

ROBERT LEE VANN  
AND  
THE PITTSBURGH COURIER

James H. Brewer  
A. B., Virginia State College, 1940

Submitted to the Graduate School  
of the University of Pittsburgh in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania  
1941

FORWARD

Of all the American Negroes who have risen to fame in the journalistic service of the United States, Robert Lee Vann, Pittsburgh Editor, is the most distinguished. His merit in journalism, law, and politics is acclaimed by men of all races on both continents. The extent of his influence upon the American Negro is an accepted tradition and may be traced throughout the history of the United States for the last twenty-five years. Thus in this work an attempt has been made to follow the career of Robert Lee Vann from his first association with The Pittsburgh Courier until his death, keeping in mind the continual growth of Vann and his newspaper.

The writer wishes to thank the members of The Pittsburgh Courier staff for their courtesy, especially Mr. Ira F. Lewis who kindly permitted the use of all available information and who made many helpful suggestions. Special thanks is due to Mrs. R. L. Vann for the helpful cooperation and her permission to use his private and business letters and other material. Acknowledgment is also made to Miss Marion Bayless, for assistance; and to Dr. E. J. Ferguson, under whose guidance the work was done.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
FOREWARD-----	1
Chap. I Introduction: Early Youth and Training-----	1-15
A. Environment-----	1-7
B. Early Education-----	7-10
C. Training-----	11-13
D. Beginning of Public Career-----	13-15
Chap. II Founding and Expansion of <u>The Pittsburgh Courier</u> -----	16-45
A. Early History-----	16-22
B. Expansion-----	22-33
C. Contents of the paper-----	33-45
Chap. III A Journalistic Crusade-----	46-77
A. Equal Rights Struggle-----	46-53
B. Ethiopian War-----	53-60
C. Fight for Negro Teachers in Pittsburgh-----	60-65
D. Fight for Equality in the Army, Navy, and Air Corps-----	65-77
Chap. IV From Journalism to Politics-----	78-101
A. Early Politics-----	78-80
B. National Politics-----	81-83
C. Fight for Political Independence-----	83-100
D. Conclusion-----	100-101

Early Life and Training  
(1879-1910)

Robert Lee Vann's early life, youth, training and struggles were all important in conditioning him for later life. From humble birth and poverty, this Negro boy rose to the leadership of his race as the editor of The Pittsburgh Courier, the greatest Negro newspaper in the world. Throughout his entire career which embraced the legal profession, journalism, politics, and social crusading, he fought for the cause of his less fortunate compatriots, more vigorously because of his early struggles.

Vann was born of poor parents in the backwoods of Ahooskie County, North Carolina, somewhere on what is known as "old Dr. Mitchell's farm."<sup>1</sup> It is very doubtful if anyone could locate the exact spot for a stone cast at random might locate the spot with as much accuracy as any other method. Much of his early past is enveloped in the silence with which he treated matters pertaining to himself. Thus, much of the story of his youth must be pieced together from bits of information that he occasionally disclosed in his conversation. He had little or no recollection of Ahooskie

1. WELFORD COUNTY HERALD, Historical Edition, Sept., 1939.

because he was taken to Harrellsville, North Carolina, when he was very young.<sup>2</sup> His earliest remembrance of Ahooskie was the struggle of his mother to provide food for him and to keep the home they had on the old Slaughter Farm, located near Pitch Landing. This was on the old "Ahooskie to Harrellsville" road by way of Big Swamp. Since he had no father to provide for him, his mother was chiefly responsible for his rearing. It was an accepted tradition that a woman could not rear a boy with any degree of success, but she "wore many an elm sprig to shreds" in her endeavor to refute that tradition. Whenever he broke her established code of behavior, she gave him a sound thrashing and she thanked anyone else who performed that function for her.

Young Vann never forgot the happy moments he experienced when his mother took him from the Slaughter Farm to Harrellsville where she became a domestic for John Askew and his wife. This meant regular meals and a notable position for his mother, one which he could proudly boast of to his friends. He soon became a house-boy and never forgot the things he saw in the big yard at the Askew home.<sup>3</sup> There he was surrounded with the luxury and aristocracy of the South. The large farm, the great number of farmhands, the overseer, rolling green lawns, huge and stately trees, and all of the beauties of nature surrounded him as if he, himself, were an heir to wealth. In this environment he lived until he was

2. R. L. VANN, "Sketch of My Life" A short typewritten statement of his life. This is in the possession of Mrs. R. L. Vann, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

3. WELFORD COUNTY HERALD, op. cit.

ten years old; during these years, his life, as it has been lived in the past half century, took definite form. He knew the best people of Harrellsville, played with their children in their yards. The Askew estate is still hallowed ground. Molly Askew, "one of the finest specimens of womanhood he ever knew,"<sup>4</sup> shaped his early education. He gives her credit for much of the guidance he received when he was unable to choose his own course of action.

There were other influences that affected Vann's early training. Across the road at Harrellsville lived the Thomas Williams' family; next to them, the Cullens' family, then the Soulls. Charles Pruden was the local politician, constable, magistrate, and judge.<sup>5</sup> Vann went to the lumber camp with Bismarck Scull and cooked for twelve or fourteen men when he was still a child.<sup>6</sup> Another counsellor was Dr. Abner Askew. Young Vann used to count it a privilege to hold the physician's horse at the gate of a patient while the Doctor went inside to minister to the sick. Vann's father confessor and chief advisor was Charles W. Smith, a clerk in the store of Dr. Askew's brother. The spirit of this man became a part of young Vann because of the influence he had over Vann. Vann used to go to the well and

4. WELFORD COUNTY HERALD, op. cit.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

carry fresh water and listen to him give fatherly advice to a boy who did not know that the sun rose or set anywhere else except in Harrellsville. There were also the three boys of the Sharp family, Aubrey, Willie, and Bainbry. These boys' stepfather, Henry Clay Sharp, was Vann's ideal statesman. He did little or nothing but look after the estate of the minors and read the Virginian-Pilot in front of the post office every day except Sunday. He once gave Vann a copy of the paper indicating to him the national and international news. Aubrey Sharp was Vann's hero. He actually loved Aubrey. As one looks back on the whole scene, one factor must have been Aubrey's teaching Vann to ride his bicycle, probably the first one owned in Harrellsville.<sup>7</sup>

His colored associates around Harrellsville were many. One of them, Charlie Yates, is now teaching in Ahsokie, North Carolina. Another, Cornelius Askes, taught him at the school near Harrellsville Chapel at the foot of "old Red Hill." There was A. C. Boothe who became postmaster at Harrellsville. Vann could never understand the political gymnastics this Negro performed in order to become postmaster; probably Henry Clay Sharp had something to do with it because he was the only Republican around Harrellsville.<sup>8</sup> Living among these people whose names have been mentioned was a privilege, and in later years proved to be a great inspiration to Vann. They insisted on having things done right.

7. Hartford County Herald, op. cit.

8. Ibid.

Many of their traits he absorbed, for this early environment served as the foundation of his success.

His mother remarried when he was ten and from the age of ten to sixteen, he experienced the fate of the damned. In contrast to the life he lived in the Askes yard, his stepfather took him down to a swamp plot in which malaria raged. It was filled with snakes and wild animals. Here his stepfather taught him how to set steel traps for raccoons, opossums, and rabbits; how to kill snakes. In telling of his experiences, Vann declared, "If any boy can plow in the heat of the day near a running stream, without being dragged, ox, plow, and all, into that stream--he is not a boy, he is a real man." He learned to split rails, dig ditches, hoe cotton and corn, cure tobacco in the barns, and do every other task that the plow boy of a poor Negro farmer would have to perform. Although he was hired out to drive horses at a fishing beach at six dollars a month, he never saw a cent of his wages. He followed the windlass round and round on those fishing beaches because his stepfather thought he was big enough to work. He was correct. Vann was big enough to work, but his stepfather never knew how the first ten years of his life made him constantly rebel inwardly against the six years or torment he encountered under the old man's jurisdiction. He not only worked, he slaved. Little wonder it is then that he cultivated a dislike for his stepfather.<sup>9</sup>

9. Hartford County Herald, op. cit.

While a horse-boy on the fishing beaches, he served under David Askes who was known as the "Sea Captain" on the beach, chiefly because he was responsible for the conduct of the who's industry. David Askes acted as a school teacher who aided Vann greatly in a practical education. He was a great inspiration.<sup>10</sup> Vann held a lantern or a burning pine knot many nights on the fishing beach while the captain repaired a torn place in the net. It was then that he drank in some of the wise sayings and crude philosophy of David Askes.

Vann's firm and fast friend, Charlie H. Smith, prevailed upon postmaster Boothe to make Vann a clerk in the Harrellsville post office. Perhaps no one can ever realize just what this position meant to him. Most of all, it took him away from his stepfather's chosen occupation for him, that of a poor farmer. One experience while he was a clerk will suffice to indicate one of the many lessons he learned in carefulness and attention to business. One night he attempted to put the day lock on the safe where the stamps were kept. He turned the dial too far; the plunger fell; Vann did not know the combination of the safe. Boothe was away and would not return for a few days. What could he do for stamps for the next day? That night he decided his only hope was to go to Colerain and ask the postmaster there to lend him some stamps. He was not aware

10. Vann, op. cit.

of the fact that postmasters cannot make a practice of lending stamps that belong to the government. He arose about five o'clock the next morning and took the liberty of waking up Aubrey Sharp, who as always, was generous and loaned him his bicycle. Upon arriving at Colerain, he managed to talk the postmaster into lending him some stamps and was back in Harrelleville, wringing wet with perspiration, in time to open the post office.<sup>11</sup>

In the meantime, he was attending the little country school near Harrelleville Chapel at the foot of old Red Hill. In the evenings he taught his mother to write; she managed to write him a few letters in her peculiar handwriting.<sup>12</sup> When Vann had mastered the fundamentals, the principal called him in and said, "Lee, we've taught you about all we can." Vann expressed the feeling that he needed more knowledge; the principal suggested that he go to Waters' Normal Institute in Winton, North Carolina.<sup>13</sup>

While working in the post office, Vann had managed to save sixteen dollars which he decided would enable him to go to school. When September arrived, he packed a few sandwiches and walked to Winton to see if he could enter the institution. Finally, he arrived at the little two-story school building with a steeple on it. He entered the principal's

11. Vann, *op. cit.*  
12. Mrs. C. L. Vann to the writer, May 21, 1941.  
13. Vann, *op. cit.*

office in which sat Calvin Scott Brown. Principal Brown told young Vann the fee was four dollars a month, provided the student left school every Friday and did not return until Monday morning; otherwise the fee was six dollars a month.<sup>14</sup> This sum sounds rather small now, but then it was multiplied several times in the boy's ears. He decided he would meet the four dollars' charge and go home over weekends. Returning to Harrelleville, he bade goodby to his friends and his mother and departed to attend Waters' Normal.<sup>15</sup>

Every Friday he walked the ten miles to his home and every Sunday evening walked the ten miles back to school over a lonely country road.<sup>16</sup> This continued for weeks until winter came and the snow began to fall. One weekend, Vann left school as usual and returned home. Late that Sunday afternoon a severe snow storm began while he was returning to school, but he decided to continue his journey. It was hard pulling, walking ten miles through snow up to his knees, but he made it to the school door and fell in, exhausted and wet. The students and the principal helped to revive him. When he had recuperated, he was called into the principal's office. He trembled as he walked in the door for fear that he had done something wrong and would be sent home.<sup>17</sup>

14. *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, Apr. 16, 1934, p. 6. Contains an article, "New Deal Personalities" by L. M. Pitts.  
15. *Ibid.*  
16. *Ibid.*  
17. *Ibid.*

Upon being asked by Principal Brown whether he had been walking to and from home every weekend, Lee replied that he had. The principal stated that he should not have gone out in the snow as he might have caught pneumonia or gotten lost and buried in the snow. Lee explained that four dollars weekly was all he could afford. After this the principal gave him permission to stay at the school.<sup>18</sup> As small as this incident may seem, it was a great moment for young Vann--so great that he gives credit to Calvin S. Brown for such that he has achieved. The world was lifted from his shoulders that day. He was relieved of a mental and physical strain that would have stopped many a sixteen year old boy. Now he could continue his schooling.

Vann was very studious and soon developed his speaking ability. He cultivated a thirst for knowledge. In the meantime, he did odd jobs for Principal Brown and managed to make ends meet. Friends and people interested in him kept him in second hand clothes.<sup>19</sup>

During many of his summer vacations he was a ploughboy and actually followed a mule and plough in the tobacco fields of Hertford County, North Carolina. He drove horses on the fishing beaches of the Chowan River, planted corn for ten cents a day, chopped cotton for fifteen cents a day, and cured tobacco for thirty-five cents a day. He could run a

18. *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, *op. cit.*  
19. Mrs. Vann to the writer, May 21, 1941.

AP 10

AP 11

AP 12

Upon being asked by Principal Brown whether he had been walking to and from home every weekend, Lee replied that he had. The principal stated that he should not have gone out in the snow as he might have caught pneumonia or gotten lost and buried in the snow. Lee explained that four dollars weekly was all he could afford. After this the principal gave his permission to stay at the school.<sup>18</sup> As small as this incident may seem, it was a great moment for young Vann--so great that he gives credit to Calvin S. Brown for much that he has achieved. The world was lifted from his shoulders that day. He was relieved of a mental and physical strain that would have stopped many a sixteen year old boy. Now he could continue his schooling.

Vann was very studious and soon developed his speaking ability. He cultivated a thirst for knowledge. In the meantime, he did odd jobs for Principal Brown and managed to make ends meet. Friends and people interested in him kept him in second hand clothes.<sup>19</sup>

During many of his summer vacations he was a ploughboy and actually followed a sale and plough in the tobacco fields of Hertford County, North Carolina. He drove horses on the fishing beaches of the Chowan River, planted corn for ten cents a day, chopped cotton for fifteen cents a day, and cured tobacco for thirty-five cents a day. He could run a

18. Norfolk Journal and Guide, pp. xix.

19. Mrs. Vann to the writer, May 21, 1941.

barn of tobacco from ninety-eight degrees to the killing-out point.<sup>20</sup> When not employed in this manner, he went to Boston, Massachusetts, to work at summer resorts.<sup>21</sup>

It was a long and difficult struggle but thanks to the encouragement of Dr. C. S. Brown, he stayed in school. No degree ever conferred gave Vann more real pleasure than the little certificate acknowledging his graduation from Waters' Normal Institute in May, 1901.<sup>22</sup> Upon graduation from Waters' Normal, he next turned to Virginia Union. With his mother's parting benediction and a final goodby, he set his face towards furthering his education. He arrived at Virginia Union and pursued his studies there.

His career at Virginia Union was very interesting. He recalls having frequently filled the school bell full of water, with the help of many of his friends, thus giving the bell ringer an unexpected shower.<sup>23</sup> Dr. J. B. Simpson quotes in a letter to the writer dated March 2, 1941:

It was my privilege to have Mr. Vann in my classes for the two years he attended our University. Even at that early stage of his education, he seemed to be impressed with the thought that he had an important work to accomplish and whenever he was not earning money to pay his expenses, he was busy with his lessons and extra-curricular activities....

20. Vann to Jefferson Penn., August 21, 1940. In the possession of Mr. Vann of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

21. Mrs. Vann to the writer, June 6, 1941.

22. Norfolk Journal and Guide, pp. cii.

23. Ibid.

What, however, I remember most distinctly about Mr. Vann, as a student, was his open-mindedness and his readiness to abandon a deduction as soon as he found a flaw in his reasoning...yet he never seemed to either teachers or fellow-students unstable or inconsistent....<sup>24</sup>

Robert Lee wrote numerous articles for the University Journal and was a member of the college debating team.<sup>25</sup> He left the distinct impression at Virginia Union of being a radical. Finally, he was given a diploma from the academic Department and politely requested to leave. However, not so many years ago, (1926), Virginia Union called the radical Vann back to deliver the commencement address and receive the degree of L.L. D.

