

Handout #1: Promoting Migration: *The Chicago Defender*



The Chicago Defender, founded in 1905, is a weekly newspaper targeted toward an African-American audