and butter problems of survival of earlier decades were now replaced for a majority by the pursuit of happiness in the form of the traditional minority pursuits of wine, women, and song" (3).

Unlike the other seven American Dream themes that have long and historic roots in U.S. culture, the theme of consumption and leisure was initially and rapidly disseminated by mass advertising between 1890-1915.<sup>16</sup> While this new cultural mindset began in such major industrial cities of the North as Chicago, it quickly spread throughout the nation via newspapers and magazines. Marian Moore, elaborating on the power of northern periodicals in the black South, argues that while "many blacks were legally and socially segregated from mainstream U.S. life they, too, subscribed to the doctrines of the American Dream and thus shared many of the material hopes and aspirations pictured in the advertisements at the turn of the twentieth-century" (88). Indeed, she notes that the *Defender* dedicated more space to advertising than any other major black newspaper of the day.

Week after week, just as systematically as it detailed the dangers for blacks of remaining in the South, the *Defender* informed readers, through its advertising and entertainment sections, that in Chicago they could fulfill their newly acquired desire to consume and relax. According to Franklin Frazier, "The spectacular success of the *Defender* in the rural south was due to the fact that it provided blacks with mental stimulation of what other Negroes experienced in urban Chicago" (182). During the five years of the campaign, the *Defender* published an average of five pages of advertisements and/or announcements per week touting time-saving devices, leisure activities, and beauty products with each page containing one to twenty advertisements. Consequently, "consumption and leisure" emerged as the predominant American Dream theme in the Land-Of-Hope Stage of the *Defender's* migration campaign, spreading what William James called the "Gospel of Relaxation" (499-507). It is important to note, however, that while ads, obviously, were present in much larger numbers than were migration news stories and editorials, stories and editorials were clearly more highlighted, less repetitious, and utilized more column inches per document. Therefore, while "consumption and leisure" numerically was the predominant theme, it was somewhat rhetorically

balanced by the paper's discussion of the American Dream themes of "new beginnings," "wealth," and the "work ethic."

*Advertisements Selling Products (Consumption) in Chicago.* For many blacks living in the South, especially in the smaller towns and farming communities, the desire to consume luxury items could not be met by local country stores and markets. Southern blacks could only dream of time-saving gadgets, fashionable clothing, and modern inventions because of 1) the lack of industrialized technology in much of the south, and their subsequent inability to produce their own luxury items for consumption, 2) the unsophisticated distribution systems of material from the industrialized North to smaller southern communities, 3) the limited northern production of superfluous items for the South during the War years,<sup>17</sup> and 4) the small market share of many southern towns and hamlets that made distribution to them and production for them financially unfeasible. So where was a sharecropper from Tuscaloosa, Alabama, or an ex-slave from White Castle, Louisiana, going to find a vacuum cleaner, a mink coat, or a phonograph? The *Defender* showed the answer: Chicago.

In issue after issue, the *Defender* informed southern blacks, through its barrage of advertisements and announcements, that the city of Chicago could satisfy their desire to consume. Each week readers were enticed by a wide range of time-saving devices and luxury items that ads suggested were common in Chicago homes. These items ranged from spring mattresses and toys to combination ranges and refrigerators. The 13 December 1919, issue, for instance, sold "Books Books Books" for the Hayes Book Store on 3640 State Street. Southern readers were informed that the "HOT" sellers of the day included "*The Complete Exposition of the Science of Astrology*, 200 Pages—only \$1.25," "*The Black Man Father of Civilization*, 35c.," and "*Alberta Magnet*, \$1.25."

If patrons were not interested in books as a form of entertainment, there was always music to entice their imagination. One of the more interesting items that the *Defender* sold at this time was "PHONOGRAPHS." Chicago's Eagle Talking Machine Company sold its model at "\$1.00 monthly," including "36 Songs or Music FREE." The ad read: "Thousands of dollars are spent by people for theaters and all sorts of amusements. Why spend all that money if you can hear in your own home the finest singers and music on our great horn and hornless phonographs which we sell on payments of \$1.00 monthly?" (12 April 1919, 5).

Household products were not the only items that the *Defender* showcased. The *Defender* also ran ads for products that could change one's physical appearance. In fact, clothing and beauty product companies purchased the majority of ad space during this period. To many southern readers of the *Defender* it may have seemed that Chicago, not

Paris or Rome, was the fashion and beauty capital of the world. Each week the Hamilton Brothers of Chicago's south side ran a one-quarter page advertisement selling suits, coats, dresses, fur coats, and plush coats "from \$15.00 to \$40.00 on every garment." Hamilton's ads not only used sophisticated-looking white women to create a cosmopolitan image, the company also allowed customers to "PAY A DEPOSIT ON A GARMENT" that would be held "FOR YOU UNTIL WANTED." Like credit, this lay-away plan provided a way to obtain products as quickly and as painlessly as possible (13 December 1919, 4).

As important as clothing advertisements were to the *Defender*, beauty and cosmetic products took up more advertising space and generated more revenue. Cosmetics were not only important to the paper; they became the keystone of black businesses in America. Mary Frances Berry and John W. Blassingame argue that "easily, the most important black enterprises [during the first half of the twentieth century] were in cosmetics" (202). Perhaps no single force was more influential in the cosmetic business than Madame C. J. Walker, the *Defender's* largest client. Of the products that she and other cosmetic and beauty companies sold in Chicago, two stand out as the most popular—hair grower and straightener and skin lightener. Ironically, black men and women used both to look more like white men and women. In this respect, therefore, Chicago was "sold" not only as a place where southerners could consume luxury products, but also a place where blacks could transform themselves, both figuratively and literally.

