The Pittsburgh Courier's Double V Campaign in 1942

By Patrick S. Washburn

In January 1942, a twenty-six-year-old black cafeteria worker in Wichita, Kansas, wrote to the Pittsburgh (Pa.) Courier, the country's largest black newspaper with a national circulation of almost 200,000. His letter contained the following views on black rights and patriotism:

Being an American of dark complexion . . . these questions flash through my mind: . . . "Would it be demanding too much to demand full citizenship rights in exchange for the sacrificing of my life?" "Is the kind of America I know worth defending?" "Will America be a true and pure democracy after this war?" "Will colored Americans suffer still the indignities that have been heaped upon them in the past?" . . .

I suggest that while we keep defense and victory in the forefront that we don't lose sight of our fight for true democracy at home.

The V for victory sign is being displayed prominently in all so-called democratic countries which are fighting for victory over aggression, slavery and tyranny. If this V sign means that to those now engaged in this great conflict, then let we colored Americans adopt the double VV for a double victory. The first V for victory over our enemies from without, the second V for victory over our enemies from within. For surely those who perpetuate these ugly prejudices here are seeking to destroy our democratic form of government just as surely as the Axis forces.¹

James G. Thompson's words had an immediate impact. In the next weekly issue of the Courier (February 7), four Double V drawings appeared; the paper announced a Double V campaign emphasizing black rights a week later on the front page; and massive amounts of Double V articles, photographs, and drawings showed up in the Courier within a month. Readers unquestionably liked the campaign. The Courier received hundreds of telegrams and letters praising the campaign, and by mid-July the paper claimed that it had recruited 200,000 Double V members.² In addition, there

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were Double V dances and parades, Double V flag-raising ceremonies, Double V baseball games between professional black teams, Double V beauty contests, Double V poems, and a Double V song, "A Yankee Doodle Tan," which NBC introduced to a nationwide audience. Well-known blacks, as well as famous whites, endorsed the campaign.

The campaign's rapid acceleration in the Courier, and its appeal, was not surprising. Like numerous black publications at the time, the Pittsburgh paper eagerly played up racial injustices and pushed for equality with whites. These demands were not subtle, and the editors displayed no apparent regard of whom they might offend. P.L. Prattis, managing editor of the Courier in World War II and one of the country's most influential black journalists, noted the "fighting" style of the black press:

The Negro reporter is a fighting partisan. He has an enemy. That enemy is the enemy of his people. The people who read his newspaper . . . expected him to invent similes and metaphors that lay open the foe's weaknesses and to employ cutting irony, sarcasm and ridicule to confound and embarrass our opponents. The Negro reader is often a spectator at a fight. The reporter is attacking the reader's enemy and the reader has a vicarious relish for a fight well fought.  

Thus, it was not unusual for the Courier in 1942, while proclaiming its loyalty to the United States and to the Allies, sometimes to praise Communists for helping blacks and to criticize the Allies, particularly Great Britain, for mistreating blacks in far-flung colonies. Occasionally, the Japanese were lauded for throwing off the white yoke in Asia and the Pacific Ocean. Such criticism appealed to black readers, who since 1938 had seen the black press reemphasize a World War I theme — ending discrimination in the armed services.  

Black men could not join the Marines, Coast Guard, or Air Corps; the Navy would accept them only as messboys; and the Army confined them to four units in which openings seldom occurred. Such treatment angered blacks — since they could do little to defend the country, the felt like second-class citizens — and a status struggle resulted.  

Blacks also resented oppressive poll taxes, educational and job discrimination, police violence against blacks, and lynchings of blacks in towns such as Sikeston, Missouri; Laurel, Mississippi; and Texarkana, Texas.  

Thompson's letter expressed nothing radically new, but its Double V goal captured the interest of blacks and brought about a national cohesiveness as numerous black newspapers emphasized the need to end discrimination while continuing to publicize Allied war aims. The timing was superb. With the U.S. involvement in World War II, government officials began stressing the need of a united home front to ensure victory, and the country's 13,000,000 blacks assumed that whites could no longer ignore the issue of discrimination. The campaign declined by July, however, and it virtually died by October. It continued in the Courier until 1945, but the number of Double V items and the column inches they consumed were a mere trickle compared to the previous torrent.

