BLACK PRESS--Protest

STANLEY S. SCOTT

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

I welcome this opportunity to pay tribute to the Black Press.

For many years, I witnessed firsthand the vital role played by the Black Press in our struggle for survival, and in our determination to succeed. The Black Press must press on in the pursuit of equality, justice, understanding, and full participation until the hopes for America are realized by all people.

I know that Americans from all walks of life will proudly join me in a well deserved "Salute to the Black Press."

STANLEY S. SCOTT
Special Assistant
to the President

Did You Know?

*That the New York Amsterdam News has the highest ABC audited circulation of any single edition black paper.

*That four black dailies exist: the Chicago Daily Defender, the New York Challenger, the Columbus (Ga.) Times and the Atlanta Daily World.

*That the Afro-American Newspaper chain publishes 13 editions or an average of nearly two papers daily.

*That the Norfolk Journal and Guide was originally a fraternal organ of the Knights of Gideon.

*That more than 1,400 black papers were started between 1900 and 1950.

By Sherman Briscoe
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The voice of one of the longest protests in history is the Black Press of America which celebrates its 146th anniversary in March.

But it has been more than an effective voice of protest that has played a major role in every era of resistance overcome; it has also stimulated attainments in education and self-improvement to help keep black people abreast of opportunities as they have been achieved.

It was in March of 1827 — more than 200 years after slavery had been established in America — that John B. Russwurm and the Rev. Samuel E. Cornish launched Freedom's Journal, the first black newspaper in the United States and the first black voice raised in newsprint against bondage.

The Journal not only spoke out against slavery in the South and ill treatment of freed blacks in the North, but it also emphasized education, self-improvement, industry and thrift on the part of freedmen.

Within a little over a year, Russwurm, an 1826 graduate of Bowdoin College, became discouraged, left the paper and joined the American Colonization Society.

Changes Name

The Reverend Mr. Cornish, founder of the first black Presbyterian Church in America, continued briefly with the journal, changing its name to "The Rights Of All."

Between the death of the Journal and the death of slavery, 23 other black newspapers were to raise their mastheads in protest of that institution, of the denial of full enfranchisement of freed blacks, and of oppression of them. Equally, they promoted the Underground Railroad and other abolitionist efforts, while constantly encouraging self-improvement, self-definition, industry and thrift.

Among the most outstanding of these mostly short-lived papers were: Fred Douglass' North Star, Willis Hodges' Ram's Horn, William Welles Brown's Rising Sun, Phillip Bell and Charles Ray's Colored American, Dr. Martin Delaney's Mystery and the AME Church's Christian Advocate which is still going after 124 years.

With slavery dead in 1865, black leaders believed there was no urgency to continue black newspapers. Only about 10 such papers were established between the end of the Civil War and the Hayes-Tilden deal which led to the withdrawal of troops from the South in 1877 and the rolling back of the clock whose hands were to stand still in racial progress for more than half a century.

Between 1877 and 1900, about 150 black newspapers came into being to protest mob violence, lynchings, the total abrogation of the 14th and 15th amendments and only half observance of the 13th.

Still Going Strong

The leading black papers of this dark period were: The Washington Bee, established in 1879 by Attorney William Calvin Chase; the Cleveland Gazette, launched in 1883 by Harry C. Smith; the Philadelphia Tribune, founded by Chris J. Perry, a successful realtor, in 1884. This 88-year-old paper, now under the leadership of the able Eustace Gay, is one of five that still survive from the 19th century.

Other outstanding papers of the era were: Timothy Thomas Fortune's New York Age, John Mitchell's Richmond Planet, Sol Johnson's Savannah Tribune, Phillip Bell and W. J. Powell's San Francisco Elevator, Nick Chiles' Topeka Plaindealer, John Murphy's AFRO-AMERICAN which, along with the Indianapolis Recorder, the New Iowa Bystander and the Houston Informer and Texas Freeman, are the other four that are still going strong.