Vann never forgot any wholesome instruction or any information that would stand him in good stead in later life. While still a youth, he asked the Reverend C. E. Askew why he did not take law as he felt he would have made a good lawyer. The Reverend Askew replied that a Negro lawyer in North Carolina could never succeed for the only field open was criminal law. In the court his color would prejudice the jury (all white) against his clients, and this would drive him from the bar because of lack of practice. Thirty years later in Pittsburgh he reminded the Reverend Askew of that conversation and said that was

24. Dr. J. B. Simpson to the writer, March 2, 1941.

25. University Journal, Jan. 1, 1903. School paper of Virginia Union University, Richmond, Virginia.

the thing that made him decide to come to the North to practice law.<sup>26</sup>

After leaving Virginia Union, he decided to attend the University of Pittsburgh, then named Western University of Pennsylvania. He took the freshman examination and passed it. The next day he took the sophomore examination and passed it, all but one Greek. This he made up in the summer session while working as a bellboy in a hotel in Bar Harbor, Maine.<sup>27</sup>

At the University, Vann presented himself as a candidate for the football team. The coach told him he was too light, but common sense told him that the coach meant just the opposite, too dark. He now sought other extra-curricular activities and turned to the Courant which was the school paper of Western University of Pennsylvania. He was appointed as a reporter. It was felt that he soon would tire of this position and resign. However, he integrated himself with the staff of the Courant. He was promoted and in his new position on the staff he wrote the school news. In the October 1906 issue of the Courant he wrote an article entitled, "A Timely Reform" at the conclusion of which he signed his initials. On page fourteen was the announcement of the election of new officers. R. L. Vann

26. The Reverend Askes to Mrs. R. L. Vann, March 15, 1941.

27. Norfolk Journal and Guide, *op. cit.*

of the Senior Class was chosen as the new editor-in-chief.<sup>28</sup> In May, 1906, the Courant carried a picture of its staff on page four including R. L. Vann.<sup>29</sup>

He enjoyed expressing his views and opinions with his classmates. He finally joined the debating team. He had a natural gift for speaking. Being a Negro, he was somewhat of a novelty. His speaking ability enabled him to become president of the Tri-State Debating League, comprising the teams of West Virginia, Ohio, and Pennsylvania.<sup>30</sup> On one occasion he debated on the constitutionality of the now famous Interstate Commerce Commission. He proved successfully to the audience that it was not constitutional but the Supreme Court has since decided differently. He also won the chancellor's cash prize of fifty dollars for the best oration. He spoke on "The Heavy Hand of Leopold in the African Congo."<sup>31</sup>

To earn enough money to pay for his tuition, Vann did all types of work. In the summers, he was a bellboy in New England hotels, did porter work, waited tables, cooked, and while attending Western University of Pennsylvania, worked in a boarding house on the North Side of Pittsburgh as a waiter. The boarding house still stands on Stockton Avenue, two doors from the Concordia Club. Here he was

28. Courant, October, 1906, p. 14. School paper of Western University of Pennsylvania, now University of Pittsburgh.

29. *Ibid.*, May, 1906.

30. Norfolk Journal and Guide, *op. cit.*

31. Vann, *op. cit.*

required to serve twice daily. He kept this job from 1905 to 1906 when he was graduated with the A. B. Degree, exercises being held in the Nixon Theatre.<sup>32</sup>

Vann now determined that law should be his chosen profession. He entered the Law School at the University of Pittsburgh.<sup>33</sup> While attending law school, he worked on the railroad, serving dinner on the Pullman coach on the run from Pittsburgh to Connellsville, Pennsylvania. He would leave Pittsburgh and serve dinner at six o'clock every evening and remain in Connellsville until the next morning. During the time spent in Connellsville, he would pursue his studies. At nine-thirty the next morning he served breakfast on the run back to Pittsburgh. Upon arriving in Pittsburgh, he would go to his classes.<sup>34</sup> In 1910, he was graduated from the Law School and in December of the same year was admitted to the bar.<sup>35</sup>

In February, 1910, Attorney Vann married Miss Jessie Matthews of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.<sup>36</sup> A man's wife is one of the most significant facts in his success. No better example can be cited than the present one. Jessie Vann

32. Vann, *op. cit.*

33. *Ibid.*

34. Mrs. Vann to the writer, June 6, 1941.

35. Vann, *op. cit.*

36. *Ibid.*

proved to be the stabilizing factor in his life. In moments of distress and disillusionment, it was she who encouraged him to continue his struggles. Her sacrifices and encouragement contributed to his success in later life. When all the world was against him, he knew he always could depend upon Jessie. Need I say what such faith would mean to any man? Thus, in his first year out of school, he began the practice of his profession, entered business, married and began the purchase of a home.<sup>37</sup>

The hardships he faced steeled him for later life. Vann had spent thirty years preparing himself to face life by removing various obstacles to arrive at the place where he might serve. As fate was to decree, he had thirty years to work and serve. Vann's early struggles, which are here described, were the key to his success. On many subsequent occasions his childhood experiences and observations had a marked influence on his legal, journalistic, and political policies.

37. The Pittsburgh Courier, Oct. 30, 1940.

## II

### The Founding and Expansion of The Pittsburgh Courier

During a period of a little over a quarter of a century, the journalist, Vann, built The Pittsburgh Courier into the greatest Negro newspaper in the world. This task was difficult and the progress up to 1915 was relatively small and discouraging. Thereafter, because of strong editorial policies, the development of an efficient staff, the establishment of road agencies which eventually became branch offices, and capitalization upon news and events of particular interest to Negro people, the growth of the paper was phenomenal. The Pittsburgh Courier, from a small beginning in 1907, has risen to the position of the most powerful and the most successful Negro paper in the world.

The Pittsburgh Courier, founded by Mr. Edwin E. Harlston, began with two pages as early as 1907.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Harlston, at that time an employee of the H. J. Heinz Company, was somewhat of a poet. He began The Pittsburgh Courier as an outlet for his poetry. He came to R. L. Vann with his paper of two pages and advised him that he had named the paper the Courier in recognition of Vann's position when he was in college and served as editor-in-chief of the

1. R. L. Vann to E. A. Finckney, Apr., 31, 1936.

University Journal (Courant), published by the University of Pittsburgh (Western University of Pennsylvania at that time).<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Harlston, a native of Charleston, South Carolina, migrated northward, finally settling in Pittsburgh where he got a job as a messenger at the H. J. Heinz Company. He wanted to name the paper the Charleston News-Courier in honor of his birthplace.<sup>3</sup> To assist Mr. Harlston, Vann supplied articles for his little paper. Thus, from 1907 to 1910 the paper went along purely as a hobby of the two men and could be classified as a literary sheet. It was published at the will of Mr. Harlston who acted as editor, reporter, treasurer, business manager, and a complete newspaper company all in one. His poems were written on the spur of the moment in his own peculiar style. No recognition was given the paper. Often not more than ten copies were printed and sold to an unwilling public at five cents a copy. Mr. Harlston had the paper printed at his own expense and more than once it was purely an expense for him. Those who bought the paper often never read it, but merely patronized Mr. Harlston because he was a personal friend of theirs. Mr. Harlston began to look around for business associates whom he might interest in his paper. However, his efforts were of no avail as there was no one who cared to invest in his enterprise. This practice continued for over three years.

2. Vann to E. A. Finckney, Apr. 31, 1936.

3. Ira F. Lewis to the writer, May 6, 1941.

Finally in 1910, five enterprising young Negroes, Cumberland H. Posey, William H. Page, William H. Hance, Samuel Rosmond, and E. H. Marlston, invested their own savings in the corporation in order to promote a Negro newspaper in Pittsburgh.<sup>4</sup> After he had been practicing law a little less than six months, attorney Vann was called by this group to secure a charter for their proposed newspaper.<sup>5</sup> Thus, The Pittsburgh Courier Publishing Company was incorporated under the laws of Pennsylvania, March 10, 1910, for the purpose of publishing The Pittsburgh Courier, a weekly newspaper.

Vann's fee was fifty dollars; he consented to allow it to be paid in stock in the newspaper. He secured ten shares at five dollars a share because a member of the board of directors and the legal counsel for the organization.<sup>6</sup> Its first officers were: C. H. Posey, president; Edward J. Johnson, treasurer; William H. Hance, vice-president; William H. Page, business manager; Edward Marlston and Robert L. Vann, editors.<sup>7</sup> Little did they dream of the widespread influence it would have.

The first office was located at 1918 Wylie Avenue near Elm Street in Jackson's Undertaking establishment. This

4. Marion Bayless, "Advancement of the Negro Through The Pittsburgh Courier" An article in the possession of Mrs. Bayless of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

5. L. F. Pitts, *op. cit.*

6. *Ibid.*

7. Bayless, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

site was chosen because it was obtained at a low cost and, most important, it was in the center of Pittsburgh's "black belt."<sup>8</sup> Many difficulties confronted the editors; lack of capital, inadequate office space and equipment, distance from the printing shop, sale of stocks and bonds, and, fundamentally, that of arousing Negro interest. These are only a few of the obstacles they encountered.<sup>9</sup>

The original founder withdrew entirely from the company in the autumn of 1910 because of some disagreements and left the city of Pittsburgh, leaving Vann as editor.<sup>10</sup>

In 1912, Beatrice H. Posey was selected as general secretary to the entire Courier staff. Upon entering the office, she saw one typewriter, one second hand desk, and two second hand chairs. Her salary was seven dollars per week; before she left in 1917, she was making ten dollars per week.<sup>11</sup> The staff now consisted of one secretary reporter, one city errand boy who also served as proof reader and mailing clerk, and one sports editor.<sup>12</sup> They decided to move to a better location, so in 1914, the Courier office was moved from Jackson's undertaking parlor to 516 Fourth Avenue.<sup>13</sup>

8. Beatrice Posey Bayless to the writer, May 27, 1941.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Lewis to the writer, May 6, 1941.

11. B. F. Bayless to the writer, May 27, 1941.

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*

The earlier issues of The Pittsburgh Courier consisted of four pages.<sup>14</sup> These pages contained news about Pittsburgh and some of the outlying districts within a radius of thirty miles. However, there was a national subscription list since all of the members of the staff had friends throughout the country.<sup>15</sup> Thus, about one hundred and fifty Couriers were mailed out to various parts of the United States each week.

The Western Newspaper Union, located on Duquesne Way, printed the paper. The printing company got out the issue every Thursday afternoon. The paper was distributed by the entire staff. Many copies were carried to the post office on the back of the mailing clerk. Others were carried by street cars to designated spots and thrown off.<sup>16</sup> Here an agent would pick them up and deliver them.

Even in its early stages, the Courier was not without competition in Pittsburgh. The Sunday Press devoted two columns to Negro news. A. T. Hall wrote these columns under the title, "Afro-American News." The news was more or less social. There was also the American, a Negro journal which was established by the Reverend Austin, the Reverend Hunter, Arthur Stevenson and Mr. Douglas. Mr. Stevenson was the

14. B. F. Bayless to the writer, May 27, 1941.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*



legal advisor for this paper. Its pages contained church, social, and sports news. Often the employees of each paper would transfer to jobs on the other paper as difficulties arose. However, most of them returned to the Courier. Julia E. Jones wrote the Women's page for the American. Her entrance into the Courier had no small effect on the growth of the paper through female patronage. Another source of competition in Pittsburgh was the Pennsylvania Guard. However, the Courier left the others behind and they soon failed, one by one. The Sunday Press stopped the Afro-American column around 1914.<sup>17</sup>

The Pittsburgh Courier had a considerable amount and variety of advertising. Advertisements concerning hair ranked first. Many of the large Department stores in Pittsburgh saw the value of advertising in Negro newspapers and supported The Pittsburgh Courier. Kauffmann, Hoe-chaux, and Frank and Seder were a few of these stores.<sup>18</sup> From this very small and insignificant beginning in 1910, the paper had a more or less indifferent success. As late as 1915, The Pittsburgh Courier's circulation was about 8,700, contributing monthly to the race over \$150 in salaries and commissions.<sup>19</sup>

17. Lewis to the writer, May 6, 1941.

18. The Pittsburgh Courier, Jan. 8, 1914.

19. Ibid., Nov. 15, 1915.

The year 1915 marks a turning point in the expansion and progress of the paper. Ira F. Lewis was taken into the company in this year.<sup>20</sup> His coming stimulated the paper because of his imagination and industry. The other members of the paper began to work more diligently and attentively. Mr. Lewis was to receive three dollars per week for working three days. In addition, he was getting a twenty-five per cent commission on all the advertising he brought in. He had another job, waiting tables at McCreery's Department store. Thus from June, 1915 to November, 1917, he worked at this salary after which he was given a twenty-five dollar salary and no commissions. From the time of his joining the staff, the paper began to grow.<sup>21</sup>

A decision was reached in the same year to have a strong editorial page. Vann and Rosemond both wrote editorials. If Vann had two, Rosemond wrote none. At this time, Vann was busy practicing law and, like most young lawyers, was dabbling in politics. He received no salary while working for the paper but instead received stocks and bonds.<sup>22</sup>

As early as 1915, The Pittsburgh Courier was an eight-page newspaper, selling for five cents a copy. Local advertisements were one cent per word and news of interest to the public was printed free if it contained no advertisement. The paper was twenty-four inches long and seventeen and a

20. Lewis to the writer, May 6, 1941.

21. Lewis to the writer, May 6, 1941.

22. Ibid.

half inches wide. A reader of the paper at this early date would have seen in the November 19, 1915 issue on page one: "World Mourns Loss of Booker T. Washington;" on page two, Pennsylvania news (Braddock, Sewickley, Monongahela, Washington, Rankin, etc.) along with local advertisements; on page three, news from Negro sports world; on page four, editorials, local news, lodge news, and national news; on page five, society news and personal news; on page six, church news; page seven, continuation of Booker T. Washington's death notice; page eight, state and national news. On all eight pages there was some form of advertisement. This would show that the paper depended to no little extent on advertisements for its income.<sup>23</sup> On Wednesday evening the paper went to press. On Thursday morning about 1,800 papers were ready for delivery and Friday morning, about 100% more were ready. They were put on the street cars with tags on them instructing the conductor where to throw them. The street car conductor was given a free paper to do this.<sup>24</sup>

In 1916, William M. Page, the business manager of The Pittsburgh Courier died, but prior to his death, the company had employed Mr. W. P. Bayless as its news editor. After Mr. Page's death, the responsibility of business management was delegated to Vann for one year, but he was succeeded by Mr. W. P. Bayless who left the company in 1918. Mr. Lewis then succeeded him.<sup>25</sup>

23. The Pittsburgh Courier, Nov. 19, 1915.

24. Lewis to the writer, May 6, 1941.

25. Ibid.

half inches wide. A reader of the paper at this early date would have seen in the November 18, 1915 issue on page one: "World Mourns Loss of Booker T. Washington;" on page two, Pennsylvania news (Graddock, Sewickley, Monongahela, Washington, Rankin, etc.) along with local advertisements; on page three, news from Negro sports world; on page four, editorials, local news, lodge news, and national news; on page five, society news and personal news; on page six, church news; page seven, continuation of Booker T. Washington's death notice; page eight, state and national news. On all eight pages there was some form of advertisement. This would show that the paper depended to no little extent on advertisements for its income.<sup>23</sup> On Wednesday evening the paper went to press. On Thursday morning about 1,800 papers were ready for delivery and Friday morning, about 1,000 more were ready. They were put on the street cars with tags on them instructing the conductor where to throw them. The street car conductor was given a free paper to do this.<sup>24</sup>

In 1918, William W. Page, the business manager of The Pittsburgh Courier died, but prior to his death, the company had employed Mr. W. P. Bayless as its news editor. After Mr. Page's death, the responsibility of business management was delegated to Vann for one year, but he was succeeded by Mr. W. P. Bayless who left the company in 1918. Mr. Lewis then succeeded him.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> The Pittsburgh Courier, Nov. 18, 1915.  
<sup>24</sup> Lewis to the writer, May 6, 1941.  
<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

At the beginning of the year 1916, Vann summarized the policy of the paper in one of his editorials. It reads:

We feel that we have gained a warm spot in the hearts of the people...to that end we shall allow no opportunity for non-scientific service to go unheeded, and to make of our name, The Pittsburgh Courier, a reality, a fact...a messenger to the people...shall be our aim. Our policy shall ever be: first, uplift of the Negro race...through the medium of these columns; second, racial achievements shall be heralded...; third, racial insults and hamperings shall be refuted; fourth, recognition of racial fitness shall be proclaimed; fifth, we shall recognize no master save that which is right, that which is human and shall stand by our convictions with the courage of full mankind...<sup>26</sup>

The Pittsburgh Courier was greatly affected by the entrance of the United States into the World War in 1917. The war was a tremendous enterprise that was little understood at that time. Naturally the war had a great effect on The Pittsburgh Courier. It stimulated its growth. The leading white journals had no time to devote their columns to the Negro population. To whom could the Negro turn? In the past they had to scan page after page of white journals trying to find a paragraph mentioning the Negro. This was highly unsatisfactory. At this psychological moment, The Pittsburgh Courier and other Negro journals were the answer to the Negro's problem. Negro mothers, wives, brothers, and sisters, now began to turn to Negro journals. Could The Pittsburgh Courier and the other Negro journals do the job? The answer is self-evident. Thousands of Negro men were drafted. According to the editorial comment of

<sup>26</sup> The Pittsburgh Courier, Jan 21, 1916.

The Pittsburgh Courier, Negroes were drafted and put into a stevedore regiment in addition to being subjected to discrimination in a fight waged to save democracy. Many of these Negroes had high school and college education. The Pittsburgh Courier made such strenuous objection to the treatment of Pittsburgh boys at Camp Lee that about eighteen boys were put into the artillery regiment at Camp Meade. More than once, the United States government threatened to shut down this little "Black Journal." Editorials and stories concerning the Negro in the war appeared week after week. Material for the stories was gathered from letters from soldiers and other sources.<sup>27</sup> In 1918, an editorial entitled, "Let the World Know" is an example of the accomplishments of the Negro. It states:

The Courier believes that we, as Negroes...ought to see to it that this country, and the whole world, knows what black boys are doing in the war. The Courier will attempt to do this. We do not intend to allow our President to remain ignorant of the burdens we bear and discriminations we face. Never! The white galleys are not telling of our deeds in arms as they are busy advertising their own sons. People believe that the Negro is playing a trivial part in the war. We know differently and it is our business to show it and give a correct version of the part we play in the struggle for Democracy. If we allow ourselves to go without notice and due publicity and praise, the fault is ours. Thus, we will let the world know what portion of freedom we purchased with our blood and money. Our journals should carry refreshing, wholesome messages to our people. Our critics will see that our vice and so forth is given due publicity.

