



# John Quincy Adams

St. Paul Editor

and Black Leader



David V. Taylor

NEARLY THIRTY-FIVE YEARS before the Civil War — on March 30, 1827, in New York City — the Reverend Samuel E. Cornish and John B. Russwurm founded the first Afro-American newspaper in the United States. Called *Freedom's Journal*, it is credited with being the first successful attempt to propagandize racial grievances through the medium of the press. The newspaper was launched to promote abolition of slavery, espouse the rights of free Blacks, counteract the attacks and insults made upon Afro-Americans, and serve as an instrument of racial enlightenment and uplift. Despite

lack of support and even considerable opposition, the newspaper managed to survive until 1830.<sup>1</sup>

The subsequent establishment of other Black journals followed similar editorial lines. In general, they promoted the abolitionist cause and equal rights for Blacks. They also facilitated communication between Afro-American communities and eventually helped Blacks become more socially and politically aware and active. Before the Civil War broke out, nearly twenty-five Black journals had appeared and disappeared, including Frederick Douglass' well-known *North Star*.<sup>2</sup>

The post-Reconstruction era witnessed a national resurgence of Black journals, especially in the North. These newspapers were usually conceived of as tools to protest grievances in an attempt to seek legal redress, locally and nationally. Their goals also included advancement of literacy, racial enlightenment, and moral and social betterment. These weeklies sought to inspire racial pride and self-improvement among deprived and oppressed Blacks and to appeal to the conscience of well-meaning and sympathetic whites.<sup>3</sup>

Although many race journals were established before

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<sup>1</sup>I. Garland Penn, *The Afro-American Press and Its Editors*, 26-29 (Springfield, Massachusetts, 1891).

<sup>2</sup>Penn, *Afro-American Press*, 25-99.

<sup>3</sup>Penn, *Afro-American Press*, 100-15; Emma Lou Thornbrough, "American Negro Newspapers, 1880-1914," in *Business History Review*, 40:467-90 (Winter, 1966).

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the 1880s, few lasted long enough to celebrate their first anniversary. Others were so ephemeral that only their names remained as a testament to their existence. Not one Black newspaper founded before 1880 survived until 1914. The high percentage of failure was attributed to a low per capita income and low national literacy rate — an average of about 30 per cent in the 1880s — among Blacks. In the South, few Black newspapers lasted because of the great rate of illiteracy there and a widely dispersed and inaccessible rural Black population. In the North, race newspapers proliferated because of higher Black literacy than in the South, a more urbanized and therefore accessible body of subscribers, greater per capita income, and generous subsidies from the Republican party. More often than not, partisan politics was the greatest consideration in the establishment and survival of northern race journals.<sup>4</sup>

Of the Black newspapers founded after 1880 which achieved regional or national prominence, only eight still were being published in 1914: the *Washington Bee*, *New York Age*, *Philadelphia Tribune*, *Cleveland Gazette*, *Richmond Planet*, *Savannah Tribune*, *Indianapolis Freeman*, and the *Western Appeal* (later the *Appeal*), published in both Chicago and St. Paul. The last, established in 1885, continued publication in St. Paul until shortly after the death in 1922 of its veteran editor of thirty-six years, John Quincy Adams.<sup>5</sup>

The *Western Appeal*, initially a six-column folio, made its debut on Friday, June 5, 1885. In the months preceding the newspaper's appearance, Samuel E. Hardy and John T. Burgett, cofounders and part owners of the enterprise, pooled their resources, solicited subscriptions among friends, and thus managed to raise a few hundred dollars for type and other necessities. They secured a room in the Lambert Block Building at Third and Cedar streets, St. Paul, and engaged an editor, Frederick D. Parker, who had recently arrived from Washington, D.C.<sup>6</sup>

The *Western Appeal* germinated in fertile soil. The Afro-American population of St. Paul and Minneapolis was in general a literate, cohesive, and stable community of successful businessmen and others working principally in service-related trades. For the most part the Black citizens could afford to support a race journal. Isolated on the Upper Mississippi River out of the mainstream of American life, the community displayed an avid interest in the affairs of the nation. Black people in the Twin Cities, whose number by 1885 had increased to approximately 1,400, needed a vehicle to disseminate community news and protest. The *Western Appeal* was established to fulfill a need long ignored by the local white press.<sup>7</sup>

Initially, the newspaper was published every Friday for a nominal subscription cost of two dollars a year. It contained national and international news, Black na-

tional news, local news, reprints from other newspapers pertaining to racial issues and alleged injustices, editorials, advertisements, and a literary page. The newspaper's columns also included current news from correspondents in leading regional cities such as Minneapolis, Chicago, and Louisville.<sup>8</sup>

Although conceived as an organ of racial enlightenment, the *Western Appeal* was a business enterprise, too, but not a very good one. Financially, it proved to be a poor investment from its inception. The expenses of publication always exceeded the income from subscriptions and advertisements so that the owners had to bear the resulting deficit. Moreover, the *Western Appeal* lacked the editorial aggressiveness crucial in building a large circulation. Its initial declaration of political independence also deprived it of strong partisan subsidies so important to the existence and development of northern Black newspapers.<sup>9</sup>

Presumably disgruntled with the paper's management, and more so with his partners, Parker resigned as editor in December, 1885, necessitating reorganization of the *Western Appeal*. In an attempt to regain their investment in an apparently poor business venture, Hardy and Burgett, on January 16, 1886, disposed of their interest in the paper to the newly formed Appeal Publishing Company composed of Thomas H. Lyles, president, and James K. Hilyard, secretary and treasurer. Parker was encouraged to resume work as manager and editor of the paper. Under new management the paper was changed to a six-column quarto, twice its

<sup>4</sup>Thornbrough, in *Business History Review*, 40:467-85.

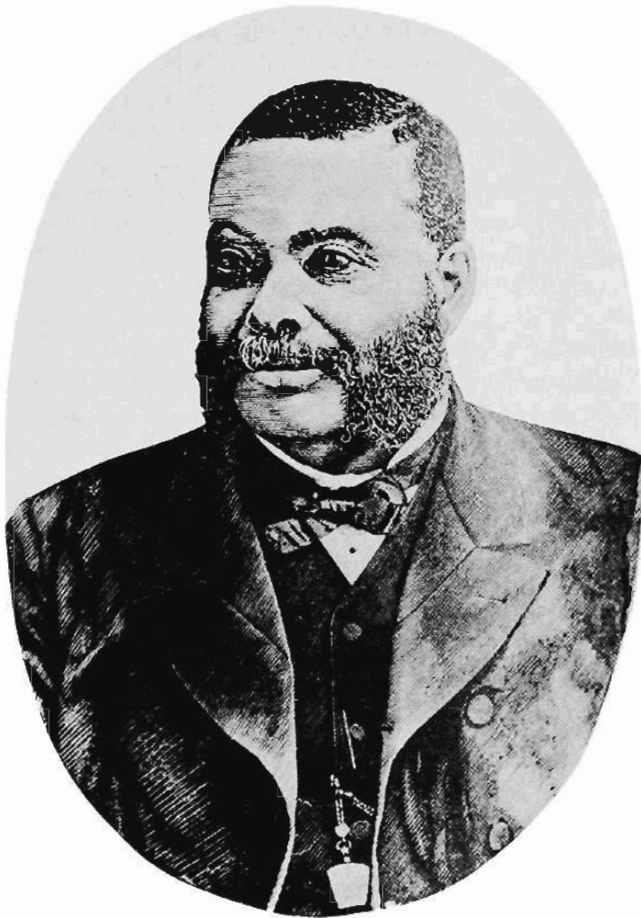
<sup>5</sup>Thornbrough, in *Business History Review*, 40:468; *Appeal*, September 9, p. 2, September 16, 1922, p. 1-2.

<sup>6</sup>*Appeal*, September 24, 1910, p. 4-5.

<sup>7</sup>*Western Appeal*, June 13, 1885, p. 1, *Appeal*, September 24, 1910, p. 4-5; Earl Spangler, *The Negro in Minnesota*, 56-62 (Minneapolis, 1961); *Minnesota, Census*, p. 25, 59 (1885). There were several known attempts to launch a Black newspaper in St. Paul which predated the founding of the *Western Appeal*. According to the *St. Paul Daily Dispatch*, September 23, 1876, a Black newspaper called the *Western Appeal* (not to be confused with the enterprise of 1885) appeared about that time. Its editors and dates of publication are unknown. Again, in the *Minneapolis Tribune* of February 11, 1880, mention is made of a colored newspaper by the name of the *St. Paul Review*. It appears to have been as ephemeral as its predecessor. In an article printed in the *New York Globe* November 24, 1883, intended to inform Afro-Americans on the East Coast about activities in St. Paul, E. P. Wade was credited with the editorship of the *Northwest Review*.

<sup>8</sup>*Western Appeal*, June 13, June 20, 1885, p. 1-4; *Appeal*, September 24, 1910, p. 4-5.

<sup>9</sup>*Appeal*, September 24, 1910, p. 4-5; Thornbrough, in *Business History Review*, 478-80; David V. Taylor interview with Mrs. Adina Adams Gibbs, surviving daughter of John Quincy Adams, at her home in Minneapolis on December 18, 1970 (hereafter referred to as "interview with Adina Adams Gibbs").



JAMES K. HILYARD

former size, and the subscription was reduced to \$1.50 per year.<sup>10</sup>

Still beset with severe financial and managerial problems, the *Western Appeal* limped into its second year of

<sup>10</sup>*Appeal*, September 24, 1910, p. 4-5. It should be noted that Thomas H. Lyles and James K. Hilyard, both St. Paul Black businessmen, provided considerable moral and financial backing for the *Western Appeal*. Without their assistance, the paper might have been stillborn. It is believed that Lyles was personally worth about one hundred thousand dollars, most of which was made in real estate speculation.

<sup>11</sup>*Appeal*, September 24, 1910, p. 4-5.

<sup>12</sup>Proof of Heirship, drawn up by Cyrus Field Adams, 1939, in papers owned by Adina Adams Gibbs; *Appeal*, February 1, 1902, p. 1, September 16, 1922, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup>Alix J. Muller, *History of the Police and Fire Departments of the Twin Cities*, 153-54 (Minneapolis, St. Paul, 1899); Penn, *Afro-American Press*, 237; *Appeal*, September 16, 1922, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup>*Appeal*, September 16, 1922, p. 1; Muller, *History of the Police and Fire Departments*, 153; Penn, *Afro-American Press*, 237; Certificate of Appointment as Granger and Storekeeper in the Fifth Kentucky District, Office of the Secretary of the Treasury, September 12, 1885, in John Quincy Adams and Family Papers in Minnesota Historical Society.

existence. Attempting to correct the paper's deficiencies, Hilyard invited John Quincy Adams, the brilliant young editor of the *Louisville Bulletin* and a news correspondent for the *Western Appeal*, to move to St. Paul and become an associate of the newspaper. Adams accepted the invitation and arrived on August 6, 1886.<sup>11</sup>

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS, born on May 4, 1848, was one of four surviving offspring of the Reverend Henry Adams, the well-known and revered minister of the Fifth Street Baptist Church of Louisville, Kentucky, and Margaret Priscilla Corbin of Chillicothe, Ohio. He received his elementary and secondary education in private schools at Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and Yellow Springs, Ohio, later graduating from Oberlin College in Ohio. Upon graduation he returned to Louisville where he entered public life by teaching in his father's school and in other parts of the state. In 1870 Adams left his family and comfortable home in Louisville to seek his political fortune in Arkansas.<sup>12</sup>

Adams began his political career as a teacher in Little Rock and progressed in a short time to the position of assistant superintendent of public instruction for the state of Arkansas. This appointment was undoubtedly due to the influence of his uncle, Joseph C. Corbin, the superintendent of public instruction. In time, Adams became even more enmeshed in Republican state politics, serving twice as secretary to Republican state conventions. In the presidential campaign of 1872, Adams appeared on the same ticket with Ulysses S. Grant and was elected a justice of the peace. Before the Democratic resurgence of 1876 forced his temporary retirement from politics and return to Louisville, he served successively as engrossing clerk of the state senate and as deputy commissioner of public works.<sup>13</sup>

In Louisville Adams taught for several years in the public school system. During this period he advanced within the inner councils of the local Republican party, eventually serving on both the city and state executive committees. Thanks to his partisan zeal, Adams was named an alternate delegate to the Republican National Convention of 1880 which nominated James A. Garfield for president and Chester A. Arthur for vice-president. After their election, Adams was rewarded with an appointment in the United States Revenue Service as granger and storekeeper in the fifth Kentucky district. The election of Grover Cleveland as president in 1884, however, brought an abrupt end to Adams' second political ascent.<sup>14</sup>

Although Adams' political career ended prematurely in 1885, the most significant early turning point in his life occurred in 1879. In that year John and his brother, Cyrus Field Adams, pooled their resources and began the publication of the *Louisville Bulletin*, a weekly. The

*Bulletin* did well for seven years, and Adams employed it to good advantage in bolstering his political career. His creativity and vigorous editorials were well known in Louisville. At Adams' behest the first National Afro-American Press Association assembled in Louisville in 1880. John Adams was elected its first president and served for two years.<sup>15</sup>

After its early success, the *Bulletin* started to decline for reasons that are unknown but perhaps were tied to Adams' waning political fortunes. In addition, Cyrus departed for an extended tour of Europe in 1884, leaving John as sole manager of the newspaper. Adams continued publishing the *Bulletin* until 1886, when he sold his interest to the *American Baptist*.<sup>16</sup> Hilyard's personal invitation, coupled with reversals in Adams' political and publishing fortunes in Louisville, led him, at the age of thirty-eight, to settle in St. Paul for the rest of his life.

JOHN ADAMS initially served as assistant editor under F. D. Parker. When Parker resigned to become a clerk in the Ramsey County register of deeds office in January, 1887, Adams was advanced to sole editor of the *Western Appeal*. Parker's resignation proved to be a windfall for Adams and the newspaper. Although Parker had provided the managerial stability the paper needed earlier, he had not been particularly innovative as an editor. Moreover, the paper still had not prospered under his management as originally hoped. At the time Parker resigned, in fact, the *Western Appeal* was in debt for \$650, a considerable sum in that day.<sup>17</sup> It was apparent to all concerned that, if the paper were to continue, a more just and equitable distribution of the cost and a more profitable return on the investment had to be found.

To this end the Northwestern Publishing Company was incorporated on February 1, 1887. The new corporation consisted of a general job order printing office, with publication of the *Western Appeal* as a subsidiary enterprise. Five thousand shares of corporate stock were to be sold to the general public at ten dollars per share. The act of incorporation also provided for a board of seven directors to be elected annually by the stockholders. John Adams was designated as secretary of the first board of directors.<sup>18</sup>

Establishment of the Northwestern Publishing Company was a shrewd business move. Its intended purpose was to give the *Western Appeal* a broader financial base and larger capital reserves from which to draw. The Northwestern firm was probably the first successful job order printing office established, owned, and operated by Black entrepreneurs in St. Paul. It therefore held for several years a virtual monopoly in the printing of programs, cards, and other small work needed within the Black community. Although the future financial basis of the *Western Appeal* seemed assured, the present creditors still had to be satisfied. For the first five months,

the new stockholders were required to dig deeper into their pockets to meet the debt, but by July, 1887, the paper claimed to be self-sustaining.<sup>19</sup>

In either 1888 or 1889 John Adams became sole proprietor of the *Western Appeal*. Just how he acquired the paper is unknown. However, as early as March, 1887, shortly after Northwestern Publishing was incorporated, several individuals who had invested in the paper announced in its columns that their shares were for sale. It is probable that Adams purchased the majority of these shares, thus becoming the principal stockholder of Northwestern Publishing.<sup>20</sup>

After eighteen months under Adams the *Western Appeal* was successfully established and faced no competition in a radius of four hundred miles. This fact was not lost upon Adams. He realized that if the *Western Appeal* were to grow and show a profit, it would require more subscribers and advertisers. One move was to open a *Western Appeal* office in Minneapolis. The Minneapolis office eventually was at 224 Hennepin Avenue, although it might have been elsewhere at first.<sup>21</sup> This accomplished, Adams directed his attention to Chicago, the territory of the *Conservator*, a Black newspaper established ten years before the *Western Appeal*. Adams viewed the Black population of Chicago as a tempting potential market and acted accordingly.

His campaign began in earnest early in 1888 with the establishment of a Chicago office of the *Western Appeal*. By January 28 Chicago was officially listed as a center for distribution in the masthead of the *Appeal's* editorial page. On February 25, 1888, the first edition from the "Windy City" made its debut. This newspaper was a separate entity, capably managed by John's brother, Cyrus Field Adams.<sup>22</sup>

THE WESTERN APPEAL was published simultaneously in St. Paul and Chicago each Saturday. Both papers apparently shared the same format, national news, feature

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<sup>15</sup>Muller, *History of the Police and Fire Departments*, 153; *Appeal*, February 9, 1901, p. 4; Penn. *Afro-American Press*, 237.

<sup>16</sup>*Appeal*, January 12, 1901, p. 2; September 16, 1922, p. 2; Muller, *History of the Police and Fire Departments*, 153; Penn. *Afro-American Press*, 237.

<sup>17</sup>*Appeal*, September 24, 1910, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup>Articles of Incorporation of the Northwestern Publishing Company, Register of Deeds, Ramsey County, Minnesota, Book F. of Incorporations, 5-6, February 23, 1887, St. Paul; *Appeal*, April 2, 1887, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup>*Western Appeal*, May 26, 1888, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup>*Western Appeal*, March 5, 1887, p. 2; interview with Adina Adams Gibbs.

<sup>21</sup>*Western Appeal*, December 17, 1887, p. 2; *Appeal*, September 24, 1910, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup>*Western Appeal*, January 28, p. 2, February 25, 1888, p. 2; *Appeal*, September 24, 1910, p. 5.



articles, editorials, and editorial policy, but each managed independently its own subscriptions, advertisements, and social news. In order that they might be interchangeable, separate columns of social news from St. Paul and Minneapolis appeared in the Chicago edition and vice versa. At first John Adams held the titles of editor and publisher with offices in St. Paul, while Cyrus Adams was listed only as manager of the Chicago edition.<sup>23</sup> It is still a matter of conjecture whether the Chicago edition was a subsidiary of the Northwestern Publishing Company. Yet, in an editorial dated February 25, 1888, the editor and management of the *Western Appeal* declared that they were "determined to make the *Appeal* a Chicago paper as well as the organ of the Northwest."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup>*Western Appeal*, February 25, 1888, p. 2. Unfortunately, no known copies of the Chicago edition of the *Western Appeal* or *Appeal* exist. The above is the author's conjecture based upon research done on twenty years of the *Appeal*. Allen H. Spear, author of *Black Chicago: Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920*, acknowledged in a private conversation that he used the St. Paul edition of the *Appeal* as source material, since its files are relatively complete from 1888 to 1920. Daniel P. Mikel's, "A History of Negro Newspapers in Minnesota, 1876-1963," an unpublished master's thesis, Macalester College, 1963, says that neither the Kentucky Historical Society nor the Texas State Historical Society have records of this paper or proof of its existence, although each of these states at one time had branch offices of the *Appeal*.

<sup>24</sup>*Western Appeal*, February 25, 1888, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup>*Western Appeal*, February 25, 1888, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup>*Western Appeal*, November 24, p. 1, December 1, 1888, p. 1.

The battle for popularity was immediately joined by the other four major Black newspapers seeking the support of Black Chicagoans: the *Chicago Conservator*, the *Detroit Plaindealer*, the *Indianapolis World*, and the *Cleveland Gazette*. In January, 1888, the *Western Appeal* of Chicago could claim a circulation of only thirty-eight copies, but it registered steady growth. On February 25 the Chicago edition numbered 350 copies, of which 119 were apparently sold. In May, 1888, the newspaper's circulation was 722 in Chicago.<sup>25</sup>

The competition between rival presses became increasingly acrid. Finally, in November, 1888, the *Western Appeal* claimed that the circulation of its Chicago edition that month was 350 greater than its four rivals combined. After an acidulous exchange of accusations by the competitors and production of sworn affidavits supporting circulation claims, the *Western Appeal*, by December, 1888, apparently won out and was, according to its records, Chicago's leading Black newspaper.<sup>26</sup>

Months before the *Western Appeal* had won its bid for domination of the Chicago area, the Adams brothers began to cast around for additional markets in which to promote their papers. They established a branch office in Louisville on August 25, 1888, under the management of H. C. Weeden, a former reporter for the *Bulletin*. Louisville thus became the fourth link in the Adams empire which at its apogee would number seven cities. Additional offices were established in St. Louis on April 20, 1889, in Dallas on August 13, 1892, and in Washington,

CYRUS FIELD ADAMS: in a portrait and as shown in the Chicago office of the *Appeal* with his secretary





ADAMS HOME at 527 St. Anthony Avenue, St. Paul

D.C., on March 9, 1901.<sup>27</sup> At one time or another the *Western Appeal* also carried by-lines from Milwaukee, Des Moines, and Denver, although offices were not set up in those cities.

In 1889 the *Western Appeal* began to bill itself as "A National Afro-American Newspaper." To lessen its identification exclusively with the Midwest, "Western" was dropped from its title. The *Appeal* was read and circulated throughout the United States. Regarding this period of development Thomas H. Lyles later recalled that "special editions were published for Chicago, Louisville, St. Louis and Dallas, Texas, making five different and distinct editions with resident managers in each of these cities."<sup>28</sup>

Within seven years of its inception, the *Appeal* had achieved a position of regional importance which it retained until the end of the nineteenth century. It promoted itself as the people's paper and printed what a spiritually, politically, economically, and socially oppressed people wanted to read. It dared to say what thousands of Black men and women kept to themselves. Its editorials held white America up to ridicule by boldly denouncing inconsistencies of America's racial policy, vigorously protesting disfranchisement and discrimina-

tion, and actively defending Blacks against malicious racial propaganda. The *Appeal* helped restore to the Afro-American a sense of dignity stripped from him by a society which did not countenance his participation. Adams urged the Black man to "labor to be proud of himself. A proper self-respect is expected of races as of individuals. We need more race love. The tie of racehood should bind us as the tie of brotherhood." In another editorial he said: "We are willing to stand the same tests the whites do to enjoy the same privileges, but we wish our judges to be completely color blind." He repeatedly pointed out the absurdity and inconsistency of maintaining the "Caucasian Christian Church" and angrily and sardonically commented on missionaries being sent to Africa while church members practiced discrimination and inhumanity at home:

"Send missionaries to Africa to prepare their souls for heaven [:] that's all right, we do not wish anyone to get lost whatever the complexion of his skin or the color of his hair but for God's sake christianize the white heathen of America at the same time."<sup>29</sup>

In the *Appeal's* columns Afro-Americans were accorded recognition for personal achievement regardless of social standing. Individual skills and talents were acknowledged and leadership encouraged. The *Appeal* gave the Black businessman a medium for advertisement, the Black politician a forum, and the Black writer and artist an audience. More importantly, it encouraged the citizenry to patronize Black businesses.

If the *Appeal* was the people's paper, then Adams was their representative at large, especially in the Twin Cities. At the age of forty-four John Quincy Adams had become one of the most influential Afro-Americans in the Upper Midwest. Although demonstrating considerable literary talent, he had found his second ascent in the field of journalism to be difficult and at times discouraging. Yet he met each obstacle with the same resilience and determination that marked his rise in the political jungles of Arkansas and Louisville. His bold endeavor to make the *Appeal* an organ of his personal beliefs had succeeded.

HOW DID John Adams look, and what kind of man was he? According to his friends, he was a moderately plump, fair-skinned man with gray-blue eyes and prematurely gray hair. He could have passed for white. Adams

<sup>27</sup> Mikel, "A History of Negro Newspapers in Minnesota," 11; *Western Appeal*, August 25, 1888, p. 1, *Appeal*, March 9, 1901, p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> *Appeal*, September 24, 1910, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> *Appeal*, March 5, 1887, p. 2 (self-respect quote), July 2, 1887, p. 2 (color blind quote), September 7, 1889, p. 2 (missionary quote).

had "Chesterfieldian manners," according to a contemporary, who added that he was "always gentle, but always contending, never offending."

He was a reserved man who was always willing to listen — an attribute befitting his trade. Behind this placid façade lay a restless and imaginative intellect. Adams always thought before he spoke and contemplated before he acted. When called upon to speak, he spoke decisively and usually impressed people with the logic of his arguments. He was resourceful, innovative, and progressive in business and in his relationship with the Black community. One of his contemporaries said that Adams was the "Urban League" of his time, a moving and vital force in St. Paul. He was respected by friend and foe alike. He was not prone to gossip or to revel in character assassination in personal life, nor did he employ these means to promote his paper. Because of his influence, the community often expected Adams to provide leadership.<sup>30</sup>

As editor of a prominent Black newspaper, Adams was called upon to entertain important personages of his race who visited the Twin Cities. Booker T. Washington, William Monroe Trotter, William E. B. Du Bois, and many other persons of regional and national importance had at one time or another dined formally with the Adams family. The doors of his accommodating home at 527 St. Anthony Avenue were always open to friends and strangers alike. Often he would bring home as guests people who just happened by his office to seek information, or aid in finding accommodations, or employment.<sup>31</sup>

On May 4, 1892, John Adams married Ella Bell Smith of St. Paul to whom he had been engaged for several years. Shortly after his arrival in 1886, they had met at a church picnic. Their engagement followed a brief courtship, but, because of the precarious state of the *Western Appeal*, their marriage was postponed until he could support a family. Four children were eventually born to them: Adina, Margaret, Edythella, and John, Jr. Loved and respected by members of his family, John Adams denied them nothing that his resources could provide. According to Adina Gibbs, Adams' eldest daughter now living in Minneapolis, the family was a picture of parental love and familial harmony. She said her parents seldom if ever quarreled.<sup>32</sup>

John Adams was many things to many people. Yet all who knew him agreed that he was one of the leading protagonists for civil rights in the Upper Midwest. Adams refused to believe that ability and success were the monopoly of one race. He reasoned that, given the opportunity, Black men could compete successfully with whites. In one editorial he said: "We know ourselves, as men, to be their [white men's] equals in every respect, and we would advise them that when they wish to set a standard to judge us by in any case, to take themselves. What would not suit them would not suit us. Remove all barriers on account of race and color and, like water, we will find our level."<sup>33</sup>

Convinced that individual achievement was a moral force that would help persuade white America to accord the Black man full rights, Adams encouraged Afro-Americans to take advantage of educational opportunities and congratulated them personally when they made significant progress. He wrote: "Education and wealth are the lever and fulcrum that will remove all obstacles [to equality and full rights]."<sup>34</sup> Adams did not believe, however, that individual achievement alone would guarantee the Afro-American his rights. He wrote in the August 27, 1898, issue of his paper:

"The theory that it is good to educate the hand as well as the heart as advanced by Booker T. Washington, is well enough, but the highest boon vouchsafed to man is personal liberty . . . nothing can be better than the enjoyment of it. What good would it do the man to be most highly educated in both head and hand if not allowed to use either as other men do? Life, without liberty, is not worth living."

An advocate of the protest tradition, Adams recognized the need for more aggressive Black leadership to combat the gradual but perceptible erosion of the Afro-American's fundamental rights to citizenship. "They [Blacks] not only do not kick before they are spurred, but do not kick hard enough, often enough, and long enough when their sides are rowelled," he editorialized on June 29, 1889. To counter the constant encroachment upon Afro-American rights, Adams advocated persistent protest and agitation, stating that "no wrongs are ever righted except by protest."<sup>35</sup>

Rights include the right to life and the right, if accused of a crime, to be subjected to an equitable judicial process, not mob violence or lynching. The outraged Adams wrote after a southern youth had been lynched for being "sassy" to a member of a mob:

"Isn't it about time for the Colored people of the South to take law in their own hands and meet these hellish heathens half way? Blood for blood. If a Colored man is lynched who is guilty

<sup>30</sup> David V. Taylor interview with Mrs. Eva Neal of St. Paul, a former neighbor of John Adams, January 3, 1971; David V. Taylor interview with Mr. S. E. Hall, St. Paul, a contemporary of John Adams, December 19, 1970; *Appeal*, September 16, 1922, p. 1 (quote).

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Mrs. Adina Adams Gibbs.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Mrs. Adina Adams Gibbs.

<sup>33</sup> *Appeal*, April 19, 1890, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> *Appeal*, June 11, 1887, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> *Appeal*, February 25, 1911, p. 2.



of no crime[,] whose life is safe [?] Every Colored man should go armed and sell his life as dearly as possible. Blood for blood."

In the same issue, in another editorial, he warned:

"... there are thousands of men in the South who have the same feelings of those martyrs [Nat Turner and John Brown] burning in their breasts and the flames will burst out some day soon if the outrageous proceedings which daily grow more outrageous are not stopped. Eight millions of people driven to desperation could make much trouble in these United States."<sup>36</sup>

Yet for the most part he deplored violence as a means to an end and was quick to chastise Blacks whose means of protestation he thought were creating a negative image. "The Afro-Americans who make insane speeches and call the race to arms to right their wrongs are really dangerous advisers," he wrote. "Nothing can be gained by such appeals. The best thing to work for is the creation of a healthy public sentiment in favor of justice for all citizens without regard to race."<sup>37</sup> With remarkable foresight, Adams refused to support anyone who claimed to be a race leader. As he put it, "there is no national political leader [,] for the race, as a body, absolutely refuses to be led."<sup>38</sup> Instead, he supported many men and organizations that protested the Afro-American condition.

The editor of the *Appeal* was also an ardent integrationist and civil rights enthusiast. He believed that a republic such as the United States could have but one kind of citizen and that the Afro-American had just claim to citizenship by birthright, loyalty to the flag, and personal sacrifice in defense of the country. The future of the nation, he believed, lay in a pluralistic and integrated society rather than a segmental and segregated one. Adams persistently discredited the notion that America was a white man's country and denounced all class legislation and repeated attempts to disfranchise the Afro-American. He correctly evaluated the tenor of his time and reasoned: "Denial of these rights has worked irresistibly for the denial or abridgment of all related rights of citizenship because a voteless man of a truth has no rights which anyone is bound to respect."<sup>39</sup>

THERE WAS ONE salient flaw in John Adams' approach to civil rights: his uncompromising allegiance to the Republican party. Adams' adherence to Republican doctrine often placed him in the embarrassing position of supporting the Republican party against the best interests of his race. Although disenchanted with efforts to create a "lily white" Republican party in the South and with the obvious contempt the party held for the Black electorate in the North, Adams remained within

the Republican ranks. Oftentimes during periods of disillusionment he would intimate that Afro-Americans should remain politically independent.<sup>40</sup> Yet his own indecisiveness on this issue put him at odds with several influential members of the Black community.

The *Appeal* was an organ of the Republican party.<sup>41</sup> It is a matter of conjecture whether John Adams was directly or indirectly subsidized by Republicans, especially during the election years. It is known that, during the presidential election of 1900, Senator Marcus A. Hanna of Ohio used the *Appeal* to promote the candidacy of William McKinley among Blacks. Also, Hanna appointed Cyrus Adams, manager of the Chicago *Appeal*, to the Republican National Advisory Committee. In a display of unusual partisan exuberance, Cyrus Adams "undertook to keep in line several hundred newspapers published by and for the Afro-American" by publishing short editorial campaign tracts designed for reprinting in Black journals. Probably typical of such tracts are two still in existence. One is entitled "The Republican Party and the Afro-American," which supported the candidacy of William H. Taft in 1908. Another, issued by Cyrus Adams, William Humby, and the Republican National Committee, was entitled "The Republican Party and the Afro-American: A Book of Facts and Figures." In addition, Cyrus Adams organized a letter campaign to win endorsement for McKinley by national Afro-American leaders. For his effort in that campaign, Cyrus Adams was appointed assistant register of the United States Treasury, a position he retained for

<sup>36</sup>*Appeal*, September 7, 1889, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup>*Appeal*, July 5, 1903, p. 2.

<sup>38</sup>*Appeal*, October 24, 1903, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup>*Appeal*, October 24, 1903, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup>In the August 25, 1888, April 20, May 11, May 18, and June 29, 1889, issues of the *Western Appeal*, Adams' disillusionment with the Republican party seems to have reached a high-water mark.

<sup>41</sup>Although in the first issue the newspaper claimed it was nonpartisan, in the second issue Parker commented: "Now let our Republican friends who wish to see us succeed, and who desire to show us that they appreciate the effort we have put forth in the past, to aid them to succeed in their many triumphs, subscribe for the paper, give it a boom among their friends, advertise with us, and demonstrate to the public that your desire for success is from the heart and well intended." (See *Western Appeal*, June 13, 1885, p. 2). Both Adams brothers had strong political affiliations with the Republican party and were from time to time rewarded with political positions. In issue after issue, John Adams made clear he stood with the Republicans, in spite of occasional misgivings. In election years, the newspaper swelled from its normal four-page size to eight pages, most of it filled with Republican ideology, pictures, engravings of candidates, the flag, and frequent exhortations to vote straight Republican. See *Appeal*, April 30, 1898, June 25, 1904, July 22, 1905, June 20, October 5, October 17, 1908.

twelve years.<sup>42</sup> John Adams remained the Black community's indefatigable champion of racial justice despite his affinity for Republican politics.

SINCE ITS INCEPTION the Black press has been at the focal point of every issue concerning the self-determination of Black people and has provided an open arena where the battle for recognition could be successfully waged. By stressing racial pride it forged a sense of ethnic solidarity and group cohesion which united the Black community. Thus the Black press, like the Black church, became a central institution of the community. Of necessity the Black editor became one of the community's principal leaders. He not only provided one of the few educational tools available to the Afro-American masses but also disseminated the only information about the oppression of the Blacks.

In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, racism in its worst expression attempted to expunge physically the Afro-American from practically all avenues of national life. The capstone of the Black man's social ostracism, the Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), gave official sanction to the South's "separate but equal" solution to the race problem. This decision encouraged all states to handle their "Negro problem" as they desired. To combat wholesale outlawry against the race, Black leaders throughout the nation made several attempts to establish an organization which would provide a united front in the struggle for equal rights of citizenship under the law. Out of this ferment for organization came the Afro-American League in which Black Minnesotans were to play an important role.

In the 1880s the Afro-American in Minnesota enjoyed many privileges of citizenship unknown to his southern brethren. He exercised the right to vote and to hold public office and was accorded a greater degree of mobility and social interaction with whites than southern Blacks were. In spite of making impressive headway in business enterprise, land holdings, education, and literacy in the late 1880s, Black men in Minnesota began to feel the subtle effects of de facto segregation. State civil rights laws had been passed in 1865 and 1885. The first guaranteed full male suffrage (with the exception of full-blooded Indians who refused to accept "civilization"). The laws of 1885 guaranteed equal rights to all citizens

regardless of "nativity, race, color or persuasion, religious or political. . ." The rights included full and equal enjoyment of all public accommodations, conveyances, facilities, and so on.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, many whites, especially in the area of public accommodations, continued to discriminate blatantly against Afro-Americans. Adams and like-minded citizens of St. Paul's Black community realized that these state laws established to protect their interests were being subverted. They also knew that, if such violations were to proceed unchallenged, other rights well established by law might also be treated with contempt. In the spring of 1887, the stage was set for a major test of Minnesota's civil rights legislation and the sentiment of the white community.

On May 17, 1887, William A. Hazel, a visiting Black architect, attempted to procure lodging for the night at both the Astoria and Clarendon hotels in St. Paul but was refused because of his color. When the clerk at the Clarendon Hotel, after acknowledging the existence of state laws prohibiting discriminatory practices in public facilities, refused to give him lodging, Hazel demanded to speak with the proprietor. The proprietor likewise refused Hazel lodging and verbally assaulted him. Hazel protested his treatment, but was arrested, charged with drunken disorderliness despite his obvious sobriety, and forced to spend the night in the city jail.<sup>44</sup>

Adams encouraged Hazel to sue the Clarendon Hotel for discriminatory practices under the Minnesota Civil Rights Law of 1885. The next week Adams announced the impending suit and printed a warning to the white community in the *Western Appeal* that Black citizens "do not intend to sit supinely and mourn over the state of affairs, but purpose to learn if there is civil justice to be obtained for a human being upon whom God has seen it fit to place a dusky skin. There is a civil rights law upon the statute books of the State of Minnesota, and it is the intent of Mr. Hazel to bring a suit under the same; not alone to punish these prejudiced landlords, by forcing them to pay heavy damages for the outrage perpetrated, but to establish the principle that we are citizens of this common wealth, and we do not intend to be debarred from our privileges. . . . We speak for every colored citizen in the city, and we intend to test the law and the sentiment of the people, and we intend to fight it out on this line if it takes all summer."<sup>45</sup>

On June 20, 1887, Hazel filed suit against Michael E. Foley and Thomas J. Foley, proprietors of the Clarendon, in the Second Judicial District Court in St. Paul. He sought two thousand dollars in damages on grounds of violation of Minnesota common law rather than the Civil Rights Law of 1885.<sup>46</sup> On October 17, 1887, the jury decided in favor of Hazel, but he was awarded only a token twenty-five dollars in damages. Although he had won a moral victory, Hazel found that the money

<sup>42</sup>*Appeal*, January 12, 1901, p. 2; campaign tracts owned by Adina Adams Gibbs; interview with Adina Adams Gibbs.

<sup>43</sup>Minnesota, *General Laws*, 1865, p. 118-19; *General Laws*, 1885, p. 295-96.

<sup>44</sup>*Western Appeal*, May 21, 1887, p. 1.

<sup>45</sup>*Western Appeal*, May 21, 1887, p. 2.

<sup>46</sup>William A. Hazel v. Michael E. Foley and Thomas J. Foley (Foley Brothers), 25515 Civil Court of the Second Judicial District, State of Minnesota. Judgment, October 17, 1887, Ramsey County Courthouse, St. Paul.

awarded him was far from sufficient to cover the expenses incurred. The *Western Appeal*, therefore, solicited a collection from the community, in whose behalf the suit was filed, to help defray Hazel's expenses.<sup>47</sup>

The affront to the Black community reflected in Hazel's experience was not readily forgotten. The *Western Appeal* said it was the general consensus of the community that the damages assessed by the court did not constitute a sufficient deterrent against future violations of the law. To the contrary, the cost of bringing a civil suit before the court was prohibitive for the average Black man. The rights of the community were still subject to infringement, the paper said. To place the Blacks in a better position to defend their rights, Adams suggested the formation of a protective league to oversee all cases in which the rights of Afro-Americans in Minnesota were abridged or denied. Addressing the community through his paper, Adams recommended that "a state convention be called and some plan formed for the protection of our civil rights."<sup>48</sup>

THE APPEAL fell on receptive ears. On November 1, 1887, a number of community leaders met to call a state convention of colored people. The leading participants felt that such a gathering, representing the collective will of Afro-Americans throughout the state, was needed to form a state civil rights league. They decided to call the convention for December 5, 1887, to be held in the hall of the house of representatives in the Capitol in St. Paul. They further decided that representation at the convention be apportioned in relation to the number of Negroes in each county.<sup>49</sup>

The call was sent throughout the state on November 15, 1887. How many responded is not known, nor do records exist of the resulting deliberations. It is known that out of the convention proceedings the Minnesota Protective and Industrial League was formed.<sup>50</sup> The organization sought to ameliorate social and economic deprivations experienced by Minnesota Afro-Americans. F. D. Parker, chairman of the league executive committee, said that "the league is not designed to become a political machine, but it will earnestly seek to promote the material interest of the race as well as to protect them in their political rights."<sup>51</sup>

The league attempted to expand avenues of livelihood for Blacks and give them material assistance. League membership was open to all regardless of sex, creed, or color. Participants paid a membership fee of fifty cents and monthly dues of twenty-five cents. The Protective and Industrial League was organized into locally active committees which kept a vigilant guard against acts construed as constituting an abridgment or denial of Negro rights. They also promoted projects designed to improve the quality of Afro-American life. One such program was a building association which would

construct inexpensive houses for small monthly payments. The league encouraged home ownership and equated it with community stability, prosperity, and general well-being. On a larger scale the Protective and Industrial League Bureau, established to administer the league's activities on the state level, ambitiously sought to draw Negroes from the South and settle them in Minnesota upon 50,000 acres of fertile farm land that was to be acquired from public land officials and railroad interests. Recruiting agents were to canvass southern communities in an attempt to form colonies of Afro-Americans willing to resettle in the North. Only the "hardier and bolder representatives of the race" were encouraged to participate. If the initial venture proved successful, the bureau planned to canvass the entire West to promote the settlement of an additional 50,000 acres of land.<sup>52</sup>

Despite the leadership of Parker, Lyles, and Adams, the league's grandiose plans never materialized. However, the emergence of the Minnesota Protective and Industrial League in 1887 was a significant milestone in the development of Black vigilance in Minnesota. Although the league's objectives appear speculative and impractical, they were appealing, seemed logical for their times, and represented the most progressive thoughts of its leaders.

It is a matter for speculation whether the Minnesota league was launched in response to a call issued by T. Thomas Fortune, editor of the *New York Freeman*, in June, 1887, for a federation of northern Afro-American organizations. Fortune proposed that participating organizations in this league would retain their autonomy but would act collectively in compelling politicians to review the grievances of Blacks and to force the national parties to acquire new respect for the Afro-American electorate. In August and September, 1887, Fortune published in the *New York Freeman* a lengthy treatise discussing in detail the need for unity and delineating a plan of organization, which subsequently became the foundation of the Afro-American League. This plan was enthusiastically received in some areas, and several protective leagues were immediately established. It is almost certain that John Adams and other convention leaders who called the Minnesota Protective and Industrial League into being were cognizant of this national

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<sup>47</sup>*Western Appeal*, October 22, 1887, p. 1-2.

<sup>48</sup>*Western Appeal*, October 22, 1887, p. 1-2.

<sup>49</sup>*Western Appeal*, November 5, p. 4, November 12, p. 2, November 19, 1887, p. 1.

<sup>50</sup>*Western Appeal*, November 26, p. 1, December 3, p. 1, December 17, p. 1, December 31, 1887, p. 1.

<sup>51</sup>*Minneapolis Spokesman*, May 16, 1958, p. 4.

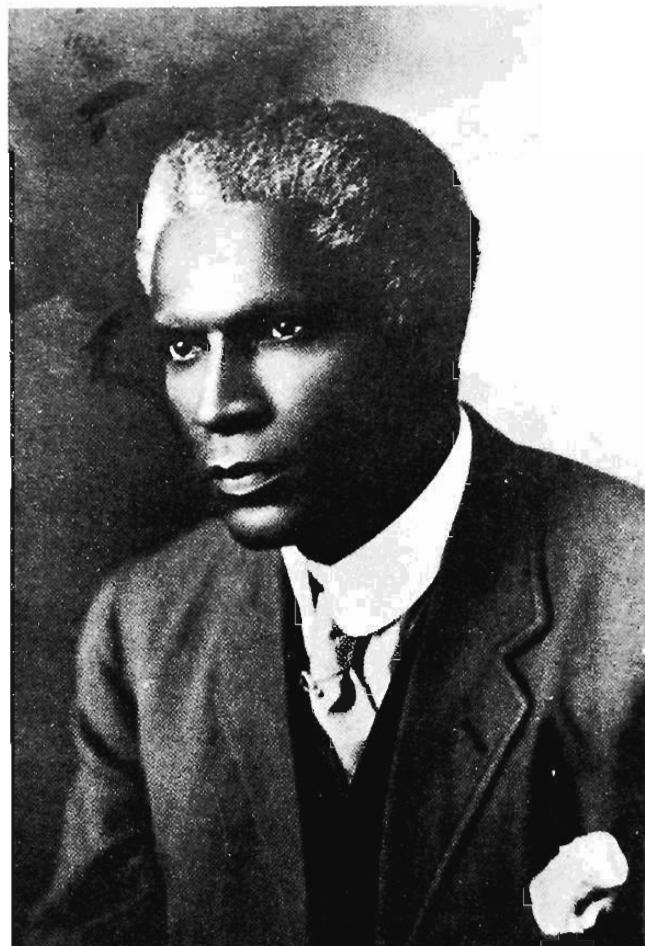
<sup>52</sup>Spangler, *Negro in Minnesota*, 78-79; *Western Appeal*, December 17, p. 1, December 24, p. 1, December 31, 1887, p. 1 (quote).

development. Generally, the call for a national federated league was somewhat premature, and the call for unity did not find fruition until the establishment of the Afro-American League in 1889.<sup>53</sup>

Fortune reiterated his call for Black unity on November 4, 1889, and proposed that a national convention of Afro-Americans meet in Chicago the following January. As early as October 19, 1889, the *Appeal* announced an impending conference of Black men in Chicago to form a "Colored Men's National League." As more detailed information became available, active interest increased. A number of Blacks, including Adams, seized the initiative by meeting October 25, 1889, in the office of Frederick L. McGhee, a St. Paul Black lawyer. After lengthy discussion they issued a call through the *Appeal* for a mass meeting to consider the formation of such a league.<sup>54</sup>

Responding enthusiastically, a large number of Black citizens met October 31, 1889, at the Market Hall at Seventh and St. Peter streets and designated themselves the Afro-American League of St. Paul, Minnesota, No. 1. John Adams was chosen chairman of the first organizational meeting. He explained the objectives of the league and read a proposed constitution modeled after that developed by Fortune. Robert E. Anderson was chosen the league's first president, the *Appeal* was designated the official organ, and McGhee, Adams, Hilyard, Lyles, and Allen French were elected to the executive committee. At a meeting held at St. James Church on January 6, 1890, Adams and McGhee were elected as delegates to the Chicago convention.<sup>55</sup>

The National Afro-American League convened in Chicago on January 15, 1890, with 141 representatives from more than twenty states attending its opening session. The Reverend Joseph C. Price of Livingston College in North Carolina was elected the league's first president, and Fortune was named secretary. Both Adams and McGhee were placed on the league's executive committee. The National Afro-American League was not only an unprecedented step in the direction of



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national Black awareness and self-reliance but also an important attempt of Blacks to obtain through the courts that which proved unattainable through political affiliation. Yet, despite enthusiastic beginnings, the league was soon torn asunder by internal problems and lack of strong leadership. Moreover, it lacked funds, mass support, and acceptance by race leaders. By 1893 the national body and its local chapters were defunct.<sup>56</sup>

When the Afro-American League of St. Paul began its membership drive it ambitiously attempted to draw the entire Black community of the city into the organization and related activities. As the league's official organ, the *Appeal* published notices of its meetings and gave detailed coverage of its activities. In time additional leagues were established in Minneapolis, Stillwater, Duluth, Faribault, Anoka, and certain counties. Before the local chapters throughout the state began to fade, one state convention was held in Minneapolis in May, 1891.<sup>57</sup>

Early in 1891 the St. Paul league, in a formal petition submitted to the national body, protested against holding the proposed second National Afro-American League

<sup>53</sup>Leslie H. Fishel, Jr., "The Negro in Northern Politics, 1870-1900," in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 42:484 (December, 1955); Penn. *Afro-American Press*, 525-37.

<sup>54</sup>*Appeal*, October 19, p. 2, October 26, 1889, p. 2; Penn. *Afro-American Press*, 525-30.

<sup>55</sup>*Appeal*, November 9, p. 1, December 14, 1889, p. 2, January 11, 1890, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup>Penn. *Afro-American Press*, 525-37, Fishel, in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 438-89; August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915*, 130 (Ann Arbor, 1963); Emma Lou Thornbrough, "The National Afro-American League, 1887-1908," in *Journal of Southern History*, 494-501 (November, 1961).

<sup>57</sup>Spangler; *Negro in Minnesota*, 79; *Western Appeal*, May 21, 1887, p. 1, *Appeal*, May 16, p. 1, May 23, 1891, p. 3.

convention in Knoxville because of Tennessee's adoption of the discriminatory "separate coach" act. Despite the protest the convention was held in Knoxville, and the Minnesota delegation was forced to accept Jim Crow accommodations on a Tennessee railroad. After the convention the Afro-American League made immediate preparations to test the constitutionality of the law. Back in St. Paul, Adams reported in the *Appeal*:

"The separate car bill which was recently enacted in Tennessee has raised a storm of indignation throughout the country in which both the Colored and fair-minded white people join. The Afro-American citizens of Minnesota have taken the lead in starting a fund to test the law and in holding a mass meeting to express their condemnation and indignation."<sup>58</sup>

On August 25, 1891, at Pilgrim Baptist Church in St. Paul, members of the Black community held a mass meeting out of which the Minnesota Civil Rights Committee was formed. This committee assisted the local Afro-American League in raising funds to test the legality of the Tennessee "separate coach" act. Despite their co-ordinated effort the law was not overthrown. Undaunted by failure, the Civil Rights Committee also attempted to raise funds for a similar test case in Oklahoma.<sup>59</sup>

The attempt to challenge the constitutionality of "separate coach" laws represented the last major legal undertaking by league members in St. Paul for several years. Disillusioned by their repeated failures in court to stem the rising tide of racism and by the general impotence of the national body, the St. Paul league and the citizen's committee began to languish by 1893.

T. Thomas Fortune and Alexander Walters, a bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, revived the National Afro-American League in Rochester, New York, in September, 1898, changing the name to the National Afro-American Council. Reconstituted on the same basis as the league, with the same philosophy and constitutional objectives, at least at first, the council counted many Afro-American leaders of the day among its members. It also retained the older organization's glaring deficiencies and acquired another onus not directly bequeathed it by the league: the patronage of Booker T. Washington. Although Washington never held an elective office in the council and only occasionally participated in its deliberations, his prestige and influence were pervasive. To an increasing extent he clandestinely directed council policy. Washington's role injected an ambiguous element into the purpose of the council and eventually split it into warring factions.

Washington espoused the conservative beliefs of self-help and industrial education for Blacks. He was ac-

commodating and acquiescent in the face of deprivation of rights. The anti-Washington forces opposed his conciliatory approach and called for vociferous protest to secure equal rights, especially political rights, which Washington seemed willing, at times, to abrogate or at least qualify. Nor did opponents agree with Washington's industrial education doctrine which they felt implied that the race was mentally inferior and deprived it of college-educated leaders it badly needed.<sup>60</sup>

Adams was closely associated with the Afro-American League from its inception in 1890. However, neither he nor other St. Paul Blacks responded favorably to the call for organization under the Afro-American Council. The *Appeal*, skeptical of the small attendance at the Rochester meeting, stated that "it is possible to make the organization a great power in righting the wrongs of the race, but there must be more enthusiasm than shown at Rochester." Undoubtedly anticipating another abortive attempt at organizing nationally, Adams, McGhee, and other Black leaders preferred to work within their own local organization, the American Law Enforcement League of Minnesota.<sup>61</sup>

There seems to have been little difference between the interests and goals of the American Law Enforcement League in St. Paul and the Afro-American Council, at least until late 1901. Adams and McGhee, both members of the Law Enforcement League, apparently attended the second national convention of the Afro-American Council in Chicago in August, 1899. On convention press releases both delegates from Minnesota were listed as members of the council's executive committee. Although Adams evidently made no effort to organize a local chapter of the council after the Chicago meeting, his paper supported the American Law Enforcement League's sponsorship of an entertainment program and mass meeting in the spring of 1900 to raise funds for the council's test of Louisiana suffrage laws. It was also undoubtedly the influence of Adams and McGhee that brought Bishop Walters, president of the National Afro-American Council, to St. Paul on October 17, 1901, to confer with community leaders on arrangements for a joint meeting of the Afro-American Council, the Afro-American Press Association, and the Pan-African Council scheduled for July, 1902, in St. Paul.<sup>62</sup> Unknowingly,

<sup>58</sup> Spangler, *Negro in Minnesota*, 79; *Appeal*, June 27, 1891, p. 2 (quote).

<sup>59</sup> Spangler, *Negro in Minnesota*, 79; *Appeal*, September 12, 1891, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, 130, 172-76. Thornbrough, in *Journal of Southern History*, 601-12.

<sup>61</sup> *Appeal*, March 26, p. 1, June 18, p. 2, July 9, p. 2, September 17, p. 2, September 24, 1898, p. 2 (quote).

<sup>62</sup> *Appeal*, February 18, p. 2, August 26, 1899, p. 2, February 20, p. 4, April 28, 1900, p. 3, October 19, 1901, p. 3, June 28, p. 1, July 5, p. 1, July 19, 1902, p. 1-2.



## CROWDS THROG TO ADAMS RITES

ADAMS WAS returning from a gospel meeting on September 3, 1922, when he was struck by an automobile as he was about to board a streetcar. He died the next day. The Appeal eulogized him in its September 16, 1922, issue. Many of his editorials were reprinted, and tributes to the man from many persons, both inside and outside the Black community and St. Paul, filled its columns. The death of the editor soon spelled the demise of the newspaper.

FULL PILGRIM  
BAPTIST CHURCH  
TO CAPACITY  
ELITE GROUND SERVICES

The funeral services for the late J. Edgar Adams, editor of the Appeal, were held at the First Baptist Church of St. Paul, Minn., on Saturday, February 11, 1922. The church was filled to capacity, and the services were of an elite and ground nature. The Rev. J. Edgar Adams, who had been a member of the church for many years, was buried in the city cemetery. The funeral was attended by a large number of friends and relatives, and the services were conducted with the utmost dignity and respect.



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**A Litany of Atlanta**  
I have read, I have seen, I have heard, and I have felt, the story of the life of the late J. Edgar Adams. I have seen the man who was a member of the church for many years, and I have seen the man who was a member of the church for many years. I have seen the man who was a member of the church for many years, and I have seen the man who was a member of the church for many years. I have seen the man who was a member of the church for many years, and I have seen the man who was a member of the church for many years.

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these three men began to plan in earnest the meeting that would cause a polarization in the Black protest movement across the nation.

THE AFRO-AMERICAN Council met in the senate chambers of the State Capitol on July 9, 1902. Other organizations met elsewhere. Despite troublesome opposition from anti-Washington forces, Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee machine won control of the entire convention and saw its slate of officers elected. Washington's domination, however, did not prevent sessions from being long and stormy.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>63</sup>Appeal, June 28, p. 1, July 5, p. 1, July 19, 1902, p. 1-2; Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, 173-74; Stephen R. Fox, *The Guardian of Boston*; William Monroe Trotter, 46-47 (New York, 1970).

<sup>64</sup>Fox, *Guardian of Boston*, 46; Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, 173.

Before the St. Paul convention, resistance to Washington amounted to little more than criticism of his compromising and conciliatory approach to race problems and his seeming acquiescence to disfranchisement and segregation in the South. Opposition was chiefly verbal and represented no organized threat to his leadership. During the months preceding the St. Paul conference, rumors began to circulate regarding an impending coup by radical forces. Undoubtedly sensing conflict and threatened loss of leadership, the Washington camp marshaled its strength in an attempt to bring the council completely under its domination.<sup>64</sup>

The Tuskegee machine did not win its victory in St. Paul without cost. Washington's naked demonstration of power alienated several influential members of the council who for several years had been listed among his supporters. Their desertion strengthened the radical cause by giving it the ablest minds and voices of the day.

It was Washington's display of authoritarian power in St. Paul that led radicals to a grand remonstrance against his leadership at the national convention of the council the following year in Louisville. After the Louisville meeting of 1903, radicals led by W.E.B. Du Bois and William Monroe Trotter withdrew from active membership in the organization and took with them many of the younger and more able leaders.<sup>65</sup>

John Adams was a nominal "Bookerite" and supported Washington at both the St. Paul and Louisville conventions. But Adams began to entertain second thoughts about Washington's semidictatorial control over race leadership following the famous "Boston riot" of 1903 in which Trotter was jailed for an oral challenge of Washington and his leadership at a Boston church meeting to which Washington had been invited.<sup>66</sup>

Adams did not completely sever his relationship with Washington after 1903 and retained his affiliation with the Afro-American Council, although by 1904 its vitality had been sapped by internal schism. Despite Adams' move away from the Tuskegee camp, he was not invited to join the radical, anti-Washington Niagara Movement, founded by Du Bois, nor did he join its local chapter in St. Paul.<sup>67</sup> Adams' pro-Washington stance had alienated him from the vanguard of the Black protest movement in the United States. Under the leadership of younger men, the protest movement, with its ever accelerating pace and burgeoning intellectual fervor, by-passed the aging St. Paul editor.

With the demise of the Afro-American Council, the *Appeal* found itself outside the mainstream of organized Black activism, a position it had not experienced since its inception. Although Adams endorsed the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, founded in 1910, he did not agitate immediately for a local chapter of the NAACP nor did he initially support Trotter's National Independent Political League (NIPL), a rival organization.<sup>68</sup>

After 1900 the *Appeal* suffered a dramatic decline in prestige and circulation, although it hung on for many years. By 1913 the once-heralded national Afro-American newspaper was reduced to the status of a local weekly. The *Appeal* closed its Dallas office in April, 1901, its Washington office in January, 1903, and its St. Louis and Louisville offices in October, 1903. There is evidence to suggest that the Chicago *Appeal* was purchased outright by Cyrus Adams prior to 1908. However, in March, 1913, the Chicago *Appeal* ceased publication, leaving the St. Paul and Minneapolis offices as the sole remnants of a once-proud journalistic empire.<sup>69</sup>

Although diminished in stature and circulation, the *Appeal* continued its vitriolic crusade against discrimina-

tion, disfranchisement, and injustices until shortly after the death of its long-time editor in September, 1922. So renowned was Adams among his contemporary Black journalists and others that, at the time of his death, condolences and flowers were received from throughout the nation as a testament to his life's work.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, 114-15, 241-47; Fox, *Guardian of Boston*, 46-47, 74-92.

<sup>66</sup> *Appeal*, July 18, p. 3, August 8, p. 2, October 17, p. 1, October 24, 1903, p. 2. At this meeting, Trotter attempted to ask Washington potentially embarrassing questions — challenges, really. The meeting was disrupted by verbal gibes and derogatory remarks between pro- and anti-Washington forces. Someone threw cayenne pepper and the meeting disintegrated into confusion and scuffles. Trotter nevertheless stood on a chair and tried to ask the questions over the din. Someone shouted that he ought to be arrested, and police did so, charging him with disrupting a public meeting. He was subsequently sentenced to one month in jail. See Fox, *Guardian of Boston*, 49-54.

<sup>67</sup> *Appeal*, November 25, 1903, p. 3, July 15, p. 2-3, July 22, p. 2, July 29, 1905, p. 2. William Du Bois issued a secret call to fifty-nine known anti-Bookerites to form an organization, and in July, 1905, twenty-nine men from fourteen states met in Fort Erie, Ontario. The group endorsed the "Declaration of Principles" drafted by Du Bois and Trotter, a radical document calling for "persistent manly agitation" as the means toward full male suffrage, equal civil rights, equal economic conditions, and full access to any type of education. Underscoring its anti-Washington stance was the statement: "We refuse to allow the impression to remain that the Negro-American assents to inferiority, is submissive under oppression and apologetic before insults." In general, the movement represented Du Bois' concept of the "talented tenth," those men who by virtue of their education ought to lead the race along the paths of freedom and growth. At its high point the movement claimed a membership of only about 400. Internal discord and the lack of adequate finances turned it into an impotent debating society and, by 1909, caused its demise. See Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, 178-82; Fox, *Guardian of Boston*, 89-91 (quote), 92.

<sup>68</sup> Fox, *Guardian of Boston*, 162-64. Meier (p. 184) says Adams was an official of the local branch of the NAACP, but apparently this was not until 1915 or so.

<sup>69</sup> Mikel, "A History of Negro Newspapers in Minnesota," 11; *Appeal*, December 5, 1908, p. 2, March 29, 1913, p. 2. There was no formal announcement to this effect; on this date Chicago was no longer listed as a center for distribution.

<sup>70</sup> *Appeal*, September 16, 1922, p. 1.

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