

Race, Politics, and the Press in Chicago

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Course Description: This course will examine the evolution of public policy on free speech, housing, criminal justice, education and social service provision through a historical lens, specifically through the history of *The Chicago Defender*, a newspaper which spanned the political and technological transformations of the 20th Century media. Founded as a weekly in 1905, *The Defender* became African America's first national communications vehicle using newly available mass printing technology and design techniques. 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 colleagues in the Black Press prompted the integration of the US Armed Forces, galvanized African American voters to elect Harry S. Truman and John F. Kennedy to the Presidency, and then were essential to the civil rights movement. At each juncture of history, *The Defender's* investigative reporters exposed how legal policies like segregation affected the newspaper's readers while the editorial pages analyzed and chastised elected officials and civil servants alike toward reform and accountability. 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. Due to COVID 19, all lectures and guest lectures will be on-line. Field trips will likely be virtual as well.

There are no prerequisites.

The course grade will be determined by class participation that demonstrates mastery of the reading materials, regular quizzes, an in-class presentation and a final research paper of 2,000-2,500 words.

Reading List:

“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.

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

“Fire on the Prairie: Harold Washington, Chicago Politics, and the Roots of the Obama Presidency,” by Gary Rivlin. Any edition is fine.

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

Other assigned readings and films.

Syllabus:

Week One

Class 1: Review of texts, classroom protocols, assignments. Lecture and discussion on the racial and political environment in the United States at the dawn of the 20th Century.

Reading/Assignments: “The Defender,” Chapter 1-2; 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>

Week Two – The Evolution of Media

Class 2: **Field Trip** in front of Harris School. How the 1893 World’s Fair shaped a generation of young activists: Frederick Douglass, Ida B. Wells and Robert S. Abbott. Effects and opportunities of Spanish American War. The city as a political/intellectual/economic environment, a home for Pullman porters, lawyers and gamblers. Robert Abbott launches the Defender using modern newspaper techniques, builds its reputation with Boxing Champion Jack Johnson. The political cartoon as the Black Press’s most potent weapon.

Reading/Assignments: Washburn, Chapters 1-2, 4; “The Defender,” Chapters 3-4; Caton and Drake, Chapters 1-2.

Jack Johnson vs James J. Jeffries (1910): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzAS-wihuVI>

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I3kmVgQHIEY>

Class 3: **Quiz** on First Week’s Reading Assignments. Lecture and discussion on the state of Free Speech in the first years of the 20th Century. Robert Abbott establishes *The Defender* and builds its readers by using modern newspaper design techniques and enlisting Pullman porters to create a unique distribution network. Jack Johnson and the championship of 1910. Abbott has to defend his newspaper against multiple attacks on its legality; 1911, the year *The Defender* fended off the Pinkertons and established the limits of African Americans’ free speech. The film becomes the new, dominant technological media. 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. Booker T. Washington vs WEB DuBois.

Reading/Assignments: “The Defender,” Chapters 5-7; Caton and Drake, Chapter 3; Emmett Scott, “Negro Migration During the War (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1920):

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

Week Three – The Great Migration

Class 4: **Quiz** on Second Week's Readings. Lecture and discussion on the effects of the World War, which offers both opportunity and danger to the Black Press, as African Americans find themselves an essential part of the war effort, unions open their ranks, and the city's political apparatus admits African American newspapers while the administration of President Woodrow Wilson threatens to shutter African American newspapers.

Class 5: **Field trip:** The Old South Side, from the Prairie District to the Levee, and from the Stroll to the World War One Monument. Meet at the Starbuck's on the corner of 35th and State streets at 11:15 a.

Reading/Assignments: "The Defender," Chapters 8-10; Carl Sandburg "The Chicago Race Riot" (Harcourt, Brace and Hough, 1919); Caton and Drake, Chapters 4-5;

<https://video.wttw.com/show/fighting-both-fronts-story-370th/>

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

Week Four – WW 1 and the 1919 Race Riot

Class 6: **Quiz** on third week's readings. Lecture and discussion on the Great Migration as how *The Defender's* editorial page launches the Great Migration. Lecture and discussion on the turbulent years at the end of WW I. The 1917 East St. Louis Riots produce a mass movement, but the 1919 Race Riot brings segregation to the North, de facto if not de jure. *The Defender* responds to the crisis by buying its own plant.