<sup>27</sup> Lewis to the writer, May 6, 1941.

The effect of this was that the national subscription list hit a new high. The local editions of The Pittsburgh Courier began to circulate in Negro homes that once felt ashamed to be seen buying a Negro newspaper. Thus, much of the history of the Negro in the World War is written in the columns of The Pittsburgh Courier.

At the conclusion of the war, The Pittsburgh Courier was faced with the problem of still keeping the Negro public interested. It had to educate a larger portion of the Negro public to accept a Negro journal. The Pittsburgh Courier still had competitors. By 1920, the paper increased its circulation to about 18,000 papers selling at five cents a copy.

In 1920, Mr. Lewis came to Attorney Vann and said that they would either have to go out of business or get sore for the newspaper.<sup>30</sup> Vann wondered if they could get seven cents when the other Negro journals were selling for a nickel. The paper that gave the most competition was the Chicago Defender. Vann sent Ira Lewis to see Mr. Abbott and Mr. Jones of the Chicago Defender. Abbott was willing to raise the price to seven cents, so they agreed to raise prices mostly because good print cost twelve and one half cents a pound. Letters were exchanged and August 7, 1920 was the date set for the increase in price.<sup>30</sup>

30. Lewis to the writer, May 6, 1941.

30. Ibid.

After Mr. Lewis's agreement with the Chicago Defender people, he came home and talked to his competitors in Pittsburgh.<sup>30</sup> However, at a board of directors meeting, the Pittsburgh group decided not to raise the price of their paper. Vann and Lewis were disgusted, decided that The Pittsburgh Courier Publishing Company could afford a better paper at ten cents a copy, and raised their price accordingly.<sup>31</sup>

Chester L. Washington was sent to procure pictures for the first issue of the ten page paper. A statement appears explaining the raising of the price. The dimensions of the paper were 25 1/2 inches by 19 3/4 inches. To make the paper more interesting, a comic strip entitled, "Little Julius Sneezer," appeared on page three. Across from the editorials appeared cartoons satirizing various political events. The first comic strip, however, appeared in the 1914 issue of the paper entitled, "Simple Simon Delivers the Goods." Throughout the war period, cartoons appeared weekly. Off-hand estimates showed that about 50,000 people read The Pittsburgh Courier; even in its early stages the paper's directors realized the value of pictures since the Negro reader loves to see pictures.

By February 1922, the paper's growth had become so great that the printing of the paper was taken away from the

30. Lewis to the writer, May 6, 1941.

31. Ibid.

Western Newspaper Union since it could no longer handle the increase in the number of papers.<sup>32</sup> The Pittsburgh Courier was now printed at the Hebrick and Held plant on the North Side. By autumn, 1923, the circulation had reached 25,000.<sup>33</sup>

The Pittsburgh Courier made strenuous efforts towards obtaining national circulation and in September, 1923, launched its first road man, H. B. Webber, upon the collection of national news.<sup>34</sup> He covered central and eastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and parts of Ohio. He was so successful that by 1924, there were two editions, the city and the national. To obtain news for the national edition, contact men covered various important events affecting the Negro in all the large cities. They were paid according to the importance of the news they sent in.<sup>35</sup>

Mr. George Schuyler was sent on the road to replace Mr. Webber in November 1924. Mr. Schuyler established several agencies for The Pittsburgh Courier. As he visited various towns, he wrote about them. His articles created a sensation and caused a great increase in the sale of the national edition. Mr. Schuyler was responsible for a net increase of 10,000 in circulation by the middle of 1926.<sup>36</sup>

32. Lewis to the Writer, May 6, 1941.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. W. C. Summ to the writer, May 10, 1941.

36. Ibid.

On September 10, 1928, the authorized capitalization of the company was increased from \$1,000 to \$75,000 with 5,000 shares of common stock at \$5 par value per share and 1,000 shares of preferred stock at \$50 par value per share.<sup>37</sup>

As time passed, the original directors disagreed, died, or dropped out of the organization. Each time Vanz was asked to buy up their stock. The remaining directors, in disgust, finally offered him the balance for a paltry sum and R. L. Vanz went up to find himself owner of The Pittsburgh Courier.<sup>38</sup>

The Pittsburgh Courier in 1927 felt the need for further expansion and its officers began to seek opportunities for larger production and better all-around service. The result was that in March, 1929, the Company began the erection of its own building at 2628 Centre Avenue. Vision, sacrifice, and courage were required to venture an expansion of such magnitude. Night after night the members of the Company sat up and drafted plans; they wanted to print their own paper. Construction began in December 1929. After completing the building and acquiring the machinery, The Pittsburgh Courier put out its first twenty-four page newspaper, printed by the new press.<sup>39</sup> This event occurred at the very beginning of the depression. Commitments had

37. Lewis to the writer, May 6, 1941.

38. Lewis to the United States Department of Revenue. A short typewritten statement concerning the financial growth of the paper in possession of Iva F. Lewis of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

39. L. M. Pitts, Sr. file.

been made on both real estate and machinery through the rose-colored glasses of early 1929 and these same commitments had to be met through the mud-smeared glasses of '30, '31, '32, and '33.

By December 1929, The Pittsburgh Courier was published in two sections, containing between twenty and twenty-four pages. Its circulation area comprised all forty-eight states, plus Europe, Cuba, Canada, the Philippine Islands, the Virgin Islands, and the British East and West Indies Islands. Robert L. Vann and William E. Hance now were the only original board members with the company. William H. Page, C. W. Posey, and Samuel Rosemond were dead. Mr. Harlston relinquished his interest shortly after he founded the company and Edward Johnson sold his interest and moved to New York City.<sup>40</sup> It was R. L. Vann who continued to finance and build the institution until it reached its original objective, its own home and equipment.<sup>41</sup>

The Pittsburgh Courier in 1929 could boast of four national editions which included northern, eastern, and southern United States.<sup>42</sup> These editions covered news of interest to these sections of the country. However, these editions increased in number, reaching a total of eleven editions by 1940. The editions are: Texas, Louisiana, Pacific Coast, Far South, South National, Washington,

40. The Pittsburgh Courier, September, 1935.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., June 7, 1941.

New York Seaboard Edition, Philadelphia, Ohio Mid-West, Chicago, and National.<sup>43</sup>

An increased emphasis on the sporting news added to the circulation of the paper. Chester L. Washington was appointed to the position of sports editor.<sup>44</sup> Shortly after 1929 the sports department, encouraged by Vann and Lewis, pushed to the forefront in the field of college and high school athletics. Soon The Pittsburgh Courier's annual all-American football teams, which were selected after Chester Washington traveled as much as 10,000 miles in one season, came into prominence in Negro high schools and colleges throughout the country. Uncounted numbers of Negro high schools' stars who had hopes of becoming great athletes while attending college now began to look forward to attending schools of their own race. More than any other thing, the publicity given to Negro youths through the channels of The Pittsburgh Courier's sports columns, enabled many a lad to attend college.<sup>45</sup>

Another event that gave impetus to the expansion of circulation was Joe Louis's winning the world heavyweight championship. No other sports writer in the country has published a more complete biography of Joe Louis than Chester Washington has through the columns of The Pittsburgh Courier.

43. Mann to the writer, May 10, 1941.

44. Ibid.

45. Chester L. Washington to the writer, May 19, 1941.

The Pittsburgh Courier scooped the American newspapers on Germany's attitude toward the Negro in the 1936 Olympics.<sup>46</sup> A cable of July 15, sent to Chancellor Hitler, was answered by A. Wubalty, Reich Athletic Director, Berlin. He states, "No discrimination, regardless of race or religion."<sup>47</sup> Vann left the United States in July, 1936 to give an inside story of the Negro in the Olympics at Berlin. He sailed on the S. S. Europa.<sup>48</sup> A cable sent by R. L. Vann reads:<sup>49</sup>

This athletic contest between the leading nations of the world, is a spectacle of spectacles. It is the greatest thing of its kind I have ever seen. Sunday, I witnessed 110,000 people cheer two Negroes because they were supreme in their field...Monday...wonder of wonders...I saw Herr Adolph Hitler salute this lad, Jesse Owens...Make no mistake about it, these Germans are mighty fine. They have a spirit of sportsmanship and fair play which overrides the color barrier...Something has been said in the American papers about Hitler's behavior towards the American team and no one feels like assuming the responsibility of explaining his attitude. But the facts, however, remain that, just at the time when he should have received the winners in the 100 meters, and everyone knows Jesse Owens was the winner, Hitler found it convenient to leave the stadium, and it is also a further fact that he did not receive the members of the American team except Miss Stephens, and that under peculiar circumstances. My seat was directly behind Herr Hitler, elevated about twenty feet above his head, and I could look right down upon him, and I did look down upon him every moment of the time he sat in his seat. In fact, every time he would wave his cap, the Germans would yell "Heil Hitler," and all he had to do was wave and the salute was almost instantaneous.

46. The Pittsburgh Courier, Sept. 7, 1936.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid., July 22, 1936.

49. Ibid., Sept. 2, 1936.

However, he waved at Jesse Owens and Jesse Owens waved back at him, and this is as close as he came to receiving the members of the American team.

The increase in circulation of between ten and fifteen thousand was realized by virtue of the excellent work of the sports department.

The company continued its policy of expansion and growth until by January 1, 1934, it had most of its machinery paid for and the circulation had grown to about 80,000.

The fact that The Pittsburgh Courier was the only Negro newspaper to send a war correspondent to cover the Italian-Ethiopian War increased the circulation of the paper. The Pittsburgh Courier's grew within the next two years to 150,000.<sup>50</sup>

Since that time the entire debt for machinery has been liquidated and the cost of the land and original building has been reduced immensely. From 1936 to 1939, the circulation of the paper stood between 150,000 and 180,000 with the rise and fall of business conditions. The volume of the company's business has grown to around one half million dollars a year.<sup>51</sup>

This increased business necessitated an expansion of the plant. In June, 1936, the company purchased from the Peoples-Pittsburgh Company a lot, west of the original land holding on the southern side of Centre Avenue, 100

50. Lewis to the writer, May 6, 1941.

51. Ibid.

feet wide. An addition to the plant was built to alleviate this crowded condition.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, from a meagre beginning in 1910, when its business was transacted at a rented desk space, The Pittsburgh Courier has steadily grown in physical size, resources, and importance. By 1934 it was fully equipped with the very latest in printing machinery, including<sup>53</sup>

1. one 24 page Hoe Simplex Press
2. three Intertype Typesetting Machines
3. one Elrod Rule, Border and Slug Casting Machine
4. one Ludlow Head and Ad-setting Machine
5. one heavy duty Mat Roller
6. one complete stereotyping equipment set including (scorcher, inside sifter, tail cutter, power saw, router, chipping cylinder, etc.)

valued at \$53,000.

#### Contents of the Newspaper

The Pittsburgh Courier, like every other progressive newspaper, attempts to give its readers a good paper. It is committed to the policy of "the greatest good for the greatest number." It stands for justice, independence, courage, industry, and economy. It gives variety in subject matter by basing its news upon four subject sources: national or international news, state or sectional news, local news, and human interest topics. All these in some way are related to the Negro. It urges him to develop a

52. Lewis to the writer, May 6, 1941.

53. The Pittsburgh Courier, Dec. 7, 1939.

spirit of independence, a courageousness in demanding his rights, a sense of economic values, physical fitness, and optimism.

The editorials express a conviction that the colored man has reached the state at which he must select his own leaders--the kind that will not discard principles for popularity. In politics, he must show some independence in selecting his party.<sup>54</sup> Never is he advised to form a party of his own, but rather encouraged to advance his position through proper use of the ballot.<sup>55</sup> The editorial trend advocated for the Negro in business is towards economic self-sufficiency through organized labor and consumers' cooperatives. Negroes are told to patronize their colored brothers engaged in business.<sup>56</sup> Emphasis is placed upon the fact that there is nothing racial about business; hence, the importance of forcing white merchants doing business in Negro communities to employ Negroes is stressed.<sup>57</sup> It is the policy of The Pittsburgh Courier to put before the Negro the need for economy. The editorials advocate economy through savings in business, fraternal, and religious organizations. On the other hand, they deplore the withholding of funds from organizations which concentrate upon the defense and advancement of this group.

54. E. A. Pinckney, "Editorial Page of The Pittsburgh Courier, 1925-1928."

55. The Pittsburgh Courier, Sept. 8, 1928.

56. Ibid., Apr. 17, 1928.

57. Ibid., March 29, 1928.

The large body of material found in The Pittsburgh Courier may be classed under thirteen different headings. Comment on current news and items of interest may, in turn, be subdivided into special columns, excerpts from other papers, and editorials from other papers. Its material usually appears in four or five short paragraphs each commenting upon a different issue. "Opinion"<sup>58</sup> by Chandler Owen; "Reflections" and "The Digest"<sup>59</sup> by Floyd Calvin; H. E. Murphy's copyrighted, "Review";<sup>60</sup> "It Is My Opinion"<sup>61</sup> by Ernest Rice McKinney and George Schuyler's "Thrusts and Lunges"<sup>62</sup> are a few examples of the different articles that appear weekly in The Pittsburgh Courier. They represent the writer's opinion and do not reflect the editorial opinion of The Pittsburgh Courier.<sup>63</sup> The range of subject matter is broad and appeals to Negroes throughout the country.

A second division appearing includes wit and humor. "Epigrams"<sup>64</sup> are short, witty paragraphs often of an epigrammatic nature. "Stray Thoughtlets" and "Howard Bunts

58. The Pittsburgh Courier, Sept. 29, 1923.

59. Ibid., Feb. 16, 1924.

60. Ibid., June 14, 1924.

61. Ibid., Feb. 28, 1921.

62. Ibid., Oct. 17, 1922.

63. Ibid., Jan. 19, 1922.

64. Ibid., Jan. 18, 1922.

Says"<sup>65</sup> are witty comments on everyday observations. The third division, one of the most interesting articles, is the column entitled, "The Labor Situation"<sup>66</sup> compiled by the Urban League. In each issue the occupational opportunities for the Negro in some one city are explained. Most of the cities are in the North. Literary material is the type of writing of the fourth division, including poems, quotations, wise sayings, and book reviews. "Songs From a Littered Desk"<sup>67</sup> is a collection of poems by Lewis H. Fenderson, a young Pittsburgh writer. The fifth division consists of "Letters to the Editor."<sup>68</sup> Although they have appeared as "The Editor's Mail" and, at times, without any heading, they have always covered a range of material as wide as the range of human experience. Some of the letters are based upon news or editorials concerning pertinent topics of the day; others are the result of experience or observation. Quite often these letters criticize the editor. A wide and varied range of timely local, national, and international news makes up the sixth division.<sup>69</sup> Religious activities form the seventh division. Here are found religious comments which attempt to show the value

65. The Pittsburgh Courier, Sept. 26, 1925.

66. Ibid., Nov. 14, 1924.

67. Ibid., Sept. 26, 1925.

68. Ibid., Dec. 28, 1925.

69. Ibid., Nov. 29, 1924.

Says<sup>65</sup> are witty comments on everyday observations. The third division, one of the most interesting articles, is the column entitled, "The Labor Situation"<sup>66</sup> compiled by the Urban League. In each issue the occupational opportunities for the Negro in some one city are explained. Most of the cities are in the North. Literary material is the type of writing of the fourth division, including poems, quotations, wise sayings, and book reviews. "Songs From a Littered Desk"<sup>67</sup> is a collection of poems by Lewis H. Fenderson, a young Pittsburgh writer. The fifth division consists of "Letters to the Editor."<sup>68</sup> Although they have appeared as "The Editor's Mail" and, at times, without any heading, they have always covered a range of material as wide as the range of human experience. Some of the letters are based upon news or editorials concerning pertinent topics of the day; others are the result of experience or observation. Quite often these letters criticize the editor. A wide and varied range of timely local, national, and international news makes up the sixth division.<sup>69</sup> Religious activities form the seventh division. Here are found religious comments which attempt to show the value

65. *The Pittsburgh Courier*, Sept. 26, 1935.

66. *Ibid.*, Nov. 14, 1934.

67. *Ibid.*, Sept. 26, 1935.

68. *Ibid.*, Dec. 26, 1935.

69. *Ibid.*, Nov. 29, 1934.

of the church. The first is "Why Go Ye Church";<sup>70</sup> the second, "The Negro Church--What Ails It?"<sup>71</sup> Under the eighth division is Negro history which includes a question and answer section and a discussion of animated cartoons of the deeds of the Negro in the world's history.<sup>72</sup> Health discussions form the ninth division and music notes the tenth.<sup>73</sup> The next three divisions are cartoons, features, and news of Negro sports.