Other historical studies of the Double V campaign have examined its
origins and broad aims in the entire black press. There has been no rigorous content analysis of any of the papers attempting to determine the frequency with which various campaign items appeared and the campaign's weekly strength. This study focuses on the contents of the Courier's Double V campaign in 1942. It examines both the campaign's week-by-week intensity and the frequency of appearance of different items and offers reasons for its decline.

The Courier, which was founded in 1907 and rose to prominence among black newspapers in the 1920s and 1930s, introduced the campaign on February 7, 1942 — after Thompson's letter — when a drawing that quickly became familiar appeared in the upper left-hand corner of the front page. It contained the American symbol — an eagle — and the words, "Democracy. Double V victory. At home — abroad." Then, on February 14, the paper sharply escalated the campaign, devoting five and a half times more space to it than in the preceding week. In a box at the top of the front page, the Courier restated Thompson's general theme:

Americans all are involved in a gigantic war effort to assure victory for the cause of freedom . . . . We, as colored Americans, are determined to protect our country, our form of government, and freedoms which we cherish for ourselves and for the rest of the world, therefore we adopted the Double "V" War Cry . . . . Thus, in our fight for freedom, we wage a two-pronged attack against our enslavers at home and those abroad who would enslave us. WE HAVE A STAKE IN THIS FIGHT . . . WE ARE AMERICANS, TOO.

The intent was obvious. While the paper wanted to publicize the campaign, it also hoped to convince nervous whites that it was not suggesting blacks should be unpatriotic.

In the same issue, the Courier ran the first of an avalanche of Double V photographs featuring smiling blacks. Besides the standard picture showing a black flashing a V with each hand, there were numerous variations: one woman had a "VV" on the back of her dress while another held a "VV" quilt; a class of sixth graders flashed the Double V sign; a soldier formed a Double with his hands and two military flags; and children displayed a Double V poster while selling war bonds and stamps. The paper also began selecting a "Double V Girl of the Week" such as Mabel Burks of Chicago, who was shown against a backdrop of two large V's on March 28.

A number of well-known persons appeared in Double V photographs from February through November 1942. They included such blacks as singers Marian Anderson and Etta Moten; hand leaders Lionel Hampton, Lucky Millinder, and Jimmie Lunceford; New York City Councilman Adam Clayton Powell Jr.; NAACP Assistant Secretary Roy Wilkins; Joe Louis' wife, Marva; and Miss Bronze America of 1941, Beatrice Williams. The Courier hammered home their support in ringing phrases, "Like thousands of other race patriots, she wants victory at home against prejudice and bias as well as in foreign lands against enemies of democracy," the Courier assured under Williams' three-column, front-page photograph. More support came from
some famous whites, who frequently were photographed either reading the 
*Courier* or wearing a Double V lapel pin. Among them were politicians 
Wendell Wilkie, Thomas Dewey, and John McCormack; columnist and 
broadcaster Dorothy Thompson; novelist Sinclair Lewis; comedian Eddie 
Cantor; CBS’ William Paley and NBC’s David Sarnoff; and movie stars 
Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, and Gary Cooper.

But the most vocal support for the Double V, according to the *Courier*, 
came from ordinary readers, who wrote “hundreds” of letters about the 
campaign by February 21. On that day, the paper ran seven letters, with a 
geographical distribution that became typical of what followed weekly — 
New York City; Wichita, Kansas; Toledo, Ohio; Charleroi, Pennsylvania; 
Los Angeles; Philadelphia; and Washington. The most noteworthy letter was 
from Thompson. He explained that he had written to the *Courier* in January 
because he had hoped his letter would result in “a nationwide drive in which 
every home and every car would carry in full-view these Double ‘V’ for victory 
signs.”

By March 7, when the paper ran fifteen letters, commendatory titles began 
appearing on them, such as “Detroit is Impressed,” “Says Double V is Tops,” 
and "Double Victory Important.” A scathing letter came from “a 19-year-
old Colored Boy” in Columbus, Ohio:

> If and when the American White Man loses this war, I am wondering if he will think why he did not give the colored man a 
> chance with the white in the Navy? It may be too late for he may 
> not have the Navy himself! He may ask why he did not give the 
> colored man a bigger part to play in the war. He may say, “We 
> could have used the colored man but we didn’t. Why didn’t I 
> give more jobs in the factories, where he was much needed at the 
> time? We have found that we could have won the war with his 
> aid, that we couldn’t win without him. Why didn’t we let more of 
> these colored men into the Army and the Marine Corps? Why 
> didn’t we let him do more than flunky work? That is all too late 
> now. We were only thinking of ourselves.” Your Double V 
> campaign will help to avoid the above situation.