*Advertisements Selling Services (Leisure) in Chicago.* Along with selling Chicago as a place where one could fulfill the need to consume, the *Defender* also sold the city as a place to have fun and relax. Just as systematically as it enticed readers with ads for furniture, phonographs, and face bleach, the *Defender* tantalized readers with stories of blacks attending full-length movies, joining social clubs, eating at the nicest restaurants, relaxing at the most comfortable hotels, and loudly cheering for the American Black Giants, black America's favorite baseball team. According to Franklin Frazier, Chicago at this time was a place where Negroes could "escape from the social and mental isolation of the rural South." He argued that by reading northern newspapers, such as the *Defender*, "The Negro's imagination was awakened by the marvels of the city, which offered various escapes from the pent-up existence which he had known. The Northern city provided mental stimulation not only for the Negro folk, but for the educated Negro as well" (*Negro Family* 182). One reader from Mississippi expected State Street, the focus of black Chicago's night life, to be "heaven itself" (Grossman, *Hope* 86).

One of the *Defender's* most popular sections was the Entertainment Section, which told black southerners of Chicago's movies, shows, plays, vaudeville acts, and musical groups. James Grossman, in fact,

credits Abbott for having the first such section in Negro Journalism (86). On any given Saturday during the "migration campaign," readers in Alabama, Texas, and Georgia could find page after page of theater advertisements enticing them with entertainment available to blacks in the north. For example, at the newly built Owl Theater, "The South Side's Finest," *Defender* patrons read of the "1200 ROOMY SEATS—\$10,000 KIMBALL PIPE ORGAN—8 PIECE ORCHESTRA—and—PERFECT VENTILATION" that awaited their arrival (27 January 1917, 4). At the Studebaker Theater, located at 3507 State Street, southerners learned that they could see Annette Kellermann in *A Daughter of the Gods*—"continuously 2 P.M. to Midnight" (27 January 1917, 4). In 1916, the Lincoln Motion Picture Company and the Washington Theater, at 3444 State Street, advertised their new film, *The Trooper of Troop K*, "featuring Noble Johnson and an all colored cast." The ad bragged that this "sensational three-part drama" used "350 people, ex-Ninth and Tenth Cavalrymen, Mexicans, Cowboys, and Horses" (7 October 1916, 4). *Troop K*, however, was not the only movie in town utilizing black actors. Oscar Micheaux's *The Homesteader* promised an opportunity to see "AN ALL STAR NEGRO CAST" in a "Powerful Drama of the Great American Northwest" for only 25 cents for the balcony or 50 cents for the main floor (22 February 1919, 4).

The *Defender* also featured ads for restaurants, hotels, and dance halls. Readers in Louisiana and Kentucky were told of Mr. Mattie Stonehouse's home-cooked plate dinner: "DINNER! GOOD! DINNER!" Further down the street, at 5058 South State Street, was Dunois Cafe where "service and quality to the patrons is our slogan." For readers with a more sophisticated palate, there was "Chicago's Fashionable Cafe, The Chateau" to tantalize their imagination. Along with the finest "Fruits, Chops, and Potatoes," The Chateau offered Chicago's finest music and "Dance from 8:00 P.M. to 1:00 A.M." (6 November 1915, 7). If one was not satisfied with the music at The Chateau, the *Defender* informed readers of other options. "Such dance halls as the Peking and the Palace Garden offered jazz, bright lights, dancing into the wee hours, and even racially mixed crowds" (Grossman, *Hope* 86). After a night of fun and excitement, a new migrant could spend a luxurious night at the Hotel Pullman—"The Finest and Largest Colored Hotel in America"—which promised "first class accommodations for married and single people. Everything new and up-to-date" (2 January 1915, 8).

By the turn of the nineteenth century, then, U.S. citizens, including black readers of the *Defender*, were exposed to a new variation of the American Dream that encouraged them to spend and not save, to relax and not work, and to seek self-fulfillment rather than self-denial. For blacks living in the south, however, the opportunity to consume and to enjoy leisurely pursuits were as unobtainable as "freedom," "equality," and "democracy." Beginning in 1915, however, the *Defender* rhetorically created a promised land where the materialistic hopes of the American

Dream could be realized. At the most obvious level, the *Defender's* discourse of consumption and leisure sold specific products and services. More importantly, however, such messages served as empirical proof for discontented black southerners that Chicago could fulfill their desire to consume and relax. However, the "consumption and leisure" theme was not the only American Dream theme the *Defender* used in creating a "city of hope." The paper also told of the possibilities of starting over by exploiting the "new beginnings" theme.

#### *New Beginnings*

Another one of the more predominant materialistic themes in the American Dream is that of "new beginnings." Robert Fossum and John Roth go as far as to argue that no theme "is more persistent" in America's social myth. They argue that "this belief exemplifies better than any other the optimism—some would call it naiveté—of Americans and the fundamental reason why rhetoric about the Dream caught on in the United States" (6). The possibility of a fresh start, the promise of a better tomorrow, and the belief that progress is inevitable are all manifestations of this optimism.

The *Defender*, as it did with the other themes of the Dream, not only reflected this dominant social mindset, but also helped to perpetuate and sell this idea in the black community. Franklin Frazier, a critic of this role, sees Negro Newspapers as "creating and maintaining a world of make-believe in which Negroes can realize their desires for recognition and status in a white world that regards them with contempt and amusement" (*Bourgeoisie* 178). A less cynical Grossman sees Abbott as a man who "reinforced black southerners' belief in the possibility of success, while convincing them that they could open the door of opportunity by moving North" (*Hope* 35).

While they differ on the merits of such rhetoric, both Frazier and Grossman agree that the *Defender* played a prominent role in stimulating black migration to the North by portraying Chicago as a land of hope. This task was partially accomplished by demonstrating to black southerners the importance of "new beginnings" in the North. The paper's method of demonstrating this theme was through stories that focused on local blacks who had procured respect, prestige, and status.

