

**Syllabus:**

**Race, Politics, and the Press in Chicago**

**Course 34799**

**Instructor: Ethan Michaeli**

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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 the first national newspaper for and by African Americans through the use of 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 mayors, governors and even presidents, 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. The course is taught by the author of the award-winning non-fiction book about *The Defender*, himself a veteran of the newspaper, and includes guest lectures, field trips, and references to the substantial scholarship of the history of the South Side. Class meetings, guest lectures and field trips may be adjusted due to COVID 19 requirements, of course.

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 that reflects successful analysis and contextualization of historic texts, especially newspapers.

**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.

## 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 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

### Reading/Assignments:

- Ida B. Wells, et al: “The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition”  
<http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/wells/exposition/exposition.html>

Class 2: **Lecture and Discussion:** How the 1893 World’s Fair shaped a generation of young activists: Frederick Douglass, Ida B. Wells and Robert S. Abbott.

### Reading/Assignments (for the following week):

- “The Defender,” Chapters 1-5
- Caton and Drake, Chapters 1-2
- Washburn, Chapters 1-2, 4
- Watch “Soldiers Without Swords”: <https://vimeo.com/57630507>
- Watch Jack Johnson vs James J. Jeffries (1910):  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzAS-wihuVI>

## Week Two – The Dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Class 3: **Quiz** on Reading Assignments “The Reason Why...” and “The Defender,” Chapters 1-5. **Lecture and discussion** on the state of Free Speech in the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Booker T. Washington vs WEB DuBois. Effects and opportunities of Spanish American War. The city as a political/intellectual/economic environment. 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. The political cartoon as the Black Press’s most potent weapon. Abbott has to defend his newspaper against multiple attacks on its legality; 1911, the year *The Defender* fends off the Pinkertons and established the limits of African Americans’ free speech.

- Watch “Birth of a Nation (D.W. Griffith, 1915)”:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I3kmVgQHIEY>

Class 4: **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. 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. The rise of Oscar DePriest and Big Bill Thompson in Chicago.

**Reading/Assignments(for the following week):**

- "The Defender," Chapters 6-8
- Caton and Drake, Chapter 3-4
- Read Emmett Scott, "Negro Migration During the War (Carnegie Endowment, 1920): <https://archive.org/details/negromigrationdu00scot>
- Read 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](https://books.google.com/books/about/The_Chicago_Race_Riots_July_1919.html?id=-ZwTAAAYAAJ)
- Watch "Fighting on Both Fronts": <https://video.wttw.com/show/fighting-both-fronts-story-370th/>
- Watch "Red Chicago": <https://www.pbs.org/video/red-chicago-ma2ihu/>

**Week Three – Great Migration and the 1919 Race Riot**

Class 5: **Quiz** on readings. **Lecture and Discussion:** *The Defender's* editorial page launches the Great Migration. The 1917 East St. Louis Riots produce a mass movement led by the NAACP. J. Weldon Johnson and Ida B. Wells-Barnett.

Class 6: **Field trip:** The Stroll, the 1919 Race Riot and the World War One Monument. Meet at the Starbucks on the corner of 35th and State streets.

**Reading/Assignments(for the following week):**

- "The Defender," Chapters 9-11
- Caton and Drake, Chapter 8, 13
- Watch "The Paper Trail": <https://vimeo.com/58356271>

**Week Four – Depression and Political Exodus**

Class 7: **Quiz** on Readings. **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.

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

**Reading/Assignments:**

- Select Topics for Research Paper
- “The Defender,” Chapters 12-16
- Caton and Drake, Chapter 14-15
- Washburn, Chapter 6

**Week Five – WW2 and Truman**

Class 9: **Quiz** on 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?

Class 10: **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.

**Reading/Assignments(for the following week):**

- Present Bibliography for Research Papers in scheduled meetings.
- “The Defender,” Chapters 17-20
- Caton and Drake, Chapters 15, 17
- Washburn, Chapter 8

**Week Six - Civil Rights in the South and the North**

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.

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.

**Reading/Assignments(for the following week):**

- “The Defender,” Chapters 21-24
- “Fire on the Prairie,” Book One, Chapters 1-11

## **Week Seven – the 70s and Harold**

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. **Student Presentations.**

Class 14: **Lecture and discussion** on 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. The Rise of Harold Washington. **Student Presentations.**

### **Reading/Assignments(for the following week):**

- Present Outline for Research Papers in scheduled meetings
- “The Defender,” Chapters 21-24
- “Fire on the Prairie,” Book 2, Chapters 12-18, and Book 3, Chapters 19-22.

## **Week Eight – After Harold**

Class 15: **Lecture and discussion** on tragic demise of Harold Washington, and the aftermath, 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. **Student Presentations.**

Class 16: **Guest Speaker: Beverly Scott**

### **Assignments:**

- Work on Final Paper

## **Week Nine**

Class 17: **Lecture and discussion** on the rise, fall and political resurrection of Rahm Emanuel. **Student Presentations.**

Class 18: **Student Presentations.**