That was not the only bitter letter. A Texas woman labeled the Double V 
campaign important “because many Americans are more dangerous to us 
[blacks] than some of our enemies abroad.” In Oregon, according to another 
woman, the Double V “means more to us than the ‘Buy a Stamp’ or ‘Buy a 
Bond’ drive!” An Ohio Baptist minister claimed that the campaign “will teach 
the Mr. Charlie of the South a new lesson and will shake the foundations of 
the hypocritical North.”

Some writers were more positive. A Georgia resident called the Double V 
“the greatest race proclamation since emancipation.”

Congratulations to the “Double V” campaign. I have got up a 
group of fifty men to carve marks and write the “Double V” 
emblem on everything that is movable and immovable here in 
S.C. We cut some [Double V drawings] out of the paper and
stuck them in the trolley bus. Give us the buttons and stickers and we will put them in the right places.\textsuperscript{15}

The \textit{Courier} also frequently reiterated the campaign's themes in editorials and columns. On February 28, only three weeks after the Double V began, columnist Edgar T. Rouzeau encouraged blacks to "shame" verbally any whites guilty of prejudice, pointing out that someone had to be either totally for democracy or against it. To him, no middle ground existed.\textsuperscript{16} A week later, columnist Frank E. Bolden became noticeably tougher. He summed up his views in a capitalized sentence: "\textbf{THOSE WHO DO NOT WANT COLORED PEOPLE TO FULLY PARTICIPATE IN THE WAR EFFORT SHOULD BE CLASSED AS TRAITORS TO THE CAUSE OF DEMOCRACY, BECAUSE THEY ARE BLOCKING THE ASSISTANCE OF A POWERFUL ALLY THAT HAS NEVER SHOWN A SHORTAGE OF COURAGE AND SACRIFICE — COLORED AMERICANS!}" He stressed that the \textit{Courier} would push the Double V until its goals were accomplished.\textsuperscript{17} Then, on March 28, a \textit{Courier} editorial had an ominous line: "If we are to have no democracy at home, it does not make a great deal of difference what happens abroad."\textsuperscript{18}

Such strong remarks, by the country's largest black newspaper, understandably made whites jittery. Apparently for that reason, the \textit{Courier} on March 21 already had restated the campaign's goals: "The 'Double V' combines ... the aims and ideals of all men, black as well as white, to make this a more perfect union of peace-loving men and women, living in complete harmony and equality." It also called blacks "the most loyal segment of the American population."\textsuperscript{19} Three weeks later, only two days after the Allied surrender at Batan, the \textit{Courier} cloaked the Double V in patriotism by espousing a Double V Creed across the top of the front page in large type:

\begin{quote}
We pledge allegiance to the United States of America ... to its all-out victory over the forces of our enemies on the battlefronts in every section of the world. We pledge allegiance to the principles and tenets of democracy as embodied in the Constitution of the United States and in the Bill of Rights. To full participation in the fruits of this victory ... victory both at home and abroad ... we pledge our all.\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

Following that, the \textit{Courier} gradually toned down its criticism and settled into a line of reasoning that it considered beyond reproach. An August 8 editorial called on blacks to "do everything within your power to gain victory." However, the paper continued, "we would be less than men if, while we are giving up our property and sacrificing our lives, we do not agitate, contend and demand those rights guaranteed to all free men. This would be neither patriotism nor common sense."\textsuperscript{21}

Meanwhile, the \textit{Courier} publicized the Double V in numerous ways. They included "Double V for Victory" dances, Double V queens, Double V flag-raising ceremonies, a Double V garden at Kansas State Industrial School, and a Double V professional baseball game in St. Louis between the New York Black Yankees and the Birmingham Black Barons. As thousands watched, drum and bugle corps formed a giant Double V on the field before the game.\textsuperscript{22}
Double V clubs sponsored much of the activity. The *Courier* began encouraging readers to form clubs on April 11, when it announced its Double V Creed across the top of the front page while another box at the bottom proclaimed, “5 cents Buys the ‘Double V’ Pin!” To form a club, a group had to buy only $1 of pens or stickers, the latter costing a penny apiece. The publicity worked. The number of clubs grew from thirty-eight on May 2 to 206 three months later in thirty-four states, the District of Columbia, and the Canal Zone. As a result, the *Courier* began on June 13 a “‘Double V’ Club News” column which indicated the wide variety of interests of club members. Some wrote to congressmen to protest poll taxes; others sent letters to the radio networks, asking that two programs, “Southernares” and “Wings Over Jordan,” not be broadcast simultaneously so that blacks could listen to both; and they met with business officials to promote non-discriminatory hiring. Helping servicemen, however, was the biggest activity. Clubs sent books, magazines, cigarettes, ash trays, handkerchiefs, shoe polish, skull caps, candies, and cookies to numerous military installations.