The *Defender's* favorite rags to riches story was Abbott's own. In the 24 February 1917, issue, for example, W. Allison Sweeney, an editorial writer, interviewed Abbott. While many subjects were discussed, the one overriding conclusion to emerge was that Abbott, once a Georgia laborer, was now a great success in the city of Chicago (12). Similarly, on 26 October 1918, the paper published a picture of Abbott as grand marshal of a Chicago parade in his brand new "Jack Rabbit" car, one of the most elite and aristocratic automobiles of the day. The caption below read "Mr. Abbott bore the entire expense of the parade last Saturday afternoon and evening" (1).

Stories of others who found fame and fortune in Chicago also were given ample space in the *Defender*. Curtis Collins, for example, came to Chicago from Hale County, Alabama, in 1912, and began selling bananas. "Since that time," the *Defender* wrote, "he has been pushing his cart with success and is handsomely supporting his wife and three children. Mr. Collins says that he has hopes some day of having a fruit store" (6 July 1919, 2). A front-page pictorial layout of Andrew (Rube) Foster, the owner of Chicago's American Giants, not only showed pictures of Foster and his family but also described his incredible success and illustrated it with photographs of Foster's mansion and deluxe automobile—the material manifestations of "making it" (20 February 1915, 1).

On 8 May 1915, the *Defender* told its readers of the great financial success experienced by "all" black-owned businesses along State Street from 26th to 39th street (otherwise known as "The Stroll"). These included the Little Savoy, which was owned by E. T. Hogan and L. Stephens; the Elite No. 1 and the Elite No. 2, both owned by Teenan Jones and Art Condozoe; the De Luxe Cafe owned and operated by Wm. Bottoms and Frank Preer; and Dave McGowan's famous Keystone Hotel. After a brief description and a review of the merits of these establishments, Abbott's article informed *Defender* patrons that "Everyone of the places mentioned above are perfectly equipped and among them are listed the finest places, not only in Chicago, but also in the entire country, and the manner in which they are conducted is so clean and orderly that there is no chance for criticism" (1). Similar stories about "The Stroll" were published on 2 December 1916, and 5 January 1918.

The paper not only described the experiences of blacks who had acquired wealth through hard work and perseverance, it also wrote about the many blacks who had achieved in Chicago a level of respect and prestige unheard of in the South. One of the paper's favorite techniques for illustrating these accomplishments was to put on the paper's front page a 6.5" × 4" photograph and a short description of such individuals. The first of these appeared in February 1915; it was a photograph of George W. Prince, a young black man who had just received his doctorate in clinical pharmacology from Northwestern University (1). On 18 September 1915, the *Defender* again paid tribute to one of the city's accomplished blacks, Lieutenant Wm. F. Childs, by publishing a photograph of Childs standing in front of a statue of President Lincoln. The caption read "Lieutenant William F. Childs enjoys the distinction of being the only Afro-American police lieutenant in the United States. He was the first of his race to be appointed sergeant of police" (1).

Black Americans living in the South during the early twentieth century were well aware of the American Dream that promised the hope of a better tomorrow, the opportunity for fame, and the possibility

of success. Many of these same blacks, however, were also aware that there was little chance for "new beginnings" in the deep South. As one man from Sanford, Florida, wrote Abbott: "The winter is about over here in the South and I still have a desire to seek for myself a section of this country where I can better my condishion (sic). . . ." (Scott, *Letters* 439). The *Defender*, through its repetitive use of "new beginning" discourse, illustrated to patrons in the south that Chicago offered the opportunities they so desperately sought.

While the *Defender* used different rhetorical strategies to present the themes of "consumption and leisure," and "new beginnings," both themes shared a common materialistic focus. As a result, readers received a vision of the North that was driven by individual fulfillment, consumption, wealth, and self-gratification. Concomitantly, the moral elements of the American Dream (freedom, equality, democracy, and religious independence) were marginalized in the narratives created by the *Defender* in the Land-Of-Hope Stage. However, these two sub-myths, the moral and the material, were merged in the "Action Stage."

#### Stage Three—A Call to Action

The moral and material conceptions inherent in the American Dream exist in a symbiotic relationship; the resulting tension creates and defines the "American persona." Fisher reminds readers, however, that while the American Dream is comprised of two myths, "no American can entirely escape the whole dream. When one of the myths tends to dominate, whether in a culture or in an individual, the other myth is always hauntingly there in the background" (163).

While Fisher suggests that the American Dream myth may lead to schizophrenia, his diagnosis does not conclude that mental health—collectively or individually—would result from the elimination of one of the myths. "In dichotomizing the American Dream into materialistic and moralistic myths," Fisher writes, "there is the danger that one may assume that there is virtue in one and only vice in the other." Such a view, Fisher argues, would be inaccurate since "both are based on traditional American values" (Fisher 163). Indeed, the tension between these two myths is integral to the U.S. character, and our rhetorical discourse is often characterized by an effort to negotiate a balance between them. James Andrews reinforces this view:

A measure of ambivalence towards goals and values is inherent in the American character. America is not and will most likely never be the new Utopia, and the conflicting elements in our own identity seem likely to go on contributing to disagreements and divisions. But a polar rhetoric cannot bring lasting solutions. Only a rhetoric that takes into account the need to understand and to balance conflicting pressures will finally contribute to the realization of our noblest aspirations. (324)

As late as spring 1916, the *Defender* was still encouraging blacks to remain in the South. Beginning that summer, however, an increasing

number of articles encouraged the southern exodus. By September 1916, this encouragement had evolved into a full-blown crusade which reached its peak in late 1917.<sup>18</sup> At this point the third stage in the migration campaign, *A Call For Action*, became apparent: the *Defender* explicitly began to encourage the migration of morally discontented southerners who were aware of the material advantages of the North through its presentation of a unified vision of the American Dream.<sup>19</sup> Whereas initially (in the Discontent Stage) the *Defender* had emphasized the moral themes of the Dream, and later had stressed material themes (in the Land-Of-Hope Stage), by fall 1917 the paper provided *balanced* conceptions of America's myth. In its call for action phase the *Defender* rhetorically negotiated the splintered vision of the Dream into one complete myth.