*The Pittsburgh Courier* has, probably, the greatest staff of feature writers known to colored journalism, whose articles cover a world of human events and crystallize public sentiment on news of national importance. Below is a list of some of the feature writers and their columns:<sup>74</sup> "Views and Reviews" by George Schuyler; "Below the Mason-Dixon Line" by Jesse C. Thomas; "So It Seems" by Alice Dunbar Nelson; "Sunny Boy Sam" by Wilbert Holloway; "Hello Public" by Zella Jackson; "Homely Philosophy" by Georgia Douglas Johnson; "Jule's Soliloquy" by Julia Barry Jones; "Myrtle Avenue, Pittsburgh" by John L. Clark; "In the Fraternal World" by A. B. Rice; "Bits by Bernice" by Bernice Dextrivelle; "Along the Rialto" by Chappy Gardner; "The Mail Box" by Jack Cooper; "The Glad Girl" by Gladys Bailey; "Ches Sez" by C. L. Washington, Jr.; "Sports Shots" by W.

70. *The Pittsburgh Courier*, March 20, 1935.

71. *Ibid.*, April 14, 1936.

72. *Ibid.*, April 7, 1936.

73. *Ibid.*, May 24, 1936.

74. *Ibid.*, April 30, 1940.

Rollo Wilson; "W. G. N. Broadcasts" by William G. Mann; and exclusive features by W. E. B. DuBois, J. A. Rodgers, and Edgar T. Rouzeau.

The editorials fall under eight different headings: politics, social conditions, economic situations, education, religion, arts and sciences, sports, and miscellaneous topics. More editorials have been written concerning social conditions than anything else. It is quite probable that this topic is of the greatest importance in educating the Negro. The editorials indicate an attempt to arouse the reader's interest and to stimulate him to read further. Simplicity is of course, the chief characteristic of the diction found in the editorials of *The Pittsburgh Courier*. The words used are generally short, but they convey their meaning. The simple arrangement of the sentences makes reading them easy. A comparison of the best Negro journalism with the journalism of the best white papers reveals that the Negro newspapers do not show up unfavorably with the white ones.

Formerly Negro newspapers were ridiculed by both whites and Negroes. Lack of skill, equipment, and advertising revenue made it impossible for the Negro newspaper to measure up to the high standards of the American press. Today most of our important Negro newspapers are large business organizations, hiring in some instances, scores of trained men and women in editorial, mechanical, and circulation department work. Although at one time they covered the news of their respective communities inadequately,

today no event of importance in the Negro world goes unrecorded. Negro newspapers have correspondents in every city of importance here and abroad. News pours in from trained correspondents by letter and cable into Negro newspaper offices from the West Indies, Panama, Central America, Canada, England, Europe, and from all parts of Africa.

A war is held in Ethiopia, an anniversary is celebrated in the West Indies, an uprising takes place in South Africa, a Negro singer thrills audiences in Rio de Janeiro or Copenhagen, and a complete report appears the following week in the Negro press. Often Negro journals get the news before our leading white journals. The Pittsburgh Courier in 1936 offers proof of this:

R. W. Ferguson, war correspondent of The Pittsburgh Courier, scored a brilliant journalistic victory over the small army of American reporters who invaded France at the outbreak of hostilities, when three weeks ago (October 7, 1936), he flashed word that France was mobilizing a colonial military machine of two million black soldiers and five hundred thousand black laborers. His dispatch from Paris was dated October 12th...a practically identical account was wired to the New York Times on October 17th, nearly a week later by their white reporters.<sup>75</sup>

Comparison of the two versions---

New York Times: In a recent survey the Minister George Mendel, Minister of Colonies, estimated that the French colonies, including Algeria, Morocco, Tunis, etc., could furnish 2,000,000 troops and 500,000 workers.

Ferguson, The Pittsburgh Courier:

France is actively mobilizing two million black troops for service on the western front against Hitler's greyedard hordes as well as for the defense of her far flung Empire. In addition, 500,000 native workers are being called to the colors to share with French citizens in the burden placed on the civilian population at home and abroad by the French war machine.

New York Times:

For more than two years now, Monsieur Mendel has been doing his utmost to organize colonial assistance.

Ferguson, The Pittsburgh Courier:

The creation of the new Colonial ser machine is a definite Empire-wide policy conceived by Minister of Colonies, George Mendel, in April, 1936, and later approved by the French government and the military high command.

New York Times:

Completing a series of measures designed to give French colonial population a greater share in the management of their affairs, Mendel issued a decree (October 16th) increasing the number of voters in Madagascar who will name their colonial delegates.

Ferguson, The Pittsburgh Courier:

Predicted, October 11th. One result of the new army...is the creation of a large officer class...more leaders among the natives which may lead to the extension of political autonomy.

New York Times:

Mendel declares...colonies are doing military service...and making important contributions to the defense of Empire. Colonial troops are already under fire.

Ferguson, The Pittsburgh Courier:

Whites and blacks are fighting side by side...What effect it will have on future political and economic conditions of blacks under the tri-color? ...it does put the Mother Country heavily in debt to them...

Additional scoops of The Pittsburgh Courier include: the incident when within less than twenty-four hours after Premier Daladier received the vote of confidence of the French Chamber of Deputies, Ferguson had cabled the news directly to The Pittsburgh Courier office. Forty-eight hours later the New York Times informed its readers of the vote of confidence of Premier Daladier.<sup>76</sup>

The Pittsburgh Courier makes no boast that it maintains correspondents in every city in the world, but it does boast that it maintains qualified reporters in every city wherever a Negro is concerned. Events occurring throughout the world, because they are important to Negroes, are recorded in The Pittsburgh Courier office a few hours after they happen. Leading white newspapers have superior facilities for obtaining news, but they cannot cope with Negro journals covering Negro news unless they have Negro reporters.

Great corporations that at one time disdained to buy space in Negro newspapers, are now willing and eager to reach the vast market touched by the Negro press.<sup>77</sup> In one hundred and ten years, the Negro press has grown from a four-page anti-slavery pamphlet to great newspapers that wield a tremendous influence in spiritually uniting the Negro people and in informing them about what is going on the world about them.

76. The Pittsburgh Courier, Dec. 9, 1936.

77. Ibid., Apr. 14, 1936.

75. The Pittsburgh Courier, Oct. 26, 1936.



Since 1885, The Pittsburgh Courier has shown a consistent circulation growth. It had the largest circulation of any Negro publication in the world or in the history of the world by 1933.<sup>78</sup> People of all races throughout the world buy and read The Pittsburgh Courier. Comparison with other Negro journals reveals:<sup>79</sup>

<u>The Pittsburgh Courier</u>	Pittsburgh, Pa.	147,847
<u>Afro-American</u>	Baltimore, Md.	78,180
<u>Chicago Defender</u>	Chicago, Ill.	46,000
<u>American News</u>	New York, N. Y.	38,735
<u>Norfolk Journal and Guide</u>	Norfolk, Va.	38,087
<u>The Call</u>	Kansas City, Kan.	19,748
<u>The Tribune</u>	Philadelphia, Pa.	14,888

The coverage of The Pittsburgh Courier for America can clearly be seen in 1934:<sup>80</sup>

The Olympics	E. L. Vann (In Germany)
Tennis Tournament	C. L. Washington, Wilberforce, Ohio
Louis-Sherkey Fight	William G. Bunn, Yankee Stadium, New York
Elas Convention	Edgar T. Rousseau, Brooklyn, New York
East-West Game	Chester L. Washington and William G. Bunn, Chicago, Illinois
West Indian News Column	F. E. Trotman of Jamaica Gleaner and C. L. Harrington of Trinidad Guardian

78. The Pittsburgh Courier, July 9, 1938.

79. Ibid., Jan. 9, 1936.

80. Ibid., Sept. 18, 1934.

When the strike fever gripped the white daily newspapers in Pittsburgh in 1937, The Pittsburgh Courier which was not affected by the strike, issued emergency editions to serve the citizens and merchants as long as the emergency lasted. They did this at the usual daily paper price of three cents in order to be of service. The regular price of The Pittsburgh Courier was ten cents, but it was dropped to accommodate the citizens of Pittsburgh.<sup>81</sup>

Looking over the institutions that have served the interest of colored Americans, I would classify the "Big Four" as the Home, School, Church, and Press. It must be admitted that the Negro press has rendered an invaluable service in calling attention to the achievements of the race and waging ceaseless warfare against such injustices as lynching and discrimination. The Pittsburgh Courier has given thousands of columns of space to the pleas of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Y. M. C. A., and many other Negro organizations for the betterment of the race.

Editorials and columns written by black men and women yield nothing in brilliance to the foremost commentators in the white world, and are a regular feature of many Negro newspapers. Read by no less than two million Negroes weekly throughout the world, the Negro press has developed into the greatest educational force in the Negro world. This

81. The Pittsburgh Courier, June 30, 1937.

progress has been almost entirely due to the faith of the Negro public, which supported the Negro press from infancy to adulthood and is now repaid with an incomparable service whose tremendous significance cannot be overestimated.

The Pittsburgh Courier is just another example of the ability of colored people to measure up to the highest standards of living in any field, and of their growing power in world affairs. At one time, there were few Negro homes that purchased a Negro newspaper. They felt they did not need one. Today, even in the most remote sections of the country, there are few Negro homes where some Negro newspaper cannot be found.

## III

## Journalistic Crusades

As The Pittsburgh Courier increased in circulation and influence, N. E. Vann made of it an instrument of service and education addressed to whites and blacks. This service through crusades for the improvement of his less fortunate compatriots was great in itself, but it also reacted to his benefit because the vigor of his crusades further increased the circulation of the paper and the prestige of his race and himself. Within recent years, he used The Pittsburgh Courier to initiate many programs of service and education designed to give more body to the conception of the American Negro as a human being and a citizen. These crusades were natural because everything in his life pointed towards the struggle that he was to make through his newspaper for the benefit of his race. The Pittsburgh Courier offered him this opportunity to set forth his ideals. In the Negroes' struggle for equal rights in Pennsylvania, he remembered his own personal experiences. Support of the Ethiopian War was one of blood unity and racial sympathy. The many benefits and encouragements he received from racial teachers taught him the value of the Negro teacher for Negro children in their early training. His low economic status during his early life reminded him to encourage Negroes to improve their economic standing and the exclusion of Negroes from the branches of the United States military service, except

that of laborers, revealed to him only too plainly the harmful effects. All these were an outgrowth of his experiences, and, as the editor and owner of The Pittsburgh Courier, Vann sought to eliminate these injustices and to increase the Negroes' aspiration to improve themselves.

## Giving the Negro Equal Rights in Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania Negroes' efforts to secure an Equal Rights measure began in 1914. A short history of the struggle follows. The first Equal Rights Bill was introduced by A. C. Stein. It was passed by the House and then was sent on to the Senate. The Senate Committee approved the bill but it was killed in the Senate. At the death of this first Equal Rights Bill, the fight had only begun. In 1915, the Negro local civic organizations prepared a bill to be presented before the legislature at Harrisburg, asking that the present so-called Civil Rights Act be amended so as to make it a civil rights act in the real sense of the law. Representative A. C. Stein, of the First Legislative District promised to support the bill. Editor Vann stated:

We are reminded that in the last Civil Rights Bill, Representative Stein claimed he was deprived of his voting for the Bill by virtue of his being in another committee meeting. But now Stein can engineer the Bill throughout the Session and he will not be caught in another committee meeting. He cannot force anyone to vote for the Bill; but he can inform us of the forces that organized against its passage. Some of the forces that defeated the previous bill are members of the present assembly and must be watched.<sup>1</sup>

1. The Pittsburgh Courier, Jan 29, 1915.

True to his personal promises, Representative Gary introduced the bill. Among other things, the act forbade discrimination in public conveyances, amusements, theatres, hotels, etc. The Pittsburgh Courier reminded the Negroes of Pennsylvania that this matter could not be accomplished by one man. "Mr. Gary is a capable and willing worker, but he must have state-wide support."<sup>2</sup> The Pittsburgh Courier tried to keep the public informed as to the progress of the bill in the House and it also solicited the aid of Negro churches.<sup>3</sup> April 14th was set for the final reading and vote on the bill. At ten o'clock, Monday morning, the 12th, and Tuesday, the 13th, Vann and his committee canvassed the entire House before the vote came up and received eighty-three pledges to vote for the bill. "The Senate," quoted Vann, "can be relied upon to pass the Bill, if Senators Crow, McNichol, and Vane stand by their pledges already made. The governor's utterances of fair play indicate he will sign our Bill. His nephew, who is a member of the House, signed our petition."<sup>4</sup>

Thus, as predicted, the bill passed the House and went into the hands of the Judiciary Special Committee. Senators Crow, McNichol, and Thompson, all members of the Committee, assured the Vann delegation of its passage. Senator Penrose assured The Pittsburgh Courier by special letter that

2. The Pittsburgh Courier, Apr. 2, 1915.

3. Ibid., Apr. 9, 1915.

4. Ibid., Apr. 2, 1915.

he was highly in favor of the bill.<sup>5</sup> The bill passed the Senate Committee and went in the Senate.

Now the work began to turn. Mr. Stein was charged with having gone to the Senate leaders, after the Equal Rights Bill had passed the House, and soliciting opposition to the very bill he sponsored through Mr. Gary. He may be able to refute this charge, but he must overcome the words of men very prominent in the Senate and other prominent in public life.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the Equal Rights Bill received another knock-out blow in the Senate.

After he returned from Harrisburg where he had been attending the legislature with others trying to get the bill passed, Vann contracted a cold which later developed into pneumonia. However, after eleven weeks of continued illness, he recovered.<sup>7</sup>

Representative J. C. Agnew was the father of the third Equal Rights Bill, introduced in 1921. The bill passed the House and entered the Senate Committee.<sup>8</sup> The true story of its defeat in the Senate Committee cannot be written; however, the part the Negro played in urging its passage can be told.

5. *The Pittsburgh Courier*, Apr. 28, 1916.

6. *Ibid.*, Dec. 10, 1915.

7. Mrs. E. L. Vann to the writer, May 31, 1941.

8. *The Pittsburgh Courier*, Apr. 19, 1921.

Hundreds of Negroes from all walks of life and from all sections of the state gathered in the Senate caucus room in the capital at Harrisburg for the public hearings before the Judiciary Committee of the House on the Civil Rights Bill. After a number of forceful, eloquent speeches in favor of the bill--there being none against it--the Committee retired and shortly afterwards, the concourse of Negro people, some of whom had traveled hundreds of miles to influence its passage, were astounded to learn that the Judiciary Committee had voted to table the bill. This news was like a slap in the face to the Negroes of Pennsylvania from the Republican party.<sup>9</sup> Attorney Vann, chairman of the Negro delegation said in part to the Judiciary Committee:<sup>10</sup>

I share the embarrassment of some members of the members of the House in having to come before you so often for a civil rights bill. Your embarrassment arises from the fact that you have not aroused yourself to inform yourselves about your Negro fellow citizen nor allowed yourself to be aroused.

Now there are three reasons why you should report this Bill favorably: First, by the treatment you accord the Negro, you are challenging the right of God to create people of different colors. It is broadly a humanitarian one. Second, an economic reason; you expect us to progress and you ought to make provision for our travel, accommodations, and comfort while endeavoring to rise in the transaction of that business. Third, a political reason; we have reached the point where it was becoming more and more advisable to break away from different factions in Pennsylvania politics because the Negro is not given any consideration whatever.

9. *The Pittsburgh Courier*, Apr. 19, 1921.

10. *Ibid.*

Thus the bill was killed in the Judiciary Committee by a vote of eight to six.<sup>11</sup> The death of the bill did not crush the Negroes of Pennsylvania. One can recall that John Brown did not bring about the abolition of slavery by his efforts alone, nor will the Negroes of Pennsylvania get their rights by their first, second, or third effort, but they will get them.<sup>12</sup>

The defeat of the Bill put new life into the Negroes of Pennsylvania. A campaign to create sentiment of the bill was launched. Thus the state organization of Negro voters grew directly out of the fight for passage of the Civil Rights Bill. Attorney Vann was nominated chairman of the organization and Mrs. Ruth Bennett, secretary.

On June 11, 1935, Governor George Earle signed Act Number 132 of the Pennsylvania legislature prohibiting under penalty discrimination in any place of public accommodation. The penalties ranged from \$100 to \$500 and imprisonment of from thirty to sixty days.<sup>13</sup>

Now just how did the law get on the books? This same kind of bill had been offered at Harrisburg for almost a quarter of a century, only to be laid aside by the Republicans who sailed at the Negro and told him of Lincoln.<sup>14</sup>

11. *The Pittsburgh Courier*, Apr. 19, 1921.

12. *Ibid.*, Apr. 28, 1921.

13. *Ibid.*, June 15, 1935.

14. *Ibid.*, Apr. 19, 1921.

Thus the bill was killed in the Judiciary Committee by a vote of eight to six.<sup>11</sup> The death of the bill did not crush the Negroes of Pennsylvania. One can recall that John Brown did not bring about the abolition of slavery by his efforts alone, nor will the Negroes of Pennsylvania get their rights by their first, second, or third effort, but they will get them.<sup>12</sup>

The defeat of the bill put new life into the Negroes of Pennsylvania. A campaign to create sentiment of the bill was launched. Thus the state organization of Negro voters grew directly out of the fight for passage of the Civil Rights Bill. Attorney Vann was nominated chairman of the organization and Mrs. Ruth Bennett, secretary.