Other organizations promoted the campaign, too. Both the NAACP and the CIO’s United Automobile, Aircraft and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (more commonly known as the UAW) unanimously endorsed the Double V. The resolution adopted by the UAW, the country’s largest union with about 700,000 members, described the Double V campaign as expressing “vividly and concisely the aims of the labor movement in this war for a victory over the forces of Fascism and reaction and oppression both within this nation and in the world at large.”

The campaign also received religious support. In mid-March, the national Negro Baptist Council designated Easter Sunday as “National Negro Double Victory Day.” It called on ministers at 40,000 black churches to preach on Easter for “justice, enfranchisement, equal educational opportunities and salaries, unrestricted participation in the armed forces of the United States, employment in all defense industries regardless of race, creed or color, expansion of WPA, NYA and CCC unemployment insurance and old age pension security for . . . all workers Negro and white, north and south, from now on.” The *Courier* responded a week later with a memorable artist’s drawing. As two people stood on a hillside looking upward, Christ emerged from a cloud holding a V in each hand. “This is a ‘Double V’ scene,” said the caption. “Its importance and significance in the current struggle cannot be dissociated from its spiritual implications as expressed in Revelations.” The *Courier* claimed in the two weeks preceding Easter that the idea of a National Negro Double Victory Day was “gaining support,” but that may have been baseless. Following Easter, the paper failed to mention The Double Victory Day, probably indicating that it had not been a nationwide success.

Additional support came from the music industry. On March 14, only five weeks after the campaign began, the *Courier* announced that L.C. Johnson and Andy Razaf had composed a new song, “A Yankee Doodle Tan,” which had been inspired by the Double V. A photograph of the composers had the *Courier’s* Double V drawing in the background. Hampton’s band, which he renamed Lionel Hampton and His ‘Double V’ Band, performed the song on an NBC radio national program in May, and the paper reported two million listeners heard the broadcast. Within two weeks, the paper was selling sheet music of the song for thirty cents.
The women’s clothing industry and hairstylists also publicized the campaign. The Courier displayed Double V hats on April 11, and a “V for Victory” dress appeared in the paper in the following week. By the end of the month, a Hollywood designer had come out with a matching Double V hat and gown, which she called her “humble contribution to this great cause.” In the same issue, the paper noted some Texas women had attended a formal black ball with Double V parts in their hair. A Double V hairstyle—sometimes called a “doubler”—evolved quickly.34

Another campaign target was sports fans. On March 14, the paper ran its most imaginative Double V photograph. It showed UCLA basketball star Roger “Bill” Terry leaping in the air with his legs spread. His legs and his shadow each formed a V. A week later, the paper used a photograph of a black sprinter, who had won two events at the prestigious Knights of Columbus track meet in Madison Square Garden. Two artists’ V’s were in the background, and the cutline said the runner “automatically became one of the leaders in the Courier’s ‘Double V’ drive by virtue of his sensational performances.” In the same issue, columnist Chester L. Washington wrote about an unidentified black boxing champion who had signed up “with Uncle Sam for his greatest fight.” He supposedly told Washington: “I’m with Uncle Sam 100 per cent to win a smashing victory over our foreign enemies, but I’m also all-out for a Double Victory in America, one which will punch the ears off of our foes abroad and knock the socks off of Prejudice at home.”35

Finally, the Double V showed up in the comics section. On February 21, the “Sunnyboy” strip, drawn by the Courier’s Wilbert L. Holloway (who also designed the Double V drawing), emphasized the Double V. The campaign appeared in the strip five more times in the next seven months.36

Even the Courier’s makeup emphasized the campaign. On March 7, the paper replaced ordinary straight rules between stories with rules consisting of two long dashes with a VV between them. It was a brilliant stroke. A campaign reminder appeared wherever a reader looked in the paper. Then, on September 12, a second journalistic gimmick showed up. When there was a small space at the end of a story, the paper frequently inserted the following bold face filler: “Fifteen million people with one unified thought, ‘Double V’; Victory at Home and Abroad.”37

During the rapid success of the Double V campaign, the Courier did not forget Thompson. On March 28, a photograph showed bandleader LunCEFORD congratulating Thompson “on his brilliant idea.”38 In April, the paper sent George S. Schuyler, a columnist and associate editor, to interview Thompson in Wichita, Kansas. The first paragraph set the article’s tone when it portrayed Thompson as a black hero.

