

Trotter began immediately to mount an almost weekly editorial attack on Washington in the *Guardian* questioning his person, prestige and racial policies. It was inevitable that the two men, so opposite in their views, would eventually meet and when they did it was to be recorded as the "Boston Riot." The site was Boston's Columbus Avenue African Methodist Episcopal Church and the occasion was an address by Washington on July 30, 1903, at the invitation of the Boston branch of the National Negro Business League. In preparation for the event, the editors of the *Guardian* drafted a series of nine highly provocative questions which Trotter would ask from the floor. The questions went to the heart of the nature of the kind of leadership Washington was giving to Black people.

The church was crowded with 2,000 people. The first time a *Guardian* supporter attempted to make himself heard, he was ejected. When he returned, after Washington had been introduced, and attempted to speak again, the program's moderator ordered the police to arrest him. As he was being taken out, the crowd exploded, scuffles and fist fights broke out and in the midst of it all, Trotter climbed onto a chair and attempted to read his questions, but in the confusion could not be heard.

Someone suggested that they "throw Trotter out the window," but the police settled for arresting him instead and filed a charge of disturbing a public meeting against him. He was fined \$25 and sentenced to 30 days in jail - which he served.

Newspapers all over the country published the story of the "Boston Riot," reacting with surprise and distaste over the fact that other Blacks would dare disagree with Washington. It was as if whites had been betrayed. How dare Blacks place themselves in opposition to the sensible course that Washington had charted, the press seemed to be saying.

The *Boston Transcript* editorialized: "In no case is the old text that a prophet is not without honor save in his own country, better exemplified than in the case of Booker T. Washington, whose work is appreciated and applauded even by the Negroes' hereditary oppressors and whose person is persecuted only by his own race."

"If the Boston Negro is not capable of understanding so able a representative of his race what is to be expected of other Afro-Americans?", asked the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* in its pages.

And the *New York Times* observed that the incident was "a most disgraceful and lamentable episode" perpetrated by individuals who were "all for war and for a rush into full equality of every kind, deserved or undeserved."

To these critics, Reverend Reverdy Ransom, an anti-Washington clergyman, answered: "The revolt at Boston was the first that has reached the public. There would be others if Mr. Washington did not control the strong papers conducted by colored men and if they expressed the sentiments of the people."

The allegation that Washington controlled a good portion of the Black press through the dispensation of money and favors was to surface time and time again over the succeeding years and while no firm evidence was ever presented to substantiate such charges, the fact is that the Black press of that time was almost universally uncritical of Washington. A few notable exceptions were *The Guardian*, *The Washington Bee*, the *Chicago Broad Axe*, and later *The Crisis* magazine under the editorship of W.E.B. DuBois.

For the next fourteen years, until Washington's death in 1915, Trotter continued to attack the racial policies of the former and was one of the leading figures in the convening of "The Niagara Movement" which, in time, was to lead to the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and a culmination of the anti-Washington movement.

After the death of Washington and the end of the feud, the remaining career of Trotter seems strangely anti-climatic, as if the fire had gone out. There were flashes of the old Trotter on occasion, such as the confrontation with President Woodrow Wilson over the chief executive's acquiescence in the imposition of segregated facilities for Black and white Federal employees; the campaign against the racist firm, "Birth of the Nation"; and his activities on behalf of Black people at the Versailles Peace Conference following World War I. But after Washington passed away, *The Guardian* began to decline in influence and by the time Trotter died in a mysterious fall or leap from a Boston building in 1935, he was very much a forgotten man.

However, the contributions he made to the Black press and Black people, were substantial and of permanent value. His attacks on Washington came at a time when the nation badly needed to hear alternative views on race questions - though those views may not have been universally approved. Some of those who originally supported Trotter, thought on occasion that he went too far in his battle against Washington and the school of thought he represented. But somewhere there had to be an editor so sure of his own rightness that he could face the condemnation that would surely come his way once he attacked the accommodationist policies of Washington. Trotter was that editor.

Trotter has been described as a "true pioneer, decades ahead of his time" by Lerone Bennett, whose actions fathered latter day Civil Rights efforts. "Trotter laid the first stone of the modern protest movement," asserted Bennett. To be sure, Trotter's approach to the press set a pattern that other Black editors were to follow in the years ahead. With Trotter, a new militancy appeared in the Black press and it could not have been developed at a more propitious time in the history of Black America.

If there ever was a low point in the history of the Blacks as free citizens in America, this was it.

The overwhelming majority of Blacks still lived in the South where a carefully constructed, dehumanizing and odious system of Jim Crow permeated almost every aspect of their lives. Unpunished lynching were commonplace and hope for any easing of racist oppression was faint indeed.

With Trotter leading the way, other militant Black papers began to appear and quickly became a dominant force in Black life. Free from dependence on white beneficiaries, the Black papers could strike out boldly at racism and say those things that many Blacks wanted to say - but were in no position to do so.

A New Voice Emerges

These new papers could also be economically viable as was demonstrated by Robert Abbott who has been described as "the greatest single voice in the Black press." Abbott began the *Chicago Defender* on a shoestring in 1905 when the city had a Black population of some 40,000 persons.

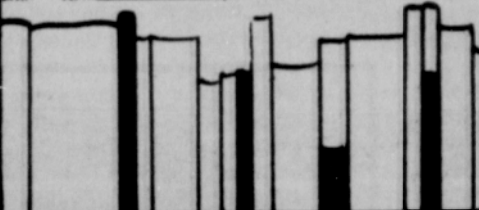
Until the advent of Abbott, Black papers generally were marginal operations. Few were financially successful enterprises. Abbott changed that and also the emphasis of the Black press. Abbott brought sensationalism to the Black press with screaming headlines heavily weighted in favor of crime stories and the latest scandal.

The purists could shake their heads in disapproval, but Abbott made the Black press, perhaps for the first time, a paying proposition. At the same time the *Defender* maintained constant crusades against segregation and discrimination.

More than any one individual, Abbott was responsible for the massive migration of Blacks from the South to the North during and after World War I. His paper was widely circulated in the South, sometimes clandestinely because in many places the white authorities sought to have it suppressed. In the pages

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