On June 11, 1885, Governor George Earle signed Act Number 188 of the Pennsylvania legislature prohibiting under penalty discrimination in any place of public accommodation. The penalties ranged from \$100 to \$500 and imprisonment of from thirty to sixty days.<sup>13</sup>

How just how did the law get on the books? This same kind of bill had been offered at Harrisburg for almost a quarter of a century, only to be laid aside by the Republicans who sailed at the Negro and told him of Lincoln.<sup>14</sup>

11. *The Pittsburg Courier*, Apr. 19, 1881.

12. *Ibid.*, Apr. 26, 1881.

13. *Ibid.*, June 15, 1885.

14. *Ibid.*, Apr. 19, 1881.

Everything has its limit and Negroes grew tired of the Republican hypocrisy. Vann backed the Equal Rights Bill with no illusions. Although Vann was once as traditionally Republican as the rest of Pennsylvania's huge colored vote, he switched over to Roosevelt in 1902, and was the leader in a colored revolt that by 1934 swept most of the state's Negroes into the Democratic line-up.<sup>15</sup>

The Republicans have been trying for two years to think up a scheme to get the Negro vote back to the Grand Old Party. Hence, the idea to have the new Civil Rights Bill--not social equality--introduced into the House by a Negro Republican, hoping to accomplish this aim. Thus, Robert R. Reynolds introduced the new Act.<sup>16</sup> The Democratic House passed the bill. The Senate was controlled by the Republicans. Here the Republicans hatched up the idea that it would be a remarkable political stratagem to pass the bill and lay it on the desk of a Democratic governor as the last word in political embarrassment. They just knew the governor would not sign the d---d thing. Well, the Democrats had a few politically alert men too--the governor signed the bill and passed the buck right back to the Republicans. Further proof of this plot was that within a few hours after the bill was signed, the Republicans voted to recall the bill from the governor's desk--but it was too late.<sup>17</sup>

15. *Bulletin Index*, Sept 12, 1935.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *The Pittsburg Courier*, Aug. 31, 1935.

In a letter to R. L. Vann, dated June 12, 1885, Governor George C. Earle wrote:<sup>18</sup>

Dear Bob:

Many thanks for your telegram commending my signature of the Equal Rights Bill. There was never any doubt in my mind as to the stand I should take on it.

With very personal regards, I am

Sincerely yours,

(signed) Governor G. Earle

Thus the Equal Rights Bill narrowly escaped an "abortion." Final passage was due to the fact that for the first time in nearly fifty years, Pennsylvania had two active political parties. Formerly it was solidly Republican and the Negroes steadfastly Republican. The revolt of Negro voters in 1902, led by R. L. Vann, into the Democratic ranks turned the tide of political action. The margin of strength between the two parties was so small that by the election of 1934, the Negro vote was the deciding factor.

Forging a Bond of Unity Among the Negro  
People of the World

When Italy invaded Ethiopia, in October, 1935, Vann immediately recognized the fundamental interest of the American Negro in that struggle. Ethiopia was seven thousand miles away, but the Ethiopians were making a fight against the aggression of Italy. She was making the same

18. Governor George Earle to R. L. Vann, June 12, 1885.

fight against the same forces which impede the progress of the American Negro. Vann believed the black people should be a unit in recognizing and opposing the common foe.

He therefore became the first American Negro publisher to make provisions to serve the extended interest of American Negroes in the ordeals suffered by their kin in distant lands. He engaged the first accredited war correspondent ever to represent an American Negro newspaper, sent him to Ethiopia, and kept him there until the war ended.

For coverage on these stories most of the impoverished Negro press depended on occasional white correspondents' stories. War stories had to be taken from the richer white press, rewritten, and gracefully tinted with pro-Ethiopian color for Afro-American consumption. J. A. Rogers represented The Pittsburgh Courier as its correspondent in Addis Ababa.<sup>19</sup>

Rogers, tall, scholarly, and dignified, was born in Jamaica in 1887. He came to the United States in 1906 and got a job portering for the Pullman Company. In his spare time he wrote "From Superman to man"--conversations between an educated porter and a United States senator--in which he tried to solve the Negro's race problem. Largely on the strength of this, he landed his first and many succeeding newspaper jobs. Since then he has contributed to many Negro newspapers of the country. Funds derived from his free-lance writings enabled him to spend eight years in the Vatican Library, Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris and

19. Mrs. Vann to the writer, May 15, 1941.

other European libraries and art galleries gathering information for his book, "World's Greatest Men and Women of African Descent." He claims to have ferreted out Negro blood in Alessandro de Medici, Beethoven, John VI of Portugal, Moulay Ismail (The Bloodthirsty), 17th Century Sultan of Morocco, and many others.<sup>20</sup>

Rogers compiled much of this information in a Negro press version of Ripley's "Believe it or Not," which he called "Your History" which appeared in The Pittsburgh Courier. In 1936, he attended Haile Selassie's coronation.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, when the war came along, The Pittsburgh Courier naturally thought of Rogers. He was given a passage to France and Addis Ababa. Rogers renewed his acquaintance with the Emperor, who was conscious of the value of favorable publicity among all the American Negroes.<sup>22</sup> In July, 1935, The Pittsburgh Courier sent the following wire to Emperor Selassie:<sup>23</sup>

His Excellency  
Haile Selassie  
Emperor of Abyssinia  
Addis Ababa, Abyssinia  
July 5, 1935

Many Negroes desire to volunteer service for Army.  
What is Ethiopia's attitude?

(signed) The Pittsburgh Courier

20. The Pittsburgh Courier, July 6, 1935.

21. Ibid.

22. Mass Week, May 2, 1936, p. 25.

23. The Pittsburgh Courier, July 13, 1935.

The Emperor's reply read:

Pittsburgh Courier  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania  
2:30 p.m., July 6, 1935

Following your telegram let us know your conditions and will accept with pleasure.

(signed) Haile Selassie

Negroes in America began to flock to recruiting stations throughout the country. Chicago enrolled eight thousand; Detroit, five thousand; Kansas City, two thousand; Philadelphia, fifteen hundred; and Pittsburgh, four hundred, all in the first few weeks after the Emperor's announcement for volunteers. Thousands of letters poured into The Pittsburgh Courier office.<sup>24</sup> However, the bottom dropped out of Vann's plans for aiding Ethiopia when the State Department uncovered a law of 1918 which made it illegal for United States citizens to recruit men to fight against foreign countries who are not at war with the United States under a penalty of a one thousand dollar fine and imprisonment for a maximum of three years.<sup>25</sup>

The Pittsburgh Courier front-paged the cables of J. A. Rogers under such headlines as: "Hint Plot to Kill Selassie"; "Ring of Ethiopian Steel Surrounds Italian Army"; "Italian Soldiers Baited"; and so forth. Rogers filed an average of three hundred weekly wireless words--at fifty-three cents per word. He also kept the mail filled with features such as: "Story of a Ruler Who Tried to Free Africa";<sup>26</sup> "Haile

24. The Pittsburgh Courier, July 27, 1935.

25. Ibid., Jan. 4, 1936.

26. Ibid.

Selassie's Message to Negroes of the World";<sup>27</sup> "Mahatma Gandhi Pledges Aid of 350,000,000 People";<sup>28</sup> "Japan Aids Ethiopia";<sup>29</sup> "Japan Arming Ethiopia"<sup>30</sup> and "History of Ethiopia."<sup>31</sup>

In February the correspondent announced Haile Selassie would send exclusive messages to Negroes of the world through the columns of The Pittsburgh Courier. Rogers's interview was the only personal interview granted any war correspondent.<sup>32</sup>

The war continued and in April, 1936, at a conference between John H. Shaw, Ethiopian Consul General in the United States and R. L. Vann and his staff, The Pittsburgh Courier was authorized to collect funds for Ethiopia. Mr. Shaw announced that the Emperor recognized the integrity and deep-seated interest of The Pittsburgh Courier and its readers. His Majesty, at the time of his interview with J. A. Rogers evinced his interest in America and American Negroes; since that time, he has observed the work of The Pittsburgh Courier in this country.<sup>33</sup> Thus, The Pittsburgh Courier launched an "Aid to Ethiopia" campaign.

27. The Pittsburgh Courier, Feb. 29, 1936.

28. Ibid., Aug. 3, 1936.

29. Ibid., Aug. 10, 1936.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid., Feb. 8, 1936.

32. Ibid., Feb. 15, 1936.

33. Ibid., Apr. 15, 1936.

The money received was held in trust until either the Emperor or his authorized representative, John H. Shaw, made a request for it.<sup>34</sup>

When J. A. Rogers was captured by the Italians, and later forced to flee the country, Vann engaged Reno Walter Ferguson, a Negro-trained correspondent to go to post-war Ethiopia and London to interview the Emperor.<sup>35</sup> In November, 1936, Haile Selassie entrusted P. L. Prattis, a member of The Pittsburgh Courier staff in London covering news, with a gift of a ring made of pure Ethiopian gold to present to Vann in recognition of His Majesty's appreciation of the service of The Pittsburgh Courier to the cause of Ethiopia. Mr. Prattis was admitted to the presence of the Emperor, Saturday at noon and Sunday before noon. Over-night he was the guest of the Emperor in the city of Bath. Emperor Selassie also expressed his willingness to aid Walter Ferguson, The Pittsburgh Courier's correspondent, to obtain first-hand official news.<sup>36</sup>

For three years The Pittsburgh Courier kept a quiet watch on the little Empire of Abyssinia, and in June, 1940, obtained a pledge from Great Britain to restore Ethiopia.<sup>37</sup>

34. The Pittsburgh Courier, June 6, 1936.

35. Ibid., Nov. 7, 1937.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid., June 23, 1940.

A letter to the Minister of Information, London, England, reads:

Hon. Arthur Duff Cooper  
Minister of Information, London, England

All American opinion is concentrated upon immediate assistance of all kinds to the Allies. This includes all groups of citizens. Prime Minister Churchill in his world wide broadcast made reference that it is the intention of England ultimately to restore all of the invaded states. For the purpose of maintaining consolidated public opinion here please ascertain whether or not it was not the intention of Mr. Churchill to include Ethiopia with other invaded states mentioned in his broadcast.

(signed) R. L. Vann, Editor  
The Pittsburgh Courier

Mr. Cooper's reply reads:

London, England  
June 25, 1940

R. L. Vann, Editor  
Pittsburgh Courier  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Replying on June 18th in Parliament to a member who asked whether the British government any longer felt itself bound to recognize Italian rights in connection with Ethiopia, Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs quote: "In view of Italy's unprovoked entry into the war against this country, His Majesty's Government hold themselves entitled to reserve full liberty of action in respect of any undertakings given by them in the past to the Italian government concerning the Mediterranean, North and East Africa, and Middle Eastern areas. Unquote-- This statement covers Ethiopia's fight for freedom already proceeding. See in this connection press reports on British Military and Air Action against Italian Garrisons.

(signed) Arthur Duff Cooper  
Ministry of Information  
London, England

Editor Vann did not live to see the successful conclusion of this long and bitter struggle. Today Emperor Selassie is leading his troops in revolt against Italy and victory is within his grasp.

#### Fight for Negro Teachers in Pittsburgh

Four years after the founding of The Pittsburgh Courier,

E. L. Vann launched a campaign for Negro teachers in Pittsburgh. He compared the great city of Pittsburgh to Cleveland, Ohio. He quotes:<sup>38</sup>

We must look to the list of colored teachers recently given out in Cleveland. This, together with the comment upon their efficiency, reminds us all too keenly that we are too satisfied here in Pittsburgh for our own good and for the good of our future. That Cleveland should find employment for thirty Negro school teachers in the city schools argues emphatically that there is a better civic order in the Forest City than we enjoy here. The effort and money employed in securing the representation the Negroes enjoy in Cleveland must be employed here before we may expect to see our educated children administering to their sisters and brothers in our public schools.

How can we afford to forego the right of our representation in the Pittsburgh schools. What we need is a concerted effort in the proper direction, with the least possible suspicion that someone wants separate schools. We are satisfied with the schools, our objection is to the present all-white personnel of the teachers.

Since we furnish a definite percentage of the attendance, a substantial percentage of the taxation paid in districts where our population is thickest, to demand a corresponding representation on the teacher's roster is nothing but common justice and equity. With Cleveland as an example, we are furnished a ready precedent.

38. The Pittsburgh Courier, July 10, 1914.

Our mission is good, our cause right, and there should be many more things more difficult than providing ourselves with a Negro teacher here and there throughout the city where our numerical strength warrants it.

At a special meeting of the Board of Education in 1915, Mr. Charles Reisfar, Jr., Director of Attendance, made a most instructive and exhaustive report. He informed R. L. Vann that there are 109,578 children between the ages of six and sixteen years, in attendance in the Pittsburgh schools. Of this throng, there are 4,063 Negro children drinking at the same fountain of knowledge.<sup>39</sup> With such information, The Pittsburgh Courier launched its program under Vann's supervision.

Progress in the drive for Negro teachers in Pittsburgh was hindered by two opposing schools of thought. One school favored separate schools for Negroes with an all-Negro faculty. The other school of thought favored mixed schools and mixed faculties.

It may be recalled that this question at one time afforded grounds for debate that lasted for almost a quarter of a century. At the time to which the writer refers, the general sentiment was against such an idea, and mixed schools were established for all times. But now that a few years have passed, there are some who would oppose mixed schools with as much zeal as they once favored them.

39. The Pittsburgh Courier, July 10, 1914.

Journalist Vann revealed his attitude on the situation.

He said:<sup>40</sup>

Of course no one would advocate that the Negro student be confined to just what knowledge the Negro is at present able to impart. Such a limitation would close the doors of research, make impossible the attainment of any distinction in the high sciences; destroy forever the hope of another DuBois, George Washington Carver, Kelly Miller, or Emmett J. Scott. What we would advocate is Negro instructors during the early adolescent state, or more technically, until the child acquires the state of mind to think with some intelligence. Many will argue that it is during this plastic period of the child's life that he needs the best teachers. I heartily agree and go further to say that the Negro is the best possible teacher for that age. It must be remembered that it is the kindergarten and elementary school days that have the most telling effect upon the child's life. It is then that the child is most susceptible to external influences. If ever his ideals of himself and his possibilities, of his home and its value, of his associations, of his state, his country, his God--if ever these ideals are to be formed, it is unmistakably during his early training. It is very necessary, then, that his teacher have sympathy, patience, interest and love. The teacher that can best meet these is the Negro because his sympathy, patience, interest, and love for his race are qualities innate and natural, and do not have to be acquired; but certainly, it must be more mechanical or it is no longer true that 'blood is thicker than water.'

...The conscientious white teacher--and there are many--begins teaching the two children on the assumption that the environment and observations of the two are the same. His illustrations are taken from his own life, which is perfectly natural.

I have tried to show some of the advantages of the Negro teacher over the white in the Negro child's early training, but not by charging the latter with either indifference or deficiency. If Negroes could take charge of the training of their youth, would they not have a better control over the life of their people and at the same time make their possibilities better?

40. R. L. Vann, "Negro Teachers Better Than White for Negro Children" A short typewritten statement of his opinion in the possession of Mrs. R. L. Vann of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

This statement left no doubt that Vann favored Negro teachers for the early training of the youth and mixed teachers for the junior and senior high school grades. In a letter he stated, "We need mixed schools and mixed teachers. I think segregation in schools is bad for both races. The difficulty now between the two races is the meagre knowledge they have of each other."<sup>41</sup>

Finally in 1935, climaxing the commendable efforts of Thomas M. Harrison, Assistant Attorney General, Robert L. Vann, and others, announcement was made by Dr. S. E. Weber, Associate Personnel Superintendent that he was already interviewing colored applicants for teaching positions in the Pittsburgh Public School System. Mr. Weber and other authorities had to be convinced that colored citizens of Pittsburgh wanted Negro teachers and that there were Negro teachers properly qualified. This is the first time since the Pittsburgh Courier's first campaign in 1914 that they were interviewed.<sup>42</sup>

In February, Pittsburgh's Negroes cherished dreams for Negro teachers came closer to realization when the Board of Public Education announced they had received requests for application from thirty-five persons.<sup>43</sup> The Pittsburgh Courier published excerpts of the general requirements

41. R. L. Vann to Dorothy N. Goldstein, Jan. 16, 1939.

42. The Pittsburgh Courier, Jan. 19, 1939.

43. Ibid., Feb. 9, 1935.

for teachers in Pittsburgh in the campaign for colored teachers. Finally in March, the Board of Public Education announced they had nine Negroes who were qualified to take the teaching examinations.<sup>44</sup>

All of this was of no avail, but because of the pressure exerted by Editor Vann and Mr. Homer S. Brown and others, a legislative investigation was held in the City Council Chambers. In the course of his testimony, Dr. Graham, Superintendent of Schools, supplied the information that Lawrence Peeler, a colored music teacher would be appointed in September.<sup>45</sup>

Again in 1937, Homer S. Brown introduced a resolution in the state Legislature calling for inquiry into alleged racial discrimination in the selection of teachers for Pittsburgh Public Schools.<sup>46</sup> His resolution was passed and all members of the Board of Public Education were subpoenaed to appear before a legislative committee.<sup>47</sup> Members of the legislative committee to investigate Mr. Brown's resolution were:<sup>48</sup> George J. Sarraz, Al Tronzo, L. K. Markins, Chairman Homer S. Brown, and Elmer J. Holland. Their report<sup>49</sup> revealed that Pittsburgh's

44. The Pittsburgh Courier, March 9, 1935.

45. Ibid., May 5, 1935.

46. Ibid., Apr. 3, 1937.

47. Ibid., May 1, 1937.

48. Ibid., May 1, 1937.

49. Ibid., June 8, 1937.

"buck-passing" local school board was guilty of flagrant discrimination. The result of these activities was that today Pittsburgh does boast of a few Negro teachers. Thus as early as 1914, Vann saw the issue and was alert to the service which The Pittsburgh Courier might render in bringing about sentiment among the Negroes in Pittsburgh for colored teachers. The results speak for themselves.

Fighting for Equality in the Army, Navy  
and Air Corps

The fight for equality in the Army and Navy for Negroes was launched by Vann as early as 1914. He said:<sup>50</sup>

To the astonishment of all intelligent citizens, the enlistment of Negro soldiers was suspended some time ago by the War Department at Washington. For what reason we leave to the white man and his peculiar nature to determine. That the Negro has always been loyal, efficient, and unquestionably brave is accepted everywhere as conclusive. He has fought in every war in which America has participated since its colonization... Yet, with such a party with such a glowing record, the United States was fit to deny the Negro the right to enlist in the Army of his own country whose soil his labor has enriched.

...Just so long as this country lends itself to the disturbance of the adjustment of the races here, so long will there be just cause for the world wide criticisms, which is being circulated against this country for the discriminatory practices against the Negro. Yet, in the fact of the discrimination which faces the Negro, there still be plenty who enlist. For loyalty, under the lash, the black man has no equal.

50. The Pittsburgh Courier, Sept. 11, 1914.



"back-passing" local school board was guilty of flagrant discrimination. The result of these activities was that today Pittsburgh does boast of a few Negro teachers. Thus as early as 1914, Vann saw the issue and was alert to the service which The Pittsburgh Courier might render in bringing about sentiment among the Negroes in Pittsburgh for colored teachers. The results speak for themselves.

Fighting for Equality in the Army, Navy  
and Air Corps

The fight for equality in the Army and Navy for Negroes was resumed by Vann as early as 1914. He said:<sup>50</sup>

To the astonishment of all intelligent citizens, the enlistment of Negro soldiers was suspended some time ago by the War Department at Washington. For what reason we leave to the white man and his peculiar nature to discern. That the Negro has always been loyal, efficient, and unquestionably brave is accepted everywhere as conclusive. He has fought in every war in which America has participated since its colonization...Yet, with such a past; with such a glowing record, the United States sees fit to deny the Negro the right to enlist in the Army of his own country whose soil his labor has enriched.

...Just so long as this country lends itself to the disturbances of the adjustment of the races here, so long will there be just cause for the world wide criticism, which is being circulated against this country for the discriminatory practices against the Negro. Yet, in the face of the discrimination which faces the Negro, there will be plenty who enlist. For loyalty, under the lash, the black man has no equal.

50. The Pittsburgh Courier, Sept. 11, 1914.

Numerous editorials of this type were used to arouse Negro sentiment against the discriminatory practices accorded them in the United States Army and Navy. In 1917, The Pittsburgh Courier began to agitate for a Negro regiment.<sup>51</sup> Vann stated:<sup>52</sup>

The Courier wants a Negro regiment and will do all it can to bring it about, but demands that the regiment be officered by all race men. If we offer ourselves upon the altar of patriotism, we ought to have the privilege of saying by whom we shall be led to the altar. This may not be military usage, but it is common sense.

In April, 1917, President Wilson declared war on Germany. There was a general cry of dissatisfaction among Negroes through the Negro journals that they were not being called upon to enter the various branches of the service. The Pittsburgh Courier reminded the Negroes that if they protested together the time would come when an opportunity would be afforded them to equal and surpass the achievements of our forefathers. The prediction had come true. The establishment of a Negro division was ordered by the United States War Department and thirty-eight branches of skilled labor were opened to the Negro.<sup>53</sup> Throughout the entire war The Pittsburgh Courier launched an attack on the discriminatory practices used against the Negro and the policy of the War Department to make labor

51. The Pittsburgh Courier, Sept. 29, 1918.

52. Ibid., Aug. 11, 1916.

53. Ibid., Dec. 19, 1916.

battalions out of the Negro troops. So bitter was this attack that more than once it was rumored that the United States government was going to shut down this black dispatch clearing for equality for Negro soldiers.

The Pittsburgh Courier also petitioned the War Department to see the excellent opportunity and call to service the many Red Cross colored nurses who had stood waiting and watching for the chance to serve their country and their boys who had been called to drive back the Germans. Vann stated, "Our boys have been called. Now let us hear the call for our nurses."<sup>54</sup>

One can see that The Pittsburgh Courier's fight for equality in the Army and Navy for the Negro began before the World War. Ever since the end of the World War, The Pittsburgh Courier complained that there was a disposition in high official circles to change the status of the Negro combatant soldier to that of an insignificant menial or laborer. It published recurrent reports, that the practical status of the 24th and 25th Infantry Regiments and the 9th and 10th Cavalry had been changed. Negro soldiers, it was said, were being made the servants of white officers. The higher branches of military service were barred to them. In the Navy, they could only qualify as messmen--waiters, cooks, and stewards. They were completely barred by the Marine Corps and the Air Corps.

54. The Pittsburgh Courier, July 13, 1918.

In 1935, Vann supported a program to aid the Negro soldier in Pennsylvania. Representative G. B. Hart successfully piloted through the House of Representatives a bill which ordered organized and equipped two colored battalions of Infantry of the National Guard of Pennsylvania. The bill passed, 192 ayes to 2 nays. Mr. Hart was commanding officer of the last colored regiment of Pennsylvania Guardsmen prior to the Spanish War. A previous bill supported by The Pittsburgh Courier passed both Houses and was vetoed by Governor Pinchot.<sup>55</sup>

In April the Senate at Harrisburg unanimously passed the bill.<sup>56</sup> Governor Haris in June signed the Negro National Guard Bill. Units were to be established in eastern and western Pennsylvania with appropriations up to \$200,000.<sup>57</sup>

The year 1936 saw The Pittsburgh Courier publishing articles on the activities of Negroes in the field of aviation. In a letter to R. L. Vann, Lieutenant William J. Powell made the following statement:<sup>58</sup>

I am receiving letters daily from young Negroes from all parts of the United States, who, reading the Courier, learned the "Somewhere in America" a way is being made for Negroes to get aviation training. The argument advanced that Negroes aren't interested in aviation is wrong as letters show that they are barred and show their love of aviation.

55. The Pittsburgh Courier, March 26, 1935.

56. Ibid., Apr. 13, 1935.

57. Ibid., June 8, 1935.

58. Lieutenant W. J. Powell to R. L. Vann, Jan. 4, 1936.

Thus publicity given to aviation for the Negro by The Pittsburgh Courier has helped solve the problem of young Negroes who pondered on the brink of dissolution and revealed to them that they can enter the field of aviation.

On February 19, 1936, R. L. Vann called forceful attention to the discrimination in the land, air, and sea forces of the United States against the Negro, in an open letter to the President of the United States. This marked the firing of the first gun in the campaign.<sup>59</sup> The ten cardinal points in The Pittsburgh Courier's campaign for equality in the Army and Navy for Negroes are:<sup>60</sup>

1. We deserve jobs in the services (one tenth of population fought in all wars)
2. We pay for jobs in the services (taxes)
3. Our fight record should be rewarded
4. We seek the test to prove our merit
5. We need education just as whites
6. We seek the chance to shatter prejudice
7. Our loyalty is an American tradition
8. Americanism is a test of our fighting men
9. We want to glorify America before the world
10. We want to inspire future black America

Vann followed this action with thousands of letters to Senators, Congressmen, newspaper editors, college presidents,

59. The Pittsburgh Courier, Feb. 19, 1936.

60. Ibid., March 26, 1936.

and leaders of thought, white and black, in every field of activity in the United States. Through these letters and The Pittsburgh Courier, thousands of white people in high places learned for the first time of the Negro's actual status as a soldier and that Bunker Hill, San Juan, and Carrizal were being ignored by our War Department. "Should the Negro," he asked, "as a citizen and on the basis of his past record, be given equal opportunity in the Army and Navy?"<sup>61</sup>

In a letter to Colonel Arthur W. Little, dated February 25, 1936, Vann states:<sup>62</sup>

If the American government were a democracy in practice as well as in theory, then my fight for equality for the Negro in the armed forces of the government would not be necessary.... I admit these inequalities could be corrected by executive action. More than a year ago, President Roosevelt asked Mr. Vann not to press the fight for a creation of a Negro division in the Army and give him an opportunity to see what could be done. As yet nothing has been done. And in the meantime, Congress is authorizing an increase in the actual strength of the Army to 190,000 men...

Thus with no executive action taken to make provisions for the Negro in the Army, R. L. Vann began to line up his forces for the fight. In a letter to Senator Joseph L. Guffey, Vann wrote:<sup>63</sup>

There is a nation-wide drive on to have the present administration create a Negro division, such as the old 88th Division of the United States Army. Hon. Hamilton Fish is going to handle the thing in the House and I want you to pick me out a Senator to handle it in the Senate, because I am in this thing

61. The Pittsburgh Courier, March 26, 1936.

62. R. L. Vann to Colonel A. W. Little, Feb. 25, 1936.

63. R. L. Vann to Senator J. F. Guffey, March 7, 1936.

up to my neck. I have canvassed all the Southern editors and the majority of them favor a separate division with Negro officers, so you need not worry about the South.

Senator, this thing will have to be done because it is right...

In April, Vann made a public announcement that Congressman Fish of New York was going to try to get Congress to open the doors for black boys. Mr. Fish announced through the newspapers that he proposed to introduce a bill within a short time opening all branches of the armed forces of the United States to the Negro. America permits aliens to serve in all armed units so why not loyal Negroes. He said, "I do not see much progress being made for the colored race if fifty years ago one of their group could qualify and today a colored officer cannot qualify due to discrimination."<sup>64</sup>

On April 7, 1938, Congressman Hamilton Fish of New York conferred with Robert Vann on the provisions of the bill for Army and Navy equality which he introduced into the House of Representatives Tuesday. The bill called for the creation of a Negro division, for an improvement of the status of Negro enlisted men in the United States Navy, for an increase in the number of appointees to West Point and Annapolis and for the training of Negro officers in all services of both the Army and Navy.<sup>65</sup>

64. The Pittsburgh Courier, Apr. 2, 1938.

65. Ibid., Apr 9, 1938.

The bill also struck at the process of "separatizing" Negro soldiers which began in the Coolidge Administration. The bills were listed as H. R. 10064, H. R. 10065, and H. R. 10066 and were referred to the Military Affairs Committee.<sup>66</sup> Twenty six members composed the Committee, twelve are from Southern states, eighteen Democrats, seven Republicans, one from Hawaii and one Independent.

Congressman Fish in a letter to President Roosevelt asked him to support The Pittsburgh Courier Army Bills. He quotes:<sup>67</sup>

I am enclosing a copy of a Bill, H. R. 10065...I believe all colored people of America are united behind this proposal, based upon justice and fair dealing for them. I have likewise introduced several other bills, providing for equality of service for Negro soldiers and the provision of a Negro division in the Regular Army.

Your friend, R. L. Vann, who is a strong supporter of this bill, has already communicated with you...

In April 1938, R. L. Vann took the issue directly to President Roosevelt in Washington D. C. In the company of Senator Joseph Guffey of Pennsylvania, he had a conference with the President. At the conclusion of the conference he was in a position to state that the President stood unequivocally behind The Pittsburgh Courier campaign to accord recognition to the Negro soldier. Vann said, "President

66. The Pittsburgh Courier, Apr. 16, 1938.

67. Ibid.

Roosevelt told Senator Guffey and myself that he felt the formation of a Negro division would be the logical move. He further proposed that the present four Negro regiments be used to serve as the nucleus of a complete Negro division.<sup>68</sup> President Roosevelt was amazed to discover by reason of a survey conducted by The Pittsburgh Courier of the true status of black soldiers and of the vast amount of sentiment throughout the nation, North and South, which is in favor of simple justice for black citizens.<sup>69</sup> Mr. Roosevelt looked over the scores of pages of data supplied to him by The Pittsburgh Courier, original documents and letters which enabled him to grasp quickly and surely the entire picture.<sup>70</sup>

President Roosevelt's endorsement of The Pittsburgh Courier's Bill brought the fight almost to a successful conclusion. Again in October the President invited Vann to the White House. Vann laid before the President two propositions. The first was the Fara Bill and its relation to the Southern Negro. Together with it was the much discussed Negro division to be integrated into the National Defense Program. The President admitted that he hoped to have a Negro division included in the program of enlargement of the Army personnel. He defined the issue as just and pledged himself to explore the possibilities of improving the situation through executive order.<sup>71</sup>

68. The Pittsburgh Courier, Apr. 30, 1938.

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid., Oct. 6, 1938.

Roosevelt told Senator Guffey and myself that he felt the formation of a Negro division would be the logical move. He further proposed that the present four Negro regiments be used to serve as the nucleus of a complete Negro division.<sup>68</sup> President Roosevelt was amazed to discover by reason of a survey conducted by The Pittsburgh Courier of the true status of black soldiers and of the vast amount of sentiment throughout the nation, North and South, which is in favor of single justice for black citizens.<sup>69</sup> Mr. Roosevelt looked over the scores of pages of data supplied to him by The Pittsburgh Courier, original documents and letters which enabled him to grasp quickly and surely the entire picture.<sup>70</sup>

President Roosevelt's endorsement of The Pittsburgh Courier's Bill brought the fight almost to a successful conclusion. Again in October the President invited Vann to the White House. Vann laid before the President two propositions. The first was the Farn Bill and its relation to the Southern Negro. Together with it was the much discussed Negro division to be integrated into the National Defense Program. The President admitted that he hoped to have a Negro division included in the program of enlargement of the Army personnel. He defined the issue as just and pledged himself to explore the possibilities of improving the situation through executive order.<sup>71</sup>

68. The Pittsburgh Courier, Apr. 30, 1936.

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid., Oct. 6, 1938.

This determined and industrious prosecution for equality won widespread support among both races and was ably advanced by a national committee of Negro leaders, named by Editor Vann, with Dr. Emmett J. Scott as chairman. The drive was stimulated editorially, in news columns, and The Pittsburgh Courier wrote personally to every United States Senator and Representative, every college president and politician of prominence, every state governor and every newspaper in this country asking their support.

In February 1939, The Pittsburgh Courier published an open letter to the President demanding the end of discrimination in the armed forces of the country.<sup>72</sup>

The militant fight brought definite results when the Senate agreed to an amendment of Senator H. E. Schwartz to the Air Corps Expansion Bill, providing that at least one colored school shall be lent flying equipment for the training of colored pilots.<sup>73</sup> Regardless of the signing of the Aviation Bill by President Roosevelt, Vann still continued to fight.

By August, 1940, there was ample proof that progress had been made in the fight. There was specific provision in the War Department for additional Negro troops and the use of these troops in combat units. On June 22, the Adjutant General stated, "The War Department plans colored combat troops,"<sup>74</sup> and on July 20, he stated, "Enlistments of

72. The Pittsburgh Courier, Feb. 4, 1939.

73. Ibid., March 16, 1939.

74. Ibid., Aug. 3, 1940.

additional colored personnel will, undoubtedly, be authorized."<sup>75</sup>

Furthermore, the War Department, in response to the agitation which Vann forced through The Pittsburgh Courier was forced to make provisions in the expanded Army for the training of Negro officers and men in all branches of service. Announcements of these plans were published in The Pittsburgh Courier<sup>76</sup> and those who followed the fight will recall that the first shot was fired by The Pittsburgh Courier in an open letter to President Roosevelt, February 13, 1938. That was eight months before Munich and nineteen months before war in Europe broke out. It was over two years before peacetime conscription became, for the first time, a fact in the United States.

Vann was convinced that there would be a war. There were persistent and widespread signs that the status of the Negro as a soldier in this country was to be changed to a worker in the Army rather than a fighter. Vann knew that this could not happen without a fundamental change in the Negro's civilian status also taking place. Many others shared his fear. Thus he struck out against it. The result was that in two and one half years, people seen the factor of Negro participation in the National Defense become a national issue. The nation's press, white

75. The Pittsburgh Courier, Aug. 3, 1940.

76. Ibid., Aug. 10, 1940.

and black, recognized the cause and aided it. Many friends in both Houses of Congress were found. Racial organizations and individuals enlisted to carry on the fight with unremitting ardor.

Editor Vann could not have achieved such gain for the Negro alone but there can be little doubt that he led the fight. He effectively overcame the budding theory that Negroes should gradually be reduced to the status of laborers in the United States Army. From President Roosevelt on down, he received pledges to induct the Negro into the Army, Navy, and Air Corps. Thus within two years, he completely changed the attitude of blacks and whites in respect to the Negro's status in the defense forces of his country.

