



The Chicago Defender



Newsboy selling the Chicago Defender, photo by Jack Delano, 1942

The *Chicago Defender* (founded in 1905) served as a major tool of communication within the African-American community during the Great Migration. Based in Chicago, but also distributed widely throughout the South, the Black owned-and-operated newspaper was a vital connection between urban centers and rural communities. The *Defender's* politics were built on racial equality. Many white merchants in the South refused to sell it and the Ku Klux Klan threatened its readers. Undeterred, black Pullman porters working on the Illinois Central Railroad smuggled and distributed the paper into Southern cities and towns. The paper's eye-catching cartoons, provocative headlines, job listings, and unequivocally pro-Black editorials encouraged many African Americans in the South to join the growing population in the industrial North.

Letter Received by the *Chicago Defender*

Dear Sir: I have been reading the Chicago Defender and seeing so many advertisements about the work in the north I thought to write you concerning my condition. I am working hard in the south and can hardly earn a living. I have a wife and one child and can hardly feed them. I thought to write and ask you for some information concerning how to get a pass for myself and family. I don't want to leave my family behind as I can't hardly make a living for them right here with them and I know they would fare hard if I would leave them. If there are any agents in the south there haven't been any of them to Lutcher if they would come here they would get at least fifty men. Please sir let me hear from you as quick as possible. Now this is all. Please don't publish my letter, I was out in town today talking to some of the men and they say if they could get passes that 30 or 40 of them would come. But they haven't got the money and they don't know how to come. But they are good strong and able working men. If you will instruct me I will instruct the other men how to come as they all want to work. Please don't publish this because we have to whisper this around among our selves because the white folks are angry now because the negroes are going north.

-- [Anonymous author], Lutcher, Louisiana; May 13, 1917