#### The Moral Call To Action

As Table 3 indicates, in the third stage of the *Defender's* campaign the distribution of these alternative conceptions of the American Dream was balanced, in contrast to the first two stages which had emphasized moral and material themes, respectively. Out of 100 articles that explicitly encouraged northern migration, 35 focused on "moral" reasons for northern movement. The two predominant moral themes used in this process were "freedom" and "equality," the same two moral themes that dominated the Discontent Stage. As early as January 1915 in the first stage, patrons had been disproportionately informed and reminded of their lack of freedom and equality in the South. Within the *Defender's* explicit calls to migrate in the third stage, these two themes emerged again. In reiterating these themes, while also highlighting the materialistic themes, the *Defender* supplied discontented blacks with a clear solution to a well-defined and detailed moral dilemma, thereby enhancing the persuasive potential of the *Defender's* rhetoric.<sup>21</sup>

#### The Material Call To Action

Counterbalancing the moral discourse that encouraged migration, were 23 articles and editorials that featured the material motivations

TABLE 3  
Frequency of the Major Themes in the Call-for-Action Stage<sup>20</sup>

Dream Focus	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	Total
Material (consumption, wealth, work ethic, and new beginnings)	0	7	8	6	2	23
Moral (freedom, equality, democracy, and religious independence)	0	6	13	12	4	35
Combined (Both Material and Moral)	0	15	15	6	3	39
Not Applicable	0	1	1	1	0	3
Total	0	29	37	25	9	100

for migration found in the American Dream. In doing so, neither the material nor the moral was disproportionately represented to southern patrons during the final "Call to Action" stage of the *Defender's* Great Migration Campaign. In encouraging southerners to migrate by illustrating the material advantages of the North, the *Defender* primarily focused on the American Dream theme of "wealth." This focus informed blacks that the North could fulfill the American Dream myth's promise of economic enhancement for them. For Abbott and his paper, however, this promised theme had significance beyond procuring capital—it was a means to achieve racial independence and equality.<sup>22</sup>

#### The Combined Moral / Material Call To Action

The *Defender's* final strategy for stimulating migration involved the utilization of both the moral and material elements in the same discourse. Of the 100 documents that explicitly encouraged black migration, over one-third did so by equally stressing both moral and material mythic conceptions in a single text. The types of texts through which the *Defender* disseminated this unified message included cover stories, editorials, letters to the editor, investigative reports, poems, and political cartoons. By doing so, the *Defender* stressed to its readers the importance of a balanced and unified vision of America, and guaranteed that readers, regardless of their newspaper content preferences, would be exposed to the complete mythic narrative. The following section analyzes two rhetorical forms used in the third stage of the campaign: reprinted letters sent to the paper and nontraditional news discourse (e.g., cartoons and poems).

*Migration-Letter Articles.* As with most major papers of this time, the most common and conspicuous rhetorical technique used on the front page was the bold headline followed by a sensationally written investigative report. Some of the *Defender's* banners encouraging migration included "EMIGRATION WORRIES SOUTH," "SOUTHERNERS PLAN TO STOP EXODUS," and "FREEZING TO DEATH IN THE SOUTH" (24 March 1917, 1; 12 August 1916, 1; and 24 February 1917, 1). However, the paper also used other rhetorical techniques to highlight its migration message on its front page—one of which was to incorporate into front-page articles letters written to the paper by migrants to Chicago.

The first of these migration-letter articles, published on 6 January 1917, quoted from a missive written by John Reece from his 4757 South Street, Chicago address. In his letter in the *Defender*, Reece extols both the material benefits of higher wages and the moral benefits of liberty in the North:

The South knows that no race in the world will stand for what we stand for, but the time is coming when we will refuse to be further humiliated and beaten like dogs and will leave. . . . We are beginning to say FAREWELL TO THE SOUTH. . . . I KNOW A THING OR TWO AND I KNOW THAT THEY ONLY PAY 13.5 CENTS PER HOUR FOR LABOR

AND ILL GET 29 CENTS PER HOUR AND HAVE BETTER HOURS AND LESS SKILL IS REQUIRED. I'll never go to the South again. Those of the South are crying like Patrick Henry; "Give me liberty or give me death." (1)

Using a similar strategy on its front page of 2 February 1918, the *Defender* printed an article titled, "AND STILL SOME WONDER WHY WE LEAVE THE SOUTH." In this article, the paper quoted from a letter sent to the *Defender* by William Crawford, formerly from Nashville, Tennessee, in which he stressed both the material and moral advantages of the North. The article began by introducing Crawford as "a man who wasted fifty years of his life in the land of rope and fire." "He now consents," the article explained, "to tell the *Defender* why so many are coming North":

It is often asked why so many Negroes are leaving the South. The Negroes are mistreated in most every way that treatment comes to one. . . . Such treatments are common among our Race, but we cannot strike back. Why? Because the courts, jails, prison houses, and ropes are yours. . . . Now, the Negro, like all other dogs, is looking for some place where he can get better treatment and a square deal; get better wages that he may be more able to support himself and his family, pay his honest debts, educate his children and make good, peaceable, law abiding citizens. (1)

In using excerpts from such letters as front-page inducements for migration, the *Defender* accomplished a number of related goals. First, and most importantly, by publishing letters that stressed both the material and moral advantages of the North, the paper rhetorically constructed a balanced vision of the American Dream for black southerners. Second, such letters showed the *Defender's* readers that the dream had been attained by other "common folk" like themselves who had been discontented in the south and had moved to the North and found solace. As group-conformity research has shown, individuals are far less fearful about taking risks when they perceive they are not acting alone (Diener 1160-1171). Third, the conclusions that the letter writers reached were the same conclusions that the *Defender* had so earnestly presented throughout the migration campaign; each author explained that s/he had become discontented with the South, had come to believe the North was morally and materially better, and then actually had migrated to Chicago and found that life there to be better than life in the south. As a result, these letters served as representative anecdotes, supplying readers with prototype examples of the three cognitive stages that characterized the migration campaign.

*Nontraditional Discourse Forms.* The *Defender* also masterfully employed "non-traditional" forms of rhetoric to present, albeit in a different way, the same salient themes and issues discussed in editorials, letters, and cover stories. For many, the visual elements of a cartoon and the rhythmically structured poem with its built-in mnemonic devices of rhythm, verse, and pattern, served as an important augmentation to the written word. These works, like their more traditional counterparts, fervently encouraged migration on both moral and material grounds.

For example, in "Bound for the Promised Land," a poem written in October 1916, a Mr. Ward told readers why he had left the morally impoverished South and described the job possibilities that he believed awaited him in the North once he was able to find the "executive" who would award him the "good job." The first eight lines of this sixteen-stanza poem set the tone for the rest of the piece:

From Florida's stormy banks I go,  
I'll bid the South good-bye;  
No longer shall they treat me so,  
And knock me in the eye.  
The Northern States is where I'm Bound,  
My cross is more than double—  
If the Executive can be found,  
I'll tell him all my trouble. (12)

Another rural poet whose verse was reprinted in the *Defender* was William Crosse. In his often-cited "The Land of Hope" poem, Crosse told of the moral (lynching and burning) and material (the desire to work) motivations for his exodus, and he urged other blacks to join him. Here are a few of the more dramatic lines:

I've watched the trains as they disappeared  
Behind the clouds of smoke,  
Carrying the crowds of working men  
To the land of hope,  
Yes, we are going to the North!  
I don't care to what state,  
Just so I cross the Dixon Line,  
From this southern land of hate,  
Lynched and burned and shot and hung,  
And not a word is said.  
Go on, dear brother; you'll ne'er regret;  
just trust in God; pray for the best,  
And at the end you're sure to find  
"Happiness will be thine." (Bontemps and Conroy 163)

While such poems played an important role in reinforcing motivations for migration, so, too did the more frequently appearing political cartoons. In every issue of the *Defender* at least one cartoon commented on the political, social, or economic conditions of black Americans. More often than not, such conditions either directly or tangentially related to the issue of migration. For example, the 2 September 1916, Fon Holly cartoon, "DESERTION," depicted a black man running towards a waiting automobile labeled "Northern Industries" and away from a white man with a gun and hound dogs labeled "lynchers." The caption accompanying the cartoon expressed this balanced motivation for migration: "They are taking advantage of the opportunities offered in the North by northern industries, where children can get a fair education and where their wives and daughters are free from being ravished" (12).

Another Holly cartoon which used the material and the moral themes of the American Dream was "THE AWAKENING." Published on

19 August 1916, it showed a black figure awaking from sleeping on a bale of cotton. The caption told readers that, "After fifty years of sound napping, depending on the white Southerners and his cotton crop, the members of the race are migrating into the northland, where every kind of labor is being thrown open to them, where decent houses are obtainable for him to house his family and better schools to educate his children" (12). Perhaps the most striking Holly cartoon was the 2 December 1916, "THINKING." In this 7 × 5.5 inch illustration, *Defender* readers saw a black laborer in the posture of Auguste Rodin's "The Thinker" sitting on a plow. Above his head, two dreamlike clouds filled with images floated in the air. The first of these depicted northern industries holding out open arms to the black migrant; the second showed black and white school children walking together into a modern, northern school building (12). Together, these images illustrate the material and moral themes of America's Dream.

By maintaining this thematic balance throughout the Action Stage, the *Defender* portrayed both the sad plight of oppressed southern blacks and a northern "Promised Land" where freedom, equality, democracy, and religious independence were as respected and valued as wealth, new beginnings, work, and consumption. For *Defender* patrons, the grand narrative made it clear that the ultimate solution to the plight of southern blacks was migration to the North, a north where all the deferred promises of the American Dream were obtainable. For many blacks, frustrated with the failure of Radical Reconstruction and the broken social contract of the New South, the *Defender's* alluring storyline was, at the very least, worthy of contemplation, and, in many cases, deserving of action.

#### Another Black Dream Deferred

Beginning in spring 1919, the *Defender* devoted decreasing space to the migration campaign. Fewer articles focused on the oppressive conditions in the South coupled with far more unfavorable reporting of life in Chicago led to a dramatic reduction in migration rhetoric. The campaign that had been waged so fervently in the paper's pages over the previous five years ground to a halt.

The "Promised Land" of Chicago was undergoing a metamorphosis. This transformation was brought about by a number of related events that seemed to have an intensifying effect on one another. Most notably, the war in Europe had ended. As a result, thousands of white soldiers returned home to Chicago to find the jobs, communities, and lifestyles they had left behind appropriated by thousands of African-American migrants. "Whites anxious to reaffirm the old caste lines, acted in ways intended to negate the economic and psychological gains made by blacks during the war, . . . but the newly settled black laborers were in no mood to be pushed around" (T. Frazier 250). As a result, racial tension grew.

This tension ultimately led to the three-day (27–30 July 1919) race riot in Chicago—an event that forever changed the tenor of the *Defender's* migration rhetoric. The bold headlines of the paper's 2 August 1919, issue summarized the situation: "RIOT SWEEPS CHICAGO," "GHASTLY DEEDS OF RACE RIOTERS TOLD," "GUN BATTLES AND FIGHTING IN STREETS KEEP THE CITY IN AN UPROAR," and "4,000 TROOPS IN ARMORY READY TO PATROL CITY: SCORES ARE KILLED" (1). When the dust settled in Chicago, 15 whites and 23 blacks lay dead, with at least 537 others wounded.<sup>23</sup> Nationally, during this tumultuous period, known as "(blood) Red Summer," 22 race riots ignited, the most violent of which occurred in Chicago.