Harvard educated William Monroe Trotter practically opened the 20th century with his Boston Guardian. Much like the Rev. T. J. Smith's Pittsburgh Broad-Axe, it let the chips fall where they may.

The Guardian was soon followed by Robert Sengstacke Abbott's Chicago Defender in 1905, P. B. Young's Norfolk Journal and Guide, James Anderson's Amsterdam News, Robert L. Vann's Pittsburgh Courier, Roscoe Dungee's Oklahoma Black Dispatch and Joseph and William Mitchell's St. Louis Argus.

With the departure of George White of North Carolina from the Congress in 1901, the long night of disfranchisement, nurtured by the Ku Klux Klan and grandfather clauses in state constitutions, set in for 27 years.

Go North

But Robert Abbott, unlike Boston-reared Trotter, was born and reared in Savannah, Ga. and educated at Hampton Institute of Virginia. He knew that no amount of cursing and protesting and demanding alone would improve the plight of black people as long as they remained in the South. The answer, as he saw it, was to get as many black people as possible out of the South. And he launched his campaign to bring them North.

By the time his campaign got well underway, World War I had begun and there arose a demand in the North for black workers to help man the steel mills, stockyards and other industries. During and following

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Credo of The Black Press

The Black Press believes that America can best lead the world away from racial and national antagonisms when it accords to every man, regardless of race, color or creed, his human and legal rights. Hating no man, fearing no man, the Black Press strives to help every man in the firm belief that all are hurt as long as anyone is held back.

and Progress

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the war, Abbott's Chicago Defender carried red headlines week after week, reading: "Negroes are Coming North by the Thousands."

Largely, it has been the voting leverage of blacks in the North that has made the difference in civil rights advance. And Abbott and his Defender are rated the most significant black journalistic achievement of the first half of the 20th century.

His paper — now directed by one of his nephews, John H. Sengstacke, has become one of four black dailies in continental U.S. The other three are the Atlanta Daily World, founded by W. A. Scott in 1932, the New York Challenger, launched in March by Thomas H. Watkins Jr. of the New York Recorder and the Columbus Times of Columbus, Ga., two years old, Mrs. Ophelin DeVore Mitchell, publisher.

In addition to the Defender, Sengstacke owns the New Pittsburgh Courier, The Michigan Chronicle and the Memphis Tri-State Defender.

John Murphy's Baltimore AFRO-AMERICAN was expanded into a chain by his sons, Carl and Arnett and other members of the family. The chain includes AFRO-AMERICAN in Newark, Philadelphia, Richmond and Washington which absorbed the old Washington Tribune.

Bought By Syndicate

James Anderson's Amsterdam News, named for the street he lived on, was taken over by Drs. C. B. Powell and Philip Savory in 1936. Last year it was purchased for more than $2 million by Attorney Clarence B. Jones and the Amsterdam News Syndicate.

These and other papers joined the Defender in its migration drive. In their deal, their editors made negative reporting a fetish, seldom seeing anything good about the South or about the black people who lived there. Much of this attitude slopped over into the North where it still exists.

While negative reporting fired the migration movement and the protest against segregation and mob-violence, it may have had the harmful influence of retarding greater efforts in education, self-improvement, industry and thrift.

Black protest was also fired by Woodrow Wilson's false promise of entering World War I "to make the world safe for democracy." At first blacks believed the slogan, but soon discovered that it was merely a slogan. Angered by the deception, black editors pressed hard for the rights of their people and took every opportunity to expose the failings of democracy.

So vocal was the Black Press in its protests and demands, that the War Department summoned 31 of the loudest voices to Washington to face complaints and criticism. But the editors brought complaints of their own — anti-black mob-violence, ill-treatment of black troops, segregation here at home and disfranchisement. Their complaints went unanswered by the War Department and the Department of Justice, and they returned to their typewriters and continued their criticism and protest as before. A. Philip Randolph's Messenger was one of the most outspoken.

Also the 1940s saw the coming of age of the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA) which was organized in 1940 with 11 members at a meeting in Chicago called by John Sengstacke.

NNPA Member Newspapers
(A Partial List)