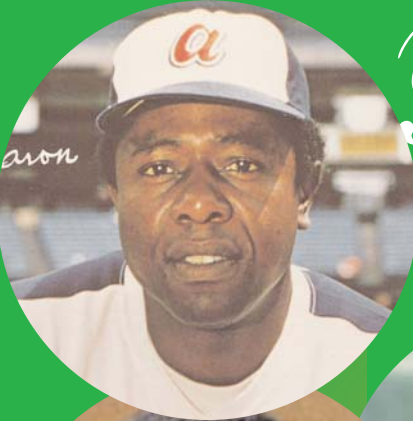
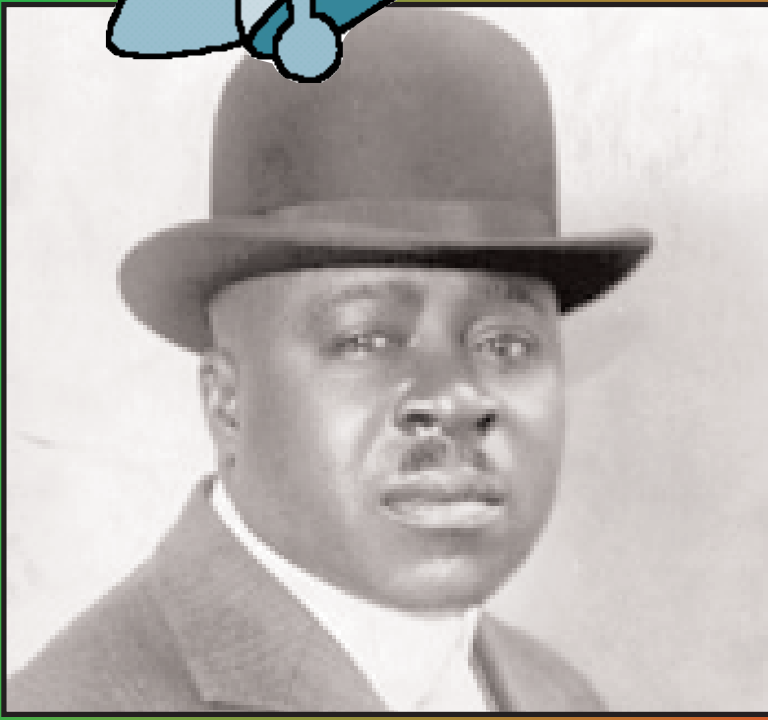


Black History Page



The Chicago Defender:



Robert S. Abbott

The Chicago Defender, which was founded by Robert S. Abbott on May 5, 1905, once heralded itself as "The World's Greatest Weekly." The newspaper was the nation's most influential black weekly newspaper by the advent of World War I, with more than two thirds of its readership base located outside of Chicago. Abbott began his journalistic

enterprise with an initial investment of 25 cents, a press run of 300 copies, and worked out of a small kitchen in his landlord's apartment. The first issues of The Defender were in the form of four-page, six column handbills and were filled with local news items gathered by Abbott and clippings from other newspapers. The Defender did not use

the words "Negro" or "black" in its pages. Instead, African Americans were referred to as "the Race" and black men and women as "Race men and Race women." The Chicago Defender's local circulation soon surpassed that of the three rival papers that existed in the Chicago area at that time: The Broad Ax, The Illinois Idea, and The Conservator. The newspaper was read extensively in the South. Black Pullman porters and entertainers were used to distribute the paper across the Mason/Dixon line. The paper was smuggled into the south because white distributors refused to circulate The Defender and many groups such as the Klu Klux Klan tried to confiscate it or threatened its readers. The Defender was passed from person to person, and read aloud in barber-shops and churches. It is estimated that at its height each paper sold was read by four to five African Americans, putting its readership at over 500,000 people each week. The Chicago Defender was the first black newspaper to have a circulation over 100,000, the first to have a health column, and the first to have a full page of comic strips.

During World War I The

Chicago Defender waged its most aggressive (and successful) campaign in support of "The Great Migration" movement. This movement resulted in over one and a half million southern blacks migrating to the North between 1915-1925. The Defender spoke of the hazards of remaining in the overtly segregated south and lauded life in the North. Job listings and train schedules were posted to facilitate the relocation. The Defender also used editorials, cartoons, and articles with blazing headlines to attract attention to the movement, and even went so far as to declare May 15, 1917 the date of the "Great Northern Drive." The Defender's support of the movement, caused southern readers to migrate to the North in record numbers. At least 110,000 came to Chicago alone between 1916-1918, nearly tripling the city's black population.

In subsequent years The Defender provided first hand coverage of events such as the Red Summer Riots of 1919, a series of race riots in cities across the country. It campaigned for anti-lynching legislation, and for integrated sports. Its columnists

included Walter White and Langston Hughes. It also published the early poems of Pulitzer Prize winning poet Gwendolyn Brooks.

In 1940 John H. Sengstacke, Abbott's nephew and heir, assumed editorial control and continued to champion for full equality. During that year, he founded and became the first president of the National Negro Publishers Association. Now known as the National Newspaper Publishers Association, the organization was established to unify publishers of African American newspapers across the country. On February 6, 1956, The Defender became The Chicago Daily Defender, the largest black-owned daily in the world. In 1965 Sengstacke purchased The Pittsburgh Courier, including it in his "Sengstacke Newspaper chain," along with such papers as The Michigan Chronicle in Detroit, and The Tri-State Defender in Memphis. John Sengstacke served as publisher of The Defender until his death in May, 1997.

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