The Chicago race riot was the *coup de grace* for the migration campaign. The paper's campaign, which had been steadily decreasing in intensity since the spring, came to an abrupt stop. Once it had become clear that many of the same problems that existed in the South were also present in the post-war North, Abbott and his paper could no longer honestly paint Chicago as the "Promised Land." Chicago simply had become yet another place where the black American Dream was deferred.

#### Conclusion

While previous scholarly studies have advanced two dominant theories to explain the exodus of southern blacks to the North—the Push-Pull Theory (see Dillard, Scott, and Haynes) and the Socio-emotional Theory (see Goodwin, Bontemps and Conroy), this essay has argued that an additional factor in the Great Migration was the migration campaign rhetoric discernible in the articles and ads in Robert Abbott's Chicago *Defender*. The analysis has shown that in three overlapping stages that spanned the five year period from 1915–1919, the *Defender* first attempted to create a sense of discontentment in its southern black readers by exploiting the moralistic themes of the American Dream (the Discontentment Stage) in articles highlighting the oppressive conditions of life in the south for black Americans. Next, by disproportionately focusing on the materialistic themes of the Dream in articles, editorials, and advertisements, the paper rhetorically held up to discontented southerners a "Promised Land" (the Land-Of-Hope Stage). Finally, the paper's articles, editorials, and nontraditional texts connected the major premises of the first two stages in appeals to migrate, and, based on the dualistic promises of the American Dream, the paper called for a black exodus to the "dream" city of Chicago.

Of course, the *Defender* was only one of many rhetorical forces stimulating the exodus. This study has demonstrated how the lure of the American Dream was employed by one black newspaper to encourage the Great Migration; however, many other individuals and social

forces have yet to be investigated. For example, research remains to be done on the role in the Great Migration played by the two traditionally dominant institutions in the black community—the black church and family. As Berry and Blassingame note, these two institutions “enabled blacks to endure American racism, slavery, segregation, violence, and oppression.” They provided the foundation, argue Berry and Blassingame, “for personal identity, communal strength, individual triumphs in the face of overwhelming odds, creative and rewarding lives, and pride” (70).

This rhetorical analysis of the *Defender's* public discourse encouraging the Great Migration of 1915–1920 also yields several new insights into black culture at the turn of the twentieth century and the power of discourse in society. First, this analysis allows us to see African Americans of the time as active decision-making agents, not passive victims. Additionally, it illustrates the power of myths to shape, augment, and reframe notions of “home,” “migration,” and the “promise of a better tomorrow.” Third, it illustrates how the *Chicago Defender*, as an example of the black press, not only disseminated news and information, but also was a force that shaped the social reality of its many black readers. Finally, and perhaps most interestingly, analysis of the paper’s contents show that while the black and white communities at the turn of the century were racially segregated, they still shared a belief in the mythic narrative of the American Dream. Jim Crow laws, “Whites Only” signs, and forced educational segregation had little impact on stopping the diffusion of “America’s Dream” to blacks. Unfortunately, as many blacks learned in the summer of 1919, believing in the dream of a better life was not the same as living the dream of a better life.

Today many African-American leaders argue that not much has changed since the bloody summer of 1919 (Asante 1987; West 1993). The promised dream still remains unfulfilled for many blacks living in the same segregated areas of the North that emerged during the Great Migration (e.g., Harlem, the south side of Chicago, Detroit, West Philadelphia, and Gary, Indiana). Such critiques suggest that the term “American Dream” is a misnomer; it should be called the “Eurocentric Dream.”

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>A true figure on the number of black Southerners who migrated during this period is difficult to estimate due to the discrepancies in scholarship. Figures range from 350,000 to 1,000,000 migrants.

<sup>2</sup>Scholars who support the Push-Pull Theory includes Emmett J. Scott, “Additional Letters” and “Letters of Negro Migrants,” George E. Haynes, Charles S. Johnson, St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, Sean Dutcher, Edward Lewis, Louise V. Kennedy, Wallace Vickery, Robert Higgs, George A. Davis and Fred Donaldson, and Gian Sahota. For more insight into this discussion, see James Grossman’s notes, 280 and Marvin E. Goodwin, v–viii.

<sup>3</sup>The Push-Pull Theory of the 1920s was the first major theory to explain the “Great Migration.” While the emergence of the Socio-emotional Theory in the 1950s and 1960s served to challenge Economic Determinism, it did not replace the latter as the dominant paradigm. Today, both theoretical approaches are still being used to explain why people migrated.

<sup>4</sup>Scholars who have supported the Socio-emotional approach include Herbert Aptheker, Arna Bontemps and Jack Conroy, The Chicago Commission of Race Relations, David E. Cronon, Franklin E. Frazier, Robert B. Grant, Marvin E. Goodwin, James Grossman, Florette Henri, Marcus E. Jones, Ira Katznelson, Lawrence Levine, Alphonso Pinkney, Allan H. Spear, and Dempsey J. Travis.

<sup>5</sup>This number steadily grew during the migration years (1915–1919), ultimately reaching 160,000 to 230,000 a week during the early 1920s.

<sup>6</sup>Information on Abbott’s personal and professional life is difficult to find. The editor left no personal papers, diaries, or letters. Roi Ottley’s book is the only biography published on the life and times of Robert S. Abbott.

<sup>7</sup>Both Ottley and Wolsley agree that Abbott had started a daily paper before the *Defender*. However only an estimated 200 to 300 copies were produced, none of which exist today. The paper soon folded because of financial difficulties.

<sup>8</sup>While some cite circulation figures as high as 250,000 a week, most researchers agree that such estimations are slightly exaggerated. Grossman and Kornweibel, two of the most highly respected researchers on the migration, place the *Defender's* weekly circulation from 160,000 to 230,000. An exact number, however, is impossible to ascertain due to poor record keeping and lost or destroyed documents.

<sup>9</sup>While the *Defender* was primarily distributed throughout the American South, a disproportionate number of papers were delivered to the states of Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia, Arkansas, and South Carolina. For a complete list of the *Defender's* shipping list see Theodore Kornweibel.

<sup>10</sup>The figure on illiterate migrants moving north may not be as high as scholars once assumed. Stanley Lieberson and Carole Marks both found that the rate of literacy in the North actually was slightly higher than would have been predicted had there been no out-migration of literate blacks.

<sup>11</sup>Not all agree, however, with my relatively non-restrictive definition of myth. Robert C. Rowland, for example, in a special *Communication Studies* (Summer 1990) dedicated to meta-critical issues of mythic criticism, asserts that rhetorical critics need a far more limiting conception of myth to avoid the “dander” of misapplication. Specifically, Rowland’s “narrow approach” defines myth by both its function and structure. Functionally, a myth needs to “define a good society and solve problems, not subject to rational solution” (102), and to be “treated as ‘true’ by the people who tell them” (103). Structurally, Rowland asserts, myths must 1) be in narrative form; 2) entail a hero as its main character; 3) occur outside of normal historical time and place; and 4) rely heavily on archetypal language (103–104).

Responding to this narrow conception of myth, Martha Solomon believes Rowland’s ideas are too dogmatic and limiting, and sees no evidence that mythic criticism is being misapplied in communication journals (120). Barry Brummett views Rowland’s categorization of myth as a constructed division, “heavily informed by religious values and forms.” His conception, writes Brummett, “implies a view that myth is like religion, and that the subject matter of myth must therefore be analogous to the subject matter of religion” (134). Finally, Janice Hocker Rushing, in defending her mythic scholarship (as well as other rhetorical critics such as Walter Fisher), sees Rowland as limiting the creative critical process and reducing the study to myth to a checklist: His “critique implies a fear that something will get out of control—whether it is myth gone rampant in society, or critics turned unruly in academia, I am not sure. I would argue, by contrast, that the real danger lies in reducing this infinitely rich field of study to a unidimensional one, and in confining critical insights to what is empirically verifiable. Regarding the latter, I prefer Black’s characterization of criticism as a ‘personal instrument’ that is ‘too personally expressive to be systematized’” (147).



While my use of myth in this essay is generally compatible with Rowland's functional/structural definition, he would surely take exception to the fact that the formal characteristics of the American Dream myth are not "explicitly evident in the text" (145). However, as Waldo Braden writes, "Since it [myth] is the possession of a group that commonly possesses and even reveres it, the myth-user (orator or writer [or newspaper]) seldom needs to present the myth in a full blown form; instead he [sic] suggests or insinuates it through a sign, a phrase, passing references, or a gesture" (146). This was most certainly true of the *Defender's* use of the American Dream Myth from 1915-1919. Readers at the turn of the century were well aware of the myth's promises and relied on its narrative to give meaning to their lives and to help answer the question, "what does it mean to be a true American." Consequently, the *Defender* did not need to supply its readers with "explicit evidence in the text;" it only needed to "refer" to the myth's recurring themes and functions. See "Special Section: On Mythic Criticism." *Communication Studies* Volume 41, Number 2 (1990): 101-160.

<sup>12</sup>Although the "American Dream" has been with us since the beginning of our country, the term is relatively new. One of the first to popularize it was the historian James Truslow Adams. In *The Epic of America*, published in 1931, he referred to "that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement." Adams believed that this dream might be "the greatest contribution that the United States has made to the thought and welfare of the world" (6).

<sup>13</sup>After the riots during the summer of 1919, the *Defender* dramatically reduced its pro-northern editorials, calls for migration, and news reports that touted Chicago as the "Land of Hope." What did not stop, however, were the advertisements that sold products and services to the paper's readers. The *Defender*, after all, was a for-profit organization. But with the paper's harsh criticism of the North, and of Chicago in particular, the advertisements were placed in a different rhetorical context—one that no longer sold Chicago as the promised land.

<sup>14</sup>The analysis of the discontent stage of the Chicago *Defender's* migration campaign from 1915-1919 entailed the following steps. First, through a detailed reading of the *Defender* during the five years of the campaign, documents that cast the South in an unfavorable light were identified, copied and dated. Through this process nearly 200 documents in which the discontent predominated were uncovered. Second, these works were studied in order to discover the aspects of the American Dream myth that characterized each of them. In categorizing the use of American Dream myth themes in this material, the themes themselves were operationalized according to the following criteria:

#### Moralistic Themes

**Freedom:** Documents categorized under the rubric of "freedom," demonstrated that blacks were unable to "live" in the South without risk of physical or mental abuse. By "live," I am referring to the everyday acts that constitute one's life style, i.e., walking through town, shopping, dating, working, talking, and raising children.

**Equality:** Documents classified as employing the theme of "equality" showed that southern whites had certain rights and privileges that were not afforded to blacks.

**Democracy:** Documents classified as "democracy" discourse emphasized the prohibition of black participation in shaping local and national governments, policies, and laws.

**Religious Independence:** Documents classified under the heading of "religious independence," portrayed the South as a region where blacks could not publicly worship the religion of their choice.

#### Materialistic Themes

**Wealth:** Documents that used the "wealth" theme emphasized the elusive of money, property, and the good life that accompanies such acquisitions.

**Work Ethic:** "Puritan Work Ethic" discourse showed that southern blacks were either unable to find work, or punished for outworking their white counterparts. The work described, however, had to be gratifying in itself, not simply a means of financial gain as in the theme of wealth.

**Consumption and Leisure:** Documents that fell under the rubric of "consumption and leisure," created a vision of the South in which the availability of luxury items, time saving devices, mass advertised products, movies, stage shows, and music halls was improbable. The theme of consumption was not used by Abbott in developing the discontent stage. Abbott would, however, make this his dominant persuasive theme in pursuing the land of hope stage.

**New Beginnings:** I classified any discontent document that persuaded readers of the improbability of a fresh start in the South as a "new beginnings" document.