For 900 miles by airplane and train from Pittsburgh to Wichita, Kansas, I had been wondering what manner of person was James Grant Thompson, whose stirring letter to The Pittsburgh Courier had launched the nationwide “Double V” campaign. I knew that he was young and endowed with unusual gifts of expression. I knew that in his memorable letters he had expressed the feelings of millions of Negroes, young and old, from the Atlantic to the Pacific. It was clear he was a thoughtful young man and his photograph indicated that he was handsome
and upstanding. Now, as I pressed the buzzer at the front door of the five-room one-story house the Thompsons own at 1239 Indiana Avenue, my curiosity was to be satisfied. At last I was to see and talk with the Negro youth whose words had thrilled a million COURIER readers.

After noting that Thompson had quit his job at the cafeteria in March after being refused a five-cent-an-hour raise, Schuyler described him as "the idol of Wichita's 6,000 Negro citizens." 39

In June, Thompson replaced W.C. Page as director of the Courier's national Double V campaign, moving a Hopkinsville, Kentucky, minister to deliver a sermon on Thompson. "Jesus Christ, our 'Double V' Friend, kissed the idea [of the Double V] when he kneeled and prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane," said the Rev. L.S. Grooms. "The idea of 'Double Victory' did not leave the earth. it simply remained silent until the selected person [Thompson] was notified and the time pronounced." 40 Thompson directed the Double V campaign until February 1943, when he joined the service. 41

A content analysis of the Courier from the beginning of the campaign until the end of 1942 (a forty-seven week period) shows that the Courier used 970 Double V items. 42 There were 469 articles, editorials, and letters (48.35 percent of the material), 380 photographs (59.48 percent) and 121 editorial drawings (12.47 percent). The campaign reached its peak on April 11, when the Courier ran fifty Double V items filling 569 column inches (13.06 percent) of the available newsprint. Then the campaign slowly tapered off until it seldom occupied more than two percent of the weekly newsprint in the final three months of 1942. The decline particularly was evident on the Courier's front page.

However, in the remaining thirty-one weeks of 1942, the campaign appeared on page one in only seven weeks. The same trend was evident in a reduction of Double V drawings, letters to the editor about the Double V, Double V Club News, listings of Double V clubs, and advertisements for Double V pins, stickers, and buttons. 43

The finding of a sharp decline in the Pittsburgh Courier's Double V campaign in 1942 is significant because it is the first evidence that any black newspaper, other than in the South, cut back on the Double V that year. Lee Finkle, who has made the most extensive study of the black press in World War II, notes that many Southern black papers toned down or eliminated the Double V in the summer of 1942 after nationally-known journalists Virginius Dabney, Westbrook Pegler, and Mark Ethridge criticized the campaign. 44 The papers backed off because they did not want to jeopardize a friendly relationship with Southern white liberals. However, Finkle says the black press outside of the South, "aware of its reader's approval, in no way softened its tone as a result of these attacks . . . The 'Double V' and 'fight for the right to fight' became the wartime slogans of the black press." 45

Several possible explanations for the decline of the Courier's Double V campaign by October 1942 can be dismissed. A decreasing circulation definitely was not the reason. The Courier had an average circulation of 141,525 for the first six months of 1941 compared to 190,684 a year later. 46
A drop in advertising also can be dismissed. On January 31, 1942, the week before the Double V campaign began, the Courier ran 588 column inches of advertisements. After the campaign began, the paper had less advertising during 1942 only once — 512 inches on September 5.

Likewise, criticism of the Double V campaign in both the black and white press is not a plausible explanation. With the exception of the Norfolk Journal and Guide in 1942, the major black publications (Chicago Defender, Amsterdam Star-News, Baltimore Afro-American, and the NAACP's The Crisis) never criticized the Courier's campaign. The white press, meanwhile, attacked the Double V; but, as Finkle has noted, the criticism had little effect outside of the South. Schuyler, the Courier's outspoken columnist, wrote in May 1942 that such attacks were useless because "the old days of scared, timid, ignorant Negroes are gone forever." In addition, Frank E. Bolden, a columnist on the Courier's 1942 staff, recalled that the paper "welcomed" the criticism. "If they [white newspapers] got on it [the Double V campaign], we knew we were attracting attention. That's what we wanted them to do."

