

Race, Politics, and the Press in Chicago

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Course Description: This course will examine the history of the African American press, especially *The Chicago Defender*, a newspaper which spanned the technological and political transformations of the 20th Century media. Founded as a weekly in 1905, *The Defender* became Black America's first national communications vehicle using newly available mass printing machines as well as page design techniques pioneered by Hearst and Pulitzer. The news pages exposed the horrors of Jim Crow, while editorials inspired millions to come to Northern cities in what became known as the Great Migration. *The Defender* and its cohort, including *The Pittsburgh Courier*, wielded substantial political clout, providing the swing votes that elected Harry S. Truman and John F. Kennedy to the Presidency. But as the century wore on, black newspapers had to compete for audience as well as staff against a multitude of print, broadcast and, ultimately, on-line options. Taught by the author of the award-winning non-fiction book about *The Defender*, himself a veteran of the newspaper, the course includes guest lectures, field trips, and references to the substantial scholarship of the history of the South Side. There are no prerequisites.

Reading List:

“Ida: A Sword Among Lions (Amistad Books, 2008),” by Paula J. Giddings

“The Defender: How the Legendary Black Newspaper Changed America (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016),” by Ethan Michaeli

“The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom (Northwestern University Press, 2006),” by Patrick S. Washburn

“Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City,” by Horace Cayton and St. Clair Drake, EITHER the 2015 version with the new Introduction by Mary Patillo, or the earlier version with the Introduction by Richard Wright, Foreword by William Julius Wilson, though I highly recommend the former.

Syllabus:

Week One

9/25: A short history of the Black Press. How the 1893 World's Fair shaped a generation of young activists: Frederick Douglass, Ida B. Wells and Robert S. Abbott.

Reading/Assignments: “Ida,” Chapter 10: ‘Light from a Human Torch’; “The Defender,” Chapter 1; Ida B. Wells’ “The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition,” <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/wells/exposition/exposition.html>

9/27: How technological developments such as the introduction of Linotype machine created a revolution in mass media and brought Hearst/Pulitzer-style journalism to community-based newspapers. The role of the Pullman Porters in distributing “The Defender.”

Reading/Assignments: “The Defender,” Chapters 2-3; Ken Burns’ film “Unforgivable Blackness” and/or video of Jack Johnson’s fight:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BnMJL36_oCs

Week Two

10/2: 1911, the year *The Defender* fended off the Pinkertons and established the limits of African Americans’ free speech. The political cartoon as the Black Press’s most potent weapon, **Guest Speaker Tim Jackson, former *Defender* editorial cartoonist, author, “Pioneering Cartoonists of Color (2016).”**

<https://www.amazon.com/Pioneering-Cartoonists-Color-Tim-Jackson/dp/1496804856>

Reading/Assignments: Watch “Birth of a Nation (D.W. Griffith, 1915)”

10/5: Jack Johnson and the Levy District: Celebrity and vice re-shape the city’s political and media dynamic. The nationwide release of the first blockbuster film, “Birth of a Nation,” re-launches the Ku Klux Klan as a national organization and poses an ethical, legal and editorial challenge for the Black Press.

Reading/Assignments: “The Defender,” Chapters 4-6; Emmett Scott, “Negro Migration During the War (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1920)

<https://archive.org/details/negromigrationdu00scot>

Week Three

10/9: *The Defender’s* editorial page launches the Great Migration - **Field trip, the Old South Side, from the Prairie District to the Levee, and from the Stroll to the World War One Monument**

10/11: The World War offers both opportunity and danger to the Black Press, as African Americans find themselves an essential part of the war effort and the administration of President Woodrow Wilson threatens to

Reading/Assignments: “The Defender,” Chapters 7-8, Carl Sandburg “The Chicago Race Riot (Harcourt, Brace and Hough, 1919)

https://books.google.com/books/about/The_Chicago_Race_Riots_July_1919.html?id=-ZwTAAAYAAJ

Week Four

10/16: The 1919 Race Riot: This incident changed Chicago and the nation forever, creating new rules for urban segregation and for the newspapers, whose conduct comes under review. *The Defender* responds to the crisis by buying its own plant.

10/18: When the re-born Klan comes to Chicago in the early 1920s, we examine the different roles played by the *Tribune* and *The Defender*. The Roman Catholic Church and progressive whites borrow techniques from the Black Press to expose the Klan's membership and direct boycotts.

Reading/Assignments: Washburn, Chapter 6; "The Defender," Chapters 9-13.

Week Five

10/23: The Black Press and the Depression: As circulation declines, *The Defender* and other newspapers create new ways of reaching readers, including the Bud Billiken Parade. The newspaper's leadership undergoes a generational change. **Guest Speaker: Col. Eugene Scott, former Defender Publisher, former president of the Defender Charities**

10/25: How the Roosevelt Administration was converted from a threat to the Black Press into an indispensable ally. The Arrival of the first Black correspondent in the White House Press Corps.

Reading/Assignments: "Black Metropolis," pgs. 186-238; "The Defender," Chapters 14-16.

Week Six

10/30: The Integration of the U.S. Armed Forces; how *The Defender* worked hand-in-glove with U.S. Representative William Dawson and the Chicago Machine.

11/1: Brown vs Board of Education: Victory or Obfuscation; Emmett Till and the birth of the civil rights movement.

Reading/Assignments: "The Defender," Chapters 17-20.

Week Seven

11/6: *The Daily Defender* vs. *Ebony* magazine; Alex Wilson and the Little Rock 9. **Field Trip to 24th and Michigan**

11/8: Martin Luther King in Chicago.

Reading/Assignments: "The Defender," Chapters 21-22.

Week Eight

11/13: As the image of the civil rights movement is changing, the Kennedy brothers and MLK are assassinated. The Black Panthers from Fred Hampton to Bobby Rush.

11/15: The anti-Machine Resistance gains steam, culminating the election of Harold Washington.

Reading/Assignments: "The Defender," Chapters 23-24.

Week Nine

11/27: Barack Obama and *The Defender*. Crucial editorial support at important junctures, then providing him with an opportunity for exposure and experience as grand marshal of the Billiken Parade.

11/29: *The Defender*, along with the rest of the newspaper industry, confronts the Internet. But *The Defender* persists, thrives even, a necessary voice in troubled times.

Reading/Assignments: Review materials, notes.

12/5: Final Exam