<sup>15</sup>The analysis of the "Land of Hope" stage of the Chicago *Defender's* migration campaign from 1915-1919 entailed the following steps. First, through a detailed reading of the *Defender* during the five years of the campaign, documents that cast Chicago in a favorable light were identified, copied and dated. Through this process nearly 16,000 documents identified. These works were then analyzed and classified according to the American Dream themes that predominated each document. The classification was carried out according to the following criteria that were used to operationalize the themes as they occurred in the discourse:

#### Materialistic Themes

**Consumption and Leisure:** Documents categorized under the rubric of "consumption and leisure" were those that demonstrated that Chicago was a place where blacks could pursue periodic leisure, compulsive spending, and individual fulfillment.

**New Beginnings:** When an item was coded as discourse used the theme of "material new beginnings," the document showed that blacks in Chicago could be optimistic about a new future, achieve the entrepreneurial concept of success (the emphasis being on the process, not on money), and climb the American ladder to social prestige.

**Wealth:** Documents classified as "wealth" discourse emphasized the availability of money and the opportunity to become financially affluent in Chicago. These were differentiated from other materialistic documents in that "money" and "economic success" were shown as the end goals—not related concepts such as advancement, purchasing power, or social respect.

**Work Ethic:** Documents classified under the "work ethic" theme emphasized the employment opportunities awaiting black migrants. These advertisements, however, had to portray the act of working (or not being idle) as the end goal—not money nor the prestige that traditionally accompanies employment.

#### Moralistic Themes

**Freedom:** An item was coded as discourse using the theme of "freedom" when the document emphasized that Chicago was a place where one could live without the constant threat of slavery, unprovoked violence (lynching, shooting, and burning), and unjust arrests.

**Equality:** Documents categorized under the rubric of "equality" demonstrated that Chicago awarded African Americans the same respect, service, and justice as that given to their white counterparts.

**Democracy:** Documents classified as "democracy" discourse emphasized the active role granted blacks in the shaping of local and national governments, policies, and laws.

**Religious Independence:** Documents classified under the heading of "religious independence" portrayed Chicago as a city where blacks could worship publicly without the risk of verbal or physical abuse.

<sup>16</sup>For a more detailed account of advertising during this period, see Marchand, and Goodrum and Dalrymple.

<sup>17</sup>Accelerated production for the military in northern industrialized cities reached its peak from 1916–1919. One result of this decision was that fewer superfluous, luxury items were produced and distributed to the South.

<sup>18</sup>For examples of early articles encouraging migration, see: *Defender*, 22 July 1916, 12; and 12 August 1916, 12.

<sup>19</sup>In writing on the migration and the Chicago *Defender*, many historians fix on the "Migration Drive of 15 May 1917" as the most important contribution of the *Defender* to black migration. Abbott's biographer, Roi Ottley, described it as "The formal kick-off day" of the "mass exodus North," and "the most ambitious project ever undertaken by the *Defender*" (160). James Grossman asserted that "For three months the *Defender* told its readers of an impending group departure on that date" (88). And Florette Henri wrote that Abbott's master stroke in materializing a migration . . . was the setting of a date, a specific month and day in 1917, for what the *Defender* called "the Great Northern Drive" (65).

There are, however, a number of shortcomings with these assertions. To begin with, the *Defender* published only three minor articles that discussed May 15, none of which appeared on the front page or were of significant length. Of these, the most talked about was a 2 × 2.5" article that was published inconspicuously on page three of the 10 February 1917, issue. Furthermore, contrary to most historic accounts, none of these works ever mentioned any specifics about meeting places, transportation, times, cost, accommodations, or resettlement in Chicago.

While the initial seed may have been planted by the *Defender*, the narrative of the "Drive" took on a life of its own, fueled by southern black optimism, rumors, and gossip. Augmenting this form of socially constructed reality, white southern papers, such as the *Birmingham Age Herald* and the *Atlanta Constitution*, began reporting on the increasing excitement infectiously spreading throughout the black South. Ernest Bormann's discussion of the "chaining out process" supplies one possible explanation of this phenomenon.

<sup>20</sup>In analyzing the action stage, I identified, copied and dated any document appearing in the *Defender* from January 1915–December 1919 that explicitly encouraged migration North. Through this process, 100 documents that encouraged migration were identified. The documents were then classified by those employing moral themes, material themes, or a combination of both. Only 3 of these 100 articles did not focus on the American Dream themes as an intentional source. In these rare cases, the documents were viewed as aberrations and they appear in Table 3 as "NOT APPLICABLE." The remaining 97 documents studied were categorized according to the following criteria:

**Material:** Documents classified as "Material" discourse encouraged northern migration by claiming that either the South denied one's material rights or that the North offered southern blacks the opportunity to consume and relax, acquire wealth, work, or start anew.

**Moral:** Documents categorized under the rubric of "Moral" encouraged northern migration on the grounds that either the South usurped or that the North offered freedom, equality, democracy, and religious independence.

**Combination:** Documents categorized as "Combination" rhetoric, persuaded blacks to migrate by not only focusing on the bad moral and/or material conditions in the South, but also by focusing on the good moral and/or material conditions in the North.

<sup>21</sup>Some examples include: *Defender*, October 7, 1916, 1; March 11, 1916, 1; September 22, 1917, 1; March 23, 1918, 6; May 25, 1918, 1; May 26, 1917, 1; June 2, 1917, 1; March 9, 1918, 1; May 31, 1919, 1; October 7, 1916, 1; November 3, 1917, 12; August 4, 1917, 12; October 21, 1916, 12.

<sup>22</sup>Some examples include: *Defender*, March 17, 1917, 12; April 20, 1918, 16; October 12, 1918, 16; August 12, 1916, 12; January 15, 1916, 12; August 12, 1916, 12; February 10, 1917, 1; and February 2, 1918, 1.

<sup>23</sup>For more detail, see: Charles S. Johnson, *The Chicago Commission of Race Relations*, William M. Tuttle, Jr., and Walter F. White.

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