More subtle attempts to tone down the black press, particularly because of the Double V campaign, came from the government. By early 1942, black newspapers were being investigated heavily by the FBI, and high government officials were pressuring both the Justice Department and President Roosevelt to indict some black editors for "sedition" and "interference with the war effort." The president, however, would not allow court action. Meanwhile, the Courier, one of the papers under investigation, ran columns and editorials throughout 1942 on the government threat to the black press' First Amendment rights. In a May editorial, the paper claimed that government officials wanted to suppress "all critical comment since [they permit] only one point of view. To the Negro press and public this trend cannot be viewed with complacency."

Bolden denied that fear of government suppression had any effect on the Courier:

"Hell, no, the government pressure didn't cause us to back off. We welcomed it. It helped sell more papers when we wrote about it. We wanted Roosevelt to arrest one publisher for sedition and shut his paper down. But he was too smart to do that. He knew that would have given some white newspapers, such as PM and the New York Times, a chance to attack him."

Bolden said the FBI investigation was no secret. He recalled seeing agents at the paper twice, in 1940 and in the first half year after the U.S. entered the war, and he said everyone considered them "scared white men, Hoover's flunkies." "They'd tell us to shut our mouths, you're hurting the war effort... We just ignored them. I guess you could call it contempt."

A desire to improve black morale does not seem to be a plausible explanation for the decline of the Courier's Double V campaign. Everyone agreed in 1942 that it was low, and the government's Office of Facts and Figures became so concerned that it called a special Washington meeting of blacks in March to discuss the problem. "It is amusing to see these people [government officials] so panicky over a situation which they have caused and which governmental policies maintain," said the Courier. "... If the
Washington gentry are eager to see Negro morale take an upturn, they have only to abolish jim crowism and lower the color bar in every field and phase of American life.\textsuperscript{52} In 1942 the paper never retreated from its belief that the government, not the press, was to blame for bad black morale. Therefore, morale could not have been improved by cutting back on the Double V campaign. Bolden recalled that the \textit{ Courier's} editors held this view.\textsuperscript{53}

So, how can the dramatic decline of the paper's Double V campaign in the last half of 1942 be explained? Available sources are of little help in answering this question. Documents prepared by the FBI, Justice Department, Office of Facts and Figures, and Office of War Information referred to the \textit{ Courier} and its Double V campaign, but these agencies only noted the campaign's presence without explaining the reason for its decline.\textsuperscript{54} In addition, none of the columnists or editors left an answer although several of them wrote autobiographies.\textsuperscript{55} Howard Sitkoff hinted at an explanation when he noted that "the war-time prosperity of the Negro middle class demanded a movement that would conserve [black] gains, rather than one that might undo the progress."\textsuperscript{56} Blacks unquestionably made sudden, significant gains in 1942. Black men were commissioned for the first time in the Air Corps, Marines, and Coast Guard; their status was upgraded in the Army and Navy; and by November they were involved in combat in the South Pacific and North Africa. Black women were accepted for the newly created Women's Army Auxiliary Corps. The Red Cross began collecting blood from blacks, and defense plants started hiring in large numbers, mainly because of government pressure on employers.

Bolden said these gains, and numerous smaller ones, caused the \textit{Courier} virtually to abandon the Double V in late 1942:

What else could we do? We had knocked on the door and gotten some attention and so the editors said, "Let's concentrate on what the people are doing." For example, why would I want to read about the Double V when people are already working in a war plant down the street? I wouldn't. These gains showed good faith intentions by the government and other people [those who owned war plants], and we felt we should follow suit . . . .

