

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.

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).¹ 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.²

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.³ Scholars subscribing to the socio-emotional explanation of the Great Migration argue that *social* injustice and *personal* ties primarily motivated migration.⁴ 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).⁵ 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.⁶ Three hundred copies of the first issue of the *Defender* appeared on May 5, 1905, printed at a cost of \$13.75.⁷ 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).⁸ 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.⁹

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).¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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.¹² 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.¹³ 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

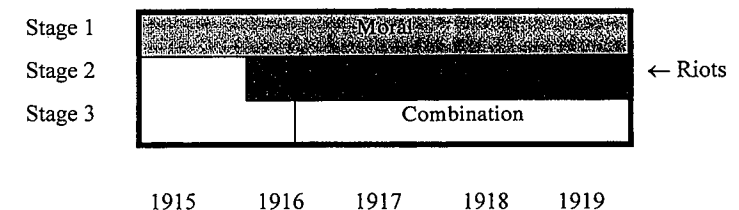


Figure 1.
Duration and Use of Stages and Mythic Dream Themes

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.¹⁴ 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 Stage¹⁵

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 1890-1915.¹⁶ 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,¹⁷ 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,