In conclusion, these preceding statements describe in part specific achievements of R. L. Vann in his service for the public cause. They do not, however, comprehend the prestige which has been won for his race through his determination to publish a powerful, intelligent, first-class newspaper. It is not difficult, therefore, to understand how important is the function of a modern journal. Vann made The Pittsburgh Courier the most powerful single agency in this country for Negroes and that power is due to its highly organized news-gathering sources and personnel. He made his impression upon men of broad vision and courage. Proof of this is the continued growth of the circulation of the paper since his death. No person has written such a complete economic, political, and social history of the Negro as

can be found written in the columns of The Pittsburgh Courier. Need one wonder why R. L. Vann is called the "Dean of Negro Journalism"?

#### IV

#### From Journalism to Politics

Vann's rise in national politics rested upon the weight he had in local and state politics. He obtained this tremendous political influence through The Pittsburgh Courier and his political astuteness. During a period a little over twenty years, Vann was associated with the chief political events in the history of this country. He served his race gallantly through his journalistic activities during the World War. After that time he became a prominent figure in local, state, and national politics. His first position of importance was that of Assistant City Solicitor of Pittsburgh, 1917-1921. He served as publicity director for Negro newspapers during the presidential campaign of Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover. In national conventions he participated as an alternate delegate-at-large from Pennsylvania at the C. O. P. convention in 1924 and has the distinction of being the first Negro delegate-at-large from Pennsylvania to the National Democratic convention in 1936. The Negro leader, Vann was also a member of the Advisory Council for the Virgin Islands; Chairman of an advisory board appointed by Secretary of Commerce, Daniel C. Roper, to study problems affecting the business and economic life of Negroes of the United States; a member of the Pennsylvania State Relief Committee; a member of the Chamber of Commerce of the city of Pittsburgh and numerous other boards.

Racial independence in politics was his creed. In pursuit of these policies he retained party loyalty only so long as that party was best serving the interest of his race. This was demonstrated when he left the Republican party in 1928 and encouraged his race to follow him. Again it was demonstrated in 1936 when within his own state he split with the corrupt Democratic leadership. In the 1940 presidential campaign he along with other Negro leaders saw that the Republican party would best serve the interest of his race and was attempting to lead his people back when he was overtaken by death.

Robert L. Vann entered local politics in 1910 when he was made secretary of the Allegheny County Protective League.<sup>1</sup> With regards to politics, Vann was a Negro supporter until he switched over to Babcock and campaigned for him when he was elected mayor of the city of Pittsburgh in 1917. Mayor Babcock appointed him as Assistant City Solicitor. Magee, together with Steven Stone, managed to prevent the councilmen from confirming Vann's appointment until March, 1918.<sup>2</sup> Vann worked in that office from 1918 to 1921.<sup>3</sup>

1. Vann, "Sketch of My Life"

2. Ira F. Lewis to the writer, May 4, 1941.

3. *Ibid.*

Vann's early political activities were local. In state politics he had little influence. The Republican party, however, awakened to the value of the Negro newspapers for political purposes in the year of 1920. Attorney Vann campaigned in that year for the election of Harding. He was the first Negro editor in the country, upon the death of President Harding, to run across his editorial page the slogan, "Calvin Coolidge for President, 1924."<sup>4</sup> In the campaign of that year, Vann was elected, in a state-wide election, as an alternate delegate-at-large to the National Republican convention held at Cleveland, Ohio, when Coolidge was nominated on the Republican ticket.<sup>5</sup> In July, William M. Butler, chairman of the Republican National Committee appointed editor Vann to handle publicity for all Negro newspapers and unite the Negro leaders behind Mr. Coolidge. Arthur W. Lynch, editor of the Philadelphia Public Journal, and Earl J. Murphy, of the Baltimore Afro-American, two powerful colored newspapers, and others represented strategic spheres of influence and it was Vann's job to prevent them from going over to the opposition.

Over 18,000 special copies of The Pittsburgh Courier advocating the election of Coolidge and the Republican party were distributed throughout West Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, and New Jersey to offset the Robert LaFollette

4. The Pittsburgh Courier, Jan. 17, 1924.

5. Frank Cohen to R. L. Vann, June 25, 1928.

and J. W. Davis support among Negroes.<sup>6</sup> This policy, aided by other Negro journals working in collaboration with The Pittsburgh Courier, turned the tide of Negro sentiment for Coolidge.

The coldness of Calvin Coolidge towards the Negro throughout his presidential career, especially his failure to say anything as the president to indicate an interest in the Negro and his problems was the chief cause for the unusually slow development of enthusiasm among Negroes for the Republican cause in the election of 1928. Editor Vann was again selected by the Republican National Chairman as Director of Publicity for the Colored Voters. A telegram to him from Frank Cohen reads: "Will place you in charge of Negro phase."<sup>7</sup>

The Republican political leaders looked forward as usual to the Negro vote. Vann came out with a statement that, "The Negroes will demonstrate old time loyalty to O. O. P."<sup>8</sup>

The most significant argument effectively used to offset the anti-Negro attitude under the Coolidge administration was to compare the two major parties. He states:<sup>9</sup>

6. R. L. Vann to Republican National Committee, Oct. 31, 1924.

7. Frank Cohen to R. L. Vann, June 25, 1928.

8. Washington Post, Sept. 30, 1928.

9. *Ibid.*, Sept 30, 1928.

At this stage of the campaign the Negro has investigated and failed to discover anything new or especially interesting to him in the Democratic Party. The idea, broadly disseminated, that Raskob and Al Smith would revolutionize the party in its attitude towards the Negro has been dispelled to such an extent that Negroes inclined to give ear to the Democratic broadcast have lost interest and are returning daily to the Republican fold. The Negro looks to the party that best serves his interest.

Even before the campaign was over it became evident that the Democratic nominee would be defeated and Hoover would be elected. Twelve years of indifference proved a costly liability for the Republican party. Vann was the leader of a political revolt that offset a tradition well over sixty years old. This revolt cost the Republican party its greatest asset; namely, the Negro vote. Just how editor Vann accomplished this can never be told, but fragments of the story can be pieced together.

Civics textbooks do not teach the value of the Negro vote. Practical politics teaches a different story of which no better example can be cited than the present. Instead of encouraging Negro support, the Republican party from 1920 to 1932 discouraged it. The Republican party under Harding deserted the Negro. Under Coolidge it was a lifeless, voiceless thing, and Vann listened to the empty promises to Negroes in the event of victory. He heard party leaders tell Negroes that the Republican party could win without them. In the Coolidge administration, an interview between Emmett J. Scott and the President on the so-called Negro question brought about nothing.

Coolidge sought to explain what had been done, calling attention particularly to the fifty million dollars worth of salaries which the colored people were drawing from the government. He, of course, did not mention that they held jobs as messengers, maids, laborers, etc., while the higher salaried jobs were exclusively for whites. Jobs once held by Negroes were discontinued, and Scott pointed out that out of twenty-five former presidential positions, the Negro now held but five.

Under the Hoover administration the Negro received the same type of empty promises. This definitely portrayed the low political status to which the Negro had fallen, and Vann was determined to change it. All efforts to establish a better relation between the Republican party and the Negro had failed. He recalled talking to James Farley in the campaign of 1928 about the hopes of building a better Democratic party. Experience in the past three presidential campaigns taught him the folly of partisanship for the Negro. He definitely decided to go along with the party that would sincerely promise to do the best for him and his race.

The election of 1932 proved fertile ground for Vann's political strategy. As editor and owner of the largest Negro journal in America, he saw a new political emancipation of the Negro, greater than in the days of the Reconstruction era. He did not commit his newspaper to either party until both the Republican and Democratic conventions were over.

As to the C. O. P. Convention, he states:<sup>10</sup>

10. *The Pittsburgh Courier*, June 25, 1932. "G. O. P. Confab Detours on Negro Issue."

The problem of eleven million citizens got but scant mention in the platform. Set up in eight-point type, the platform occupied 179 column inches, more than an entire page in the daily newspapers. Out of that space, 1 and 5/16 inches were addressed specifically to the Negro, pledging him nothing about lynching, education, discrimination, fairness in civil service and jobs. Eleven million Negroes occupied a space just about 1/156 of the platform. Exactly ten times as much space was devoted to liquor....All the specific pleas placed before the resolutions committee by representatives of various Negro groups and organizations were de-tatched and flattened to fit into the elastic platform pledge finally adopted. As we approach the fall election, the Negro seems to be between the devil and the Democratic party.

The Democratic party convention saw six Negro alternate delegates participating in the proceedings. The record shows that two were from New York state, two from Kansas, one from Colorado, and one from West Virginia. These Negroes were placed upon the Democratic ballot and voted into their positions.<sup>11</sup> The Democrats, in their convention in Chicago, nominated Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt of New York for President, and Speaker John N. Garner of Texas for vice-President. Roosevelt stated to the Negro press, "The Negro is absolutely and impartially included in my reference of a 'New Deal' to the forgotten man."

In the midst of the convention, James Farley presented Vann to the late Louis McHenry Howe and stated to him the plans they had in mind for months, all of which Howe accepted.<sup>12</sup> Farley then presented Vann to Joseph F. Guffey who controlled the puny Democratic machine in Pennsylvania. To

11. *The Pittsburgh Courier*, July 2, 1932.

12. R. L. Vann to J. A. Farley, July 22, 1940.

gether they discussed the possibilities of swinging the Negro vote into the Democratic party and worked out a plan to their mutual satisfaction. This plan included:<sup>13</sup>

1. The establishment of the first really effective Negro division in the Democratic campaign committee bringing Vann to New York as the division's manager-in-chief.
2. Appointment of Vann as state director of Negro Democrats in Pennsylvania.<sup>14</sup>
3. Appointment of Vann as handler of publicity for Negro newspapers in the campaign.<sup>15</sup>

In return for Negro support of the Democratic party, Vann sought:<sup>16</sup>

1. End of discrimination in Civil Service.
2. End of segregation in governmental departments.
3. End of "Jim-Crowism" in interstate travel.
4. Enforcement of 14th and 15th amendments.
5. Recognition of Negro support by increasing the number of appointments in the diplomatic service and all other governmentally appointed jobs.
6. End breaking up of Negro regiments.
7. Opening up of technical branches of Army and Navy to Negroes.
8. Stopping of segregation and discrimination practices in citizens' training camps.

13. *Saturday Evening Post*, March 26, 1933, p. 8, "The Guffey's."

14. *The Pittsburgh Courier*, July 2, 1933.

15. R. L. Vann, "Sketch of My Life," pp. 311.

16. *The Pittsburgh Courier*, July 2, 1933.

In 1932, neither Joseph Guffey or Robert Vann had attained any national political prominence. Guffey, by extraordinary shifts and stratagems, controlled the Democratic machine in Pennsylvania.<sup>17</sup> Vann as editor of the largest Negro journal in America was still seeking political recognition for his race. Together, these men started a successful political revolution in Pennsylvania that spread throughout the country.

It was Guffey's leadership that interested Vann and his people in the Democratic party in 1932. Together they saw the first glimpse of a larger life. For Guffey, it meant a beckon on to the White House. For Vann it meant a "New Deal" for the Negro in politics.

With so much in common, these two men started out to convert the public. Their success is attributed to a great extent to the failure of the Republican party to appeal to the masses.

Vann began his campaign among his people. Speaking from the subject, "The Patriot and the Partisan," Vann reviewed the birth and rise of the Republican party. This discourse described the differences between patriotism and partisanship. "Patriotism," he said, "is the love of one's country," and on the partisan, on the other hand, is "one having the character of blind and unreasonable adherence to a party." He pointed out the number of high governmental offices Negroes once held. After showing

17. *Saturday Evening Post*, pp. 311.

the rapid decline of the Negro's power in the Republican party since 1900, and especially for the last twelve years, Vann enumerated the various injustices the Negro suffered at the hands of the Republican leadership.

Pointing out the Democratic party as being, in his opinion, the logical group to "make the necessary changes at Washington," Vann said,<sup>18</sup>

It has the organization; it has experienced leaders imbued with the ideals of the people, and for this year, at least, the Democratic party offers the American Negro the one opportunity to destroy the selfish partisanism now in control, and restore the government to just and fair leaders....I see millions of Negroes voting a Democratic ticket. A patriot or a partisan... which shall you be?

Excerpts from this speech were published in every Negro journal of prominence in America. Soon G. O. P. organization chiefs became alarmed as the trend towards the New York governor gained among Negroes. Honorable George E. Bates, chairman of Essex County Republican Association in Newark, New Jersey, stated, "It was once a rare thing to find colored Democrats, now the woods are full of them....Negro newspapers have deserted us..."<sup>19</sup> Taking advantage of every opportunity, Vann labeled this election as a "protest vote" in the Negro newspapers throughout America.

Allied Roosevelt clubs were organized among Negroes in various states. Skeleton organizations were established

18. Vann, "The Patriot and the Partisan," Sept. 24, 1932.

19. *The Pittsburgh Courier*, Oct. 1, 1932.



in heavily populated Negro wards for the same purpose. Editorials appeared weekly in Negro journals instructing the Negro how to vote explaining why their vote was so important in states where the scale could be tipped in either direction by the Negro vote. Vann conducted a vigorous campaign, traveling thousands of miles throughout the country, discussing the leading Negro problems and salvation in his numerous speeches. Other Negro journals assisted him by giving publicity to his cause.

The Negro played a magnificent role in the Democratic landslide of Southern border states as well as Ohio, Illinois, New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, California, etc. Although Pennsylvania remained in the Republican ranks, the Negro element tells a different story. In Vann's own county we see a striking example. The thirty-five thousand Negro votes in Allegheny County put the county in the Roosevelt column. This proved that the Negro vote was the balance of power in Allegheny county. Roosevelt won by forty votes, but never before had Negroes voted Democratic in the county. The results show that the following districts heavily populated with Negroes, went Democratic. The third ward, fifth ward, and colored districts in the 10th, 12th, 13th wards, Penn Township, Hankin, Bradlock, Selzvale, and Wilkesburg. voted the Democratic ticket. Thus it was the thirty-five thousand black votes that made Allegheny

County citizens sit up and rub their eyes with amazement the following Wednesday morning.<sup>80</sup> Vann's statement concerning the Negroes' voting allegiance reads:<sup>81</sup>

Our political fortune rests, not in the Democratic party alone, but in full participation of our political rights, regardless of party in power. The colored people went Democratic in this election, and about a million of them voted the Democratic ticket and many others were convinced to do likewise but lacked the courage to cast the ballot.

In accounting for the large colored vote, the Negro press molded public opinion. These newspapers preached a complete political emancipation for the Negro in America. They preached allegiance only to the party that best served its interest and when it ceases to do so, turn to the party that is willing to do so.<sup>82</sup>

Vann made the greatest contribution of any minor party leader to the Democratic party in this election. His reward came not through the political crushes the Democratic leadership felt it had to give him for his great service, but in the new political emancipation and new deal for the Negro in politics he saw his race gain.

As a reward for such a great service, the Democratic leaders offered him a job as Assistant-Attorney General of the United States, a position he later resigned in 1935, because he felt that a man holding a political job was

80. The Pittsburgh Courier, Nov. 19, 1936.

81. R. L. Vann to The United Negro, Nov. 19, 1936.

82. Ibid.

not free to lead his people properly; that usually a man in such a position was swayed by sentiments and sympathies which his job dictated, and he could only be politically independent if he had no interest to serve other than that of his people.

As the presidential election of 1936 approached, the major parties prepared for a vigorous campaign. Their nominating conventions were held in June. The Republicans held their convention in Cleveland, Ohio. James L. Lewis protested to the National Committee of the discrimination already looming in the Republican convention, but his protests were unheeded.<sup>83</sup> This and similar action caused disunity among the entire Negro Delegation. In nominating Governor Landon, and Colonel Knox to head the national ticket; the Republican party merely went through the formality of the convention to keep it alive. It was entirely indifferent to the Negro vote.

The Democratic convention was held in Philadelphia. For the first time in one hundred years, a colored minister opened the Democratic National Convention with prayer when the Reverend Marshall Shepard, pastor of Olivet Baptist Church, Philadelphia, and a member of the Pennsylvania legislature, was called upon to ask for divine blessings upon the proceedings.<sup>84</sup>

83. The Pittsburgh Courier, June 13, 1936.

84. Ibid., July 4, 1936.

The party reported a record attendance of twenty Negro delegates and alternates. Eleven states were represented with accredited Negro presidential delegates being registered from as far away as California. There were five full fledged delegates. Vann served as delegate-at-large with one quarter vote.<sup>85</sup> All these Negro delegates sought a definite racial plank in the "New Deal".<sup>86</sup> The Democrats renominated Roosevelt and Garner.

Vann supported Roosevelt because he made a great effort to elevate the Negro's economic and cultural status than any other administration within the memory of all but a few thousand citizens. He asserted that the Negro was aided by the various Federal projects.<sup>87</sup> Farley made the following announcement to the newspapers of America: "I am pleased to announce the appointment of R. L. Vann as special advisor to the Democratic National Campaign Committee . . . ." Again Vann handled publicity for Negro newspapers and stated that the colored press of the country was divided as follows:<sup>88</sup>

Responsible Roosevelt	Circulation
The Pittsburgh Courier	174,000
The Afro-American	70,000
Norfolk Journal and Guide	54,000
Amsterdam News	18,000
Philadelphia Independent	18,000
Total	336,000

85. The Pittsburgh Courier, June 18, 1936.  
86. Ibid., July 28, 1936.  
87. Ibid.  
88. International News Service, Sept. 4, 1936.  
89. Pittsburgh Post-Examiner, Oct. 22, 1936.