In other words, the Double V was like a Roman candle. It flared up, it did its work and then it died down. It wasn't the sole reason things opened up [in the armed forces and industry], but it certainly woke people up.\textsuperscript{57}

As the Double V began to decline, the \textit{Courier} clearly demonstrated its "good faith intentions" by replacing campaign material with positive articles and picture layouts, frequently covering a full page, about black gains. Subjects included black air corps pilots (March 14), black workers in defense plants (May 28), black shipyard workers (June 6), the 93rd Army Division at Fort Huachuca, Arizona (two pages on June 20), blacks in the Coast Guard (July 4), U.S. black soldiers around the world (July 25), black WAAC's at an Iowa training center (August 1), black troops in Trinidad (August 29), black merchant marine seamen (September 5), and black women in defense plants (September 26). The \textit{Courier}’s new tone was particularly evident in picture cutlines:
The 93rd Division is part of Uncle Sam’s method of building up unexcelled fighting strength for a battle against enemy forces. Okay, Uncle Sam, we’re ready.58

These black men [in the defense plants] realize they have as much, or more, at stake than any other group of people. They know that democracy must survive. They know that democracy is their only hope. And, because they are conscious of these things, they have rolled up their sleeves and are enthusiastically helping in the development of America’s might. “America first, last and always!” is their song as they work in the arsenals of democracy.59

Other factors also may have influenced the demise of the Double V campaign. Newspaper publishers generally are conservative, and the Courier’s publisher, Jesse Vann, was no exception. When her husband, Robert L. Vann, died in 1940, she took over the paper with virtually no knowledge of the newspaper business.60 Because the paper provided her financial support, she may have been apprehensive not only about government surveillance but the effect of the Double V on black morale, particularly in the service. After all, racial incidents occurred at a number of army camps in the spring of 1942, resulting in deaths of both blacks and whites. However, to back down from the campaign because of the pressure could have angered readers (as well as destroyed staff morale at the paper) and resulted in disastrous circulation losses. Therefore, playing up black gains while backing off of the Double V probably was viewed as a way to satisfy everyone.

Mrs. Vann also had definite economic reasons for toning down the Courier. Until 1942, black newspapers always had depended on circulation to earn a profit. Unlike their white counterparts, they made little money from advertising because virtually none of the white-owned corporations advertised to a black audience. Thus, the Double V was vitally important to the Courier because the campaign gained national attention from blacks and resulted in a welcome circulation boost. But in the spring and summer of 1942, the advertising situation changed. Faced with an excess-profits tax, American companies understandably began advertising in the black media rather than merely giving surplus income to the government as taxes.61 The Courier was one of the main beneficiaries. By the end of the summer, Philip Morris cigarettes and Esso gasoline advertised regularly in the paper, and Old Gold and Chesterfield cigarettes, Pepsi-Cola, and Pabst Blue Ribbon beer followed by the end of the year. It would have been surprising if the Courier, with a lucrative new source of income, had not toned down lest it jeopardize the opportunity of obtaining still more accounts. More than one researcher in the 1940s noted the effect of increased profits on the editorial content of the black press. “Negro publishers are apt to be primarily business men whose interest in race welfare is secondary to their interest in selling newspapers,” Thomas Sancon wrote in April 1943.64 Five years later, Vishnu V. Oak agreed: “Many [black] newspapers seem quite willing to sell their pages to anyone who is willing to pay the proper price.”65

Finally, the possibility exists that war events led to the decline of the Double V. Mrs. Vann may have felt it would hurt the black cause ultimately not to
tone down the paper’s criticism of the government as the country's war fortunes improved. In 1942 the U.S. went on the military offensive, beginning with important naval victories in the Coral Sea and at Midway in May and June, respectively, continuing with the landing at Guadalcanal in August, and concluding that year with the Allied invasion of North Africa in November. By the time the latter occurred, the paper had become far less critical of the government.

Whatever the reasons for the decline of the Double V, it was obvious that the Courier had performed a significant service for blacks by the end of 1942. It had pushed hard for black rights at a perilous time when the government viewed such a push as possibly seditious because of the war, and black accomplishments had come rapidly during the year. Undoubtedly, some of the accomplishments would have occurred eventually without the Double V, simply because of the urgency of the war, but the campaign unquestionably hastened their implementation and magnitude. As such, the appetites of blacks were whetted for even more gains toward equality with whites, and the Double V had helped provide a momentum that would not end with the war.

NOTES

1James G. Thompson, "Should I Sacrifice to Live 'Half American?'" Pittsburgh Courier, Jan. 31, 1942. All footnote references are to the Courier unless indicated otherwise.
2"Double V Clubs Unite, Fight for Abolition of Poll-Tax." July 18, 1942.
7Feb. 7, 1942.
9See photographs on March 11 and 28, April 25, May 2, June 15, Aug. 15 and 22.
11March 14, 1942.
12"Means More Race Interest." March 7, 1942.
13See "Mean New Day for the Race." March 7, 1942; "Double V Is Top!" March 14, 1942; and "An Important Campaign." April 4, 1942.
14"Lauds Double 'V.'" June 13, 1942.
15"Enthusiasm 1,000 Per Cent." March 28, 1942.
17Frank E. Bolden, "We Want Full Participating Rights in War to Save Democracy - Bolden," March 7, 1942.
19"All Americans Can Rally Around The Double V Slogan." March 21, 1942.
20"Double V Creed," April 11, 1942.
21"Why Our Slogan Is 'Double V.'" Aug. 8, 1942.
23April 11, 1942.


NBC Baptizes Endorse Courier's 'Double V Drive,'" March 21, 1942.

March 28, 1942.

See "Easter As National Negro Victory Day Gaining Support," March 28, 1942; and "Racial Pastors to Preach on 'Double Victory','" April 4, 1942.


See Isadora Smith, "Nation Singing 'Yankee Doodle Tan,' New 'VV's Song, After Introduction on Radio," May 16, 1942; and "Lindel Hampton, Traveling by Train, Plays to 8,000 Whites at Miami Beach," July 4, 1942. The "Courier" announced on May 30 that it was selling sheet music.

See photographs. April 11 and 18, 1942; and "Designers to Create 'Double V' Hat, Gown" and "VV Theme Carried Out at Annual Spring Frolic," April 25, 1942.


The dashes, with the VV between them, were the longest-running Double V item in the Courier, lasting until Sept. 1, 1945. On the next day, the Japanese signed the formal surrender documents and the paper's next issue used "V..."

Photograph, March 28, 1942.

"George S. Schuyler. " 'Make Democracy Real.' Says Double V Originator," April 18, 1942.

Sy. Pastor Speaks on 'Double V,'" July 25, 1942.

Photograph, Feb. 27, 1942.

While other studies have included anything in the black press that even vaguely expressed the Double V goals, this study is limited to those articles, photographs, and drawings that specifically mentioned the campaign or contained its "VV" symbol. This approach eliminates a problem faced in other Double V studies—deciding what material to include—and allows a more detailed, precise examination of the Courier's campaign.

The decline of the Double V in the Courier in 1942 was evident in the following: only seven of the 114 letters to the editor about the campaign appeared after June 27; only three of the 121 Double V drawings were used after August 22; no advertisements for Double V pins, stickers, and buttons showed up after October 10; the listings of Double V clubs disappeared after August 1; and the Double V Club News column did not appear after September 12.

Fink. Forum for Protest. pp. 65-65. Dabney, editor of the Richmond Times Dispatch, criticized the Courier for "beating America's war effort while seeking a revolution in long-established customs and practices; Pegler, in his nationally-syndicated column, called the Courier and the Chicago Defender "dangerous because of "their obvious, inflammatory bias in the treatment of news"; and Edridge, publisher of the Louisville Courier-journal and Times, said that "those Negro newspaper editors who demand 'all or nothing'...are playing into the hands of the white demagogues."

Ibid. pp. 77 and 72. An Office of Facts and Figures report of June 25, 1942, substantiates Fink's argument that southern black newspapers could not be as bold as their northern counterparts. "Negro newspapers in the South must, if they wish to exist, be more careful than newspapers in the North," it said. See Bureau of Intelligence, Office of Facts and Figures, "Special Intelligence Report No. 48," June 25, 1942, Record Group 44-E, 171, Box 1845, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Percy H. Johnson, ed. N.W. Ayer & Sons Directory of Newspapers and Periodicals, 1942 (Philadelphia, 1942), p. 845; and J. Percy H. Johnson, ed. N.W. Ayer & Sons Directory of Newspapers and Periodicals, 1943 (Philadelphia, 1943), p. 824. While no study has been made of why the circulation increase occurred, it probably was related to the war. Blacks wanted war news as it concerned them, and such news simply could not be found in white newspapers.


Is Criticism to Be Suppressed?" May 16, 1942.
82"Hysteria Over Negroes." May 2, 1942.
85Autobiographies include Horace R. Cayton, Long Old Road (Seattle, Wash., 1963) and George S. Schuyler, Black and Conservative (New Rochelle, N.Y., 1966).
89Photograph. May 23, 1942.
91There was no question that the excess-profits tax resulted in more advertising. A black publishers' magazine noted in February 1944 that the tax had brought about a "mild advertising boom" in black publications since the war began. See "A Memo to Negro Advertising Men." Pep: Negro Publisher, Editor and Printer (February 1944), p. 21.