

Indicting the Black Press:

Securing Racial Boundaries during World War II

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During World War II, the Black press became the target of suspicion for its advocacy of full citizenship for Black Americans while the United States was fighting an international war for freedom. Although some of this scrutiny came from the government, painting the Black press as an internal threat to the war effort, members of the white press also raised pointed questions about whether the Black press, with its agitation against the racial status quo, compromised national unity. This paper focuses on 1942 and 1943, after the launch of the Double V campaign, and examines in historical context the syndicated columns of Westbrook Pegler as well as national magazine articles of newspaper editor Virginius Dabney and Black commentators who responded. The analysis demonstrates that patriotism was pretext and rationalization for an effort to thwart the civil rights agenda of the Black press at that historical juncture.