Class 7: Lecture and discussion on the Black Press and the Depression, a time when the African American community, facing segregation and discrimination in the North as well as the South, depends on its own resources and creates its own institutions. Marcus Garvey, the re-born Klan, the Great Depression. *The Defender* launches the Bud Billiken Parade.

Reading/Assignments: Select Topics for Research Paper. Washburn, Chapter 6; "The Defender," Chapters 11-14; Caton and Drake, Chapter 8.

Week Five – Depression and Exodus to Democrats

Class 8: **Guest Speaker:** Col. Eugene Scott, former *Defender* Publisher, former president of the Defender Charities.

Class 9: **Quiz** on Week 4 Readings. Lecture and discussion on the New Deal. Many symbolic victories were achieved, such as the first Black correspondent in the White House Press Corps, the promotion of the Black Cabinet, but did federal policies really change?

Reading/Assignments: Present Bibliography for Research Papers in scheduled meetings. Caton and Drake, Chapters 15-17; Washburn, Chapters 5-7; “The Defender,” Chapters 14-16.

Week Six – WW2 and Truman

Class 10: **Quiz** on Week 5 Readings. Lecture and discussion on the Integration of the U.S. Armed Forces; how this massive reform was engineered by the *The Defender* working hand-in-glove with U.S. Representative William Dawson and the Chicago Machine.

Class 11: Lecture and discussion on the change – or lack thereof – in educational policy through the Brown vs Board of Education decision by the U.S. Supreme Court. Emmett Till and the birth of the civil rights movement. Lecture and discussion on the education as the first issue of the civil rights movement; Alex Wilson and the Little Rock 9. Compare the dominant African American media institutions of the era, *The Daily Defender* vs. *Ebony* magazine.

Reading/Assignments: “The Defender,” Chapters 18-20; Washburn, Chapter 8; “Fire on the Prairie,” Book One, Chapters 1-11.

Week Seven - Civil Rights in the South and the North

Class 12: Lecture and discussion on the civil rights movement’s expansion into the North with issues like housing, criminal justice and jobs. The March on Washington and the struggle against school segregation in Chicago. Martin Luther King vs. Richard J. Daley in Chicago.

Class 13: Lecture and discussion on the late ‘60s as a time of rapid political evolution. As the assassinations of the Kennedy brothers and MLK nationally as well as Fred Hampton in Chicago prompt significant policy concessions, “Black Power” becomes a generalized demand for African American decision-making.

Reading/Assignments: Present Outline for Research Papers in scheduled meetings. “The Defender,” Chapters 21-23; “Fire on the Prairie,” Book 2, Chapters 12-18, and Book 3, Chapters 19-22.

Week Eight – the 70s and Harold

Class 14: Lecture and discussion on the political career of Bobby Rush, from Black Panther to congressman. Chicago as a laboratory for progressive reform from the death of Richard J. Daley through the unexpected election of Jane Byrne. Ralph Metcalfe and the beginning of the revolt.

Class 15: Lecture and discussion on the rise and tragic demise of Harold Washington, how his path from Machine cog to rebel to mayor of Chicago in 1983 victory gave inspiration for a generation of would-be reformers including David Axelrod and Barack Obama.

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

Week Nine – After Harold, Daley, Emanuel and Reverse Migration

Class 16: Guest Speaker: Beverly Scott

Class 17: Lecture and discussion of the rise of Mayor Richard M. Daley and Rahm Emanuel as counterweights to the progressives in the Democratic Party. Election of Mayor Lori Lightfoot in the wake of demands for public policy reform. Analysis of public policy on the federal, state and local level when it comes to segregation in housing, criminal justice and education.

Reading/Assignments: Turn in Final Paper