Supporting London	Circulation
Chicago Defender	50,000
St. Louis Argus	15,000
Kansas City Call	18,000
Total	83,000

Of the 885,000 potential Negro votes in Pennsylvania, two-thirds are concentrated in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, and the New Deal leaders counted heavily on their gains to carry the State for Roosevelt.<sup>89</sup> Farley considered the Negro vote in Pennsylvania so important that he shifted Vann from the National to the State Party post for work among the Negro voters.<sup>91</sup> Vann was originally scheduled to lead the Negro division of the Democratic National Committee, but now occupied a corresponding position with the Pennsylvania State Committee. Mr. Farley used the phrase "balance of power" in describing the situation.<sup>92</sup>

Once more Vann began a campaign among his people. He stated: ". . . I know nothing that has happened since 1932 to change my opinion of the Republican Party and its leaders . . . The only President we can expect anything from is one whom we helped to elect. We elected him in 1932 by casting over a million and one-half black votes.<sup>93</sup> In the election the Democratic candidates were victorious by a larger majority than in 1932."<sup>94</sup>

90. Pittsburgh Post-Examiner, Oct. 22, 1936

91. Pittsburgh Press, Aug. 1, 1936

92. Ibid.

93. Pittsburgh Courier, Sept. 19, 1936

94. Ibid., Oct. 17, 1936

Much was said during the campaign concerning the Negro vote. Vann quotes:<sup>95</sup>

The Republicans felt that the Negroes' preference for the Democratic Party in 1932 was only temporary. . . . In this they were mistaken. Such states as Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, Michigan, Illinois, Missouri, Indiana, New York, New Jersey, and Maryland, the Negro vote was the factor which turned the tide. In accounting for the large colored vote the colored newspapers, churches, and organizations must definitely be considered as the chief factors molding Negro public opinion. I mention this notwithstanding the power of the radio, the master voice and pleasing personality of the President, and the army of workers who convinced voters of the value of voting the Democratic ticket. . . . Pennsylvania broke away from a time-worn tradition and went Democratic by nearly three hundred thousand votes, and at the same time, took over control of the entire state government. The Negro vote in the G. O. P. column would have spelled a different story. Fully eighty per cent of the Negro vote went to Roosevelt throughout the North . . . .

Vann led this fight in 1932 and by 1936 he was aided by many other able Negro leaders and organizations. This, more than any other thing accounted for the success of the Democratic Party among Negroes in 1936.

In 1934, Vann helped elect Governor Earle and Senator Guffey. As a minority group, the Negroes in Pennsylvania advanced through the leadership of Senator Guffey who turned to Vann for counsel. The year 1936 saw a political revolt within the Pennsylvania's Democratic ranks, as an attempt was made by David L. Lawrence to destroy the leadership of the Senator. Just how the Senator retained his leadership even at the cost of embarrassment to others was through the faith Editor Vann had in Guffey's sincerity to the Negro's cause and welfare. How Vann accomplished this follows.

95. The United States News, Nov. 12, 1936.

Much was said during the campaign concerning the Negro vote. Vann quotes:<sup>55</sup>

The Republicans felt that the Negroes' preference for the Democratic Party in 1936 was only temporary. ...In this they were mistaken. Such states as Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, Michigan, Illinois, Missouri, Indiana, New York, New Jersey, and Maryland, the Negro vote was the factor which turned the tide. In accounting for the large colored vote the colored newspapers, churches, and organizations must definitely be considered as the chief factors molding Negro public opinion. I mention this notwithstanding the power of the radio, the master voice and pleasing personality of the President, and the army of workers who convinced voters of the value of voting the Democratic ticket...Pennsylvania broke away from a time-worn tradition and went Democratic by nearly three hundred thousand votes, and at the same time, took over control of the entire state government. The Negro vote in the G. O. P. columns would have spelled a different story. Fully eighty per cent of the Negro vote went to Roosevelt throughout the North

\*\*\*\*  
Vann led this fight in 1932 and by 1936 he was aided by many other able Negro leaders and organizations. This, more than any other thing accounted for the success of the Democratic Party among Negroes in 1936.

In 1934, Vann helped elect Governor Barle and Senator Guffey. As a minority group, the Negroes in Pennsylvania advanced through the leadership of Senator Guffey who turned to Vann for counsel. The year 1936 saw a political revolt within the Pennsylvania's Democratic ranks, as an attempt was made by David L. Lawrence to destroy the leadership of the Senator. Just how the Senator retained his leadership even at the cost of embarrassment to others was through the faith editor Vann had in Guffey's sincerity to the Negro's cause and welfare. How Vann accomplished this follows.

55. The United States News, Nov. 18, 1936.

Vann was invited by the State Chairman Lawrence to attend the Democratic State Convention in Harrisburg on February 25, 1938. Not being a member of the State committee, Vann was provided with a proxy by the chairman. He attended the Allegheny County caucus and voted under the instructions of the Allegheny County Chairman. Upon attendance of the convention, the proxy was challenged at the door and he was refused admission. Later he was given a press card that admitted him at the press table and he took his seat with others admitted on press passes. When the state roll call did not include the name whose proxy he had in his pocket he realized he had a fake proxy card.<sup>56</sup> Throughout the convention, when the chairman called for voting everyone at the press table voted "aye" as told by the Allegheny County Chairman, James Kirk. The State Chairman ruled that the convention should not endorse candidates for fear of violating the election code. However, the candidates on the Jones slate were recommended by the convention.<sup>57</sup> It is generally believed since the convention adjourned that the candidates led by Calvin Jones were not chosen by the Democrats of Pennsylvania, but slated by the State Chairman who was coerced by Matthew McCloskey, the millionaire contractor of Philadelphia.<sup>58</sup> Thus, the candidates identi-

56. E. L. Vann, (radio speech) Station KDKA, April 28, 1938.

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Ibid.*

fied as the Jones ticket were not selected in a democratic manner. In disgust, Vann, and others who were the victims of the fake proxy walked out of the convention. This accounts for the Kennedy ticket which was offered in opposition to the Jones slate imposed by the State Chairman. Lieutenant Governor, Thomas Kennedy, represented the other faction of the Democratic Party split. Thus, the Democrats split as the Jones-Barle-Lawrence faction versus the Kennedy-Guffey faction.<sup>59</sup>

In the May primary, the Kennedy-Guffey faction was defeated. After the primary, Vann sat with Guffey, Charles Alvin Jones, Edward W. Jones and Lawrence in a room at the Hotel Penn-Harris in Harrisburg in a meeting which was supposed to be a get-together for the two opposing factions. Vann asked Calvin Jones, "What would be his attitude towards carrying out the agreement of Guffey, Barle, and Lawrence, to give ten per cent of the state patronage to the colored voters, who supported the Democratic ticket." Lawrence interrupted and refused to allow Jones to answer. At this action, Vann got up and walked out of the room.<sup>60</sup>

On September 15, Guffey called Vann and made arrangements for a conference on "The Pittsburgher," leaving New York at 11:55 P. M. The two met in the Senator's private bedroom and discussed the political plight of the Negroes in Pennsylvania. The next morning, Vann returned

59. *The Pittsburgh Courier*, April 9, 1938.

60. Vann to Guffey, Sept. 13, 1938.

to Guffey's room in a Greensburg hotel. The Senator stated bluntly to Vann, "After thinking this thing over, Bob, and firing out things I did not know when I talked to you over the telephone, I find that I have to go along with Jones. I want you to forget all about the agreement for this election, at least, and remember that the fight is insignificant compared with what we have to do in 1940." Vann shook the Senator's hand and told him, "You're in the hands of the Philistines and you might as well admit it. You can do nothing for my people but lead them to farther slaughter."<sup>41</sup> He then left.

On September 24, Guffey's secretary called Vann and told him to meet Guffey in Philadelphia at the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel. Vann met him at 1:30 P. M. in room 1610-1611. Senator Guffey said, "Bob, I received your letter but I could not answer and I want you to tell me how you propose to carry out the suggestions made in your letter. The letter dated September 19, 1938, read as follows:<sup>42</sup>

... Now, Senator, it was the Guffey leadership that interested me and my people in the Democratic Party in 1938 ... when you were undisputed leader, your promises to me were kept ... Lawrence and you said publicly that so far as patronage is concerned, my group was entitled to ten per cent and that the Democratic administration would see to it that I got it. As long as your leadership was undisputed, this policy was adhered to ... Your Party opponents developed the idea that they could destroy your leadership. The Guffey policy towards my

41. Vann to Guffey, Sept. 19, 1938

42. *Ibid.*

race began to wane, and at this writing, we are practically ignored and forgotten. We are at the place where we must fight, not only to retain what little we have, but to restore the Guffey leadership and the Guffey policy. I do not know what your convictions are with respect to Party harmony, but I am quite certain of my convictions with respect to my race. . . . Our fight in this particular State campaign is to restore your leadership. If it requires the defeat of the Democratic organization and its ticket, then defeat must be made certain and very definite. I am writing you this letter so that there may be no mistake in your mind as to what I am fighting for in this Fall campaign. . . .

Very respectfully yours,

(Signed) R. L. Vann

The Senator asked the Negro leader point-blank if he thought he could put this program over. Vann replied that he thought there were enough white and colored Kennedy-Guffey followers to put the program over. They also discussed the possibility of the Senator's retrieving his lost leadership by defeating Jones and thereby defeating the further leadership of David L. Lawrence. They discussed the results of such a defeat, even so far as to mention the loss of patronage to Lawrence, because Governor James would hardly appoint Lawrence, Secretary of the Commonwealth.<sup>43</sup> The Senator stated to Vann when the discussion ceased, "Bob, I see your program and I appreciate your desire to defend and protect my leadership". He continued, "as the President's Number One Democrat in Pennsylvania, I cannot consistently tell you to go ahead,

43. Vann to Guffey, Sept. 24, 1938

but, as your friend and as a friend of the people who follow me, I am not going to tell you not to do it."<sup>44</sup>

The Colored Democratic Organization of Allegheny County adopted a resolution condemning the Lawrence leadership and praising the Guffey policy on October 16, 1938. The campaign for the governorship was a bitter one with the Democratic Party leaders attacking Vann for supporting Jones. However, the results of the election speak for themselves. Senator Guffey now holds undisputed claim of Pennsylvania's Number One Democrat as all possible competitors were eliminated through this smashing defeat by the G. O. P. of the Democratic Party.<sup>45</sup> The Earl-Lawrence-Jones faction was forced to retire. It was largely through Vann's efforts and faith that Senator Guffey retains his political prestige.

In 1938 and 1936, Vann supported Roosevelt for President and the Democratic Party for the reason that it was his firm conviction that the leadership of the Republican Party was at that time not in tune with the interests of his people. Editor Vann approved and supported the measures of the "New Deal", such as the W. P. A. and "Relief" to save his race, until the Democratic leaders began to use these measures to exploit the Negro for political purposes. This cheap political maneuver not only threatened to reduce his race to a low and prolonged economic status but was also a camouflage

44. *The Pittsburgh Courier*, Nov. 8, 1938

45. *Ibid.*, Dec. 17, 1938.

challenge to Negro leadership. Negro leaders once more found themselves almost without patronage for their race and could not demand political spoils for the trained Negroes. Vann was the first to sense this danger and immediately took steps to prevent it. Realizing that the best way to awaken his race to this danger was to show publicly the attitude of the white politicians towards the Negro, he launched a campaign in 1936 for equality in the Army, Navy and Air Forces of America. This campaign showed the anti Negro attitude the Democratic leadership had toward any such measures. Strangely enough, it was the Republican leaders who rallied behind this crusade and successfully obtained some results. Because Roosevelt has strayed afar from his original principles and policies towards the Negro, Vann espoused the cause and urged the election of Wendell A. Wilkie and the restoration to power of the Republican Party in the 1940 Presidential campaign. He asserts:

I have come to the conclusion that it is a mistake to help elect a Northern Democrat to the Presidency, the reason being that such action merely puts the South into the saddle. During the eight years under Roosevelt, Congress has been run by Southern Democrats among whom are some of the most vicious type of professional politicians. When a Northern Democrat is elected to the Presidency, they become Chairman of all the important committees and virtually control Congress. As evidence of this, we find in the House today: Rayburn of Texas, Sprader; Sumners of Texas, Chairman of the Judiciary Committee; Benson of Georgia, Chairman of Naval Affairs Committee; Doughton, NC North Carolina, Chairman of Ways and Means Committee; etc.

In the Senate we find: Sheppard of Texas, Chairman of Military Affairs Committee; Garner of Texas, President of the Senate; etc. . .

The larger portion of the Negro population is located in the South. Vann states that Southern Negro farmers suffered under the Farm Relief and Farm Credit Administration, because when the State-controlled machinery got through with the Federal funds and allotments, there was very little left for the Negro farmers.<sup>47</sup> The protests of these Negro farmers to the National Government went unheeded. The Negro leader Vann saw that their plight could not be solved under a Congress whose important Committees were controlled by men who did not consider the welfare of his race. Throughout the country the conditions of Negroes had a distinct parallel with those just mentioned. The Republican leadership had reversed their attitude towards the Negro and Vann began a crusade to lead his race back to them in the 1940 Presidential Campaign.

Although he had not been in good health for some time he managed to continue his daily activities until his condition became so acute that he was taken to the Shadyside Hospital in Pittsburgh. News of his critical condition became known Sunday, October 20, 1940, and since that time people throughout America awaited with bated breath any news about his condition. In a coma since Tuesday, the 22nd, his last words to his wife were: "Don't worry about

me. I'll be all right". News of his death on Oct. 24, 1940 (7:05 P. M.) came as a shock to everyone.

Thus ends the career of America's "Number One Negro Citizen": A lawyer, diplomat, crusader, and political statesman. Born in obscurity this greatest of all America's Negro leaders died as he constantly lived, fighting until the last.

Both the Negro and white newspapers throughout the United States paid tribute to his statesmanship. In accordance with Vann's wishes, the Reverend C. E. Askew, who taught him during his early school days, was in charge of funeral services which were held in Vann's country estate in Oakmont, Pa. America's leading citizens, white and black, joined the host of admirers in paying a final tribute to one who faithfully served his country and his race; Robert Lee Vann.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

## I. Primary Sources

## A. Works of R. L. Vann

## 1. Autobiographical

- a. "Negro Teachers Better Than White for Negro Children" (A typed manuscript in the possession of Mrs. R. L. Vann of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)
- b. "The Patriot and the Partisan" (A typed manuscript in possession of Mrs. R. L. Vann)
- c. "Sketch of My Life" (A typed manuscript in possession of Mrs. R. L. Vann)
- d. Herford County Herald, Historical Edition, September, 1939 (An article written by R. L. Vann)
- e. Norfolk Journal and Guide, April 18, 1934 (An interview on "New Deal Personalities")

## B. Correspondence of R. L. Vann (This is a huge collection of several thousand of Vann's letters, as yet unclassified. It is in the possession of Mrs. R. L. Vann)

## 1. Letter to Mrs. R. L. Vann:

- a. The Reverend Askes, March 15, 1941

## 2. Letters to R. L. Vann:

- a. Cohen, Frank, June 25, 1938
- b. Cooper, Arthur Duff, June 25, 1940
- c. Earle, Governor George, June 19, 1938
- d. Powell, Lieutenant S. V., January 4, 1936

## 3. Letters of R. L. Vann to:

- a. Cooper, Arthur Duff, June 14, 1940
- b. Farley, James A., January 16, 1930
- c. Goldstein, Dorothy H., January 14, 1939

## BIBLIOGRAPHY--cont.

## 3. Letters of R. L. Vann to: (cont.)

- d. Guffey, Senator, March 7, 1938
- e. Guffey, Senator, September 13, 1938
- f. Guffey, Senator, September 24, 1938
- g. Little, Colonel A. W., February 23, 1938
- h. Fann, Jefferson, August 21, 1940
- i. Pinckney, E. A., April 21, 1936
- j. Republican National Committee, October 31, 1934
- k. The United News, November 12, 1936

## D. Newspapers, Magazines, Journals, Pamphlets, Historical Works

1. The Pittsburgh Courier, 1910 to November 1940
2. International News Service, September 30, 1938
3. Pittsburgh Post Gazette, October 22, 1936
4. Pittsburgh Press, August 1, 1936
5. The United States News, November, 1936
6. Washington Post, September 30, 1938
7. Bayless, Marion, "Advancement of Negro Through The Pittsburgh Courier", May, 1938
8. Bulletin Index, September 12, 1935
9. Comment, October, 1935
10. News Week, May 2, 1936
11. Pinckney, E. A., "Editorial Page of The Pittsburgh Courier"
12. Saturday Evening Post, March 26, 1936
13. Virginia Union University Journal, January 1, 1935

## BIBLIOGRAPHY--cont.

## E. Personal Interviews to the Writer:

1. Bayless, Beatrice Posey, May 6, 1941
2. Lewis, Ira F., May 4, 1940
3. Fann, W. G., May 10, 1941
4. Washington, Chester L., May 19, 1941
5. Vann, J. H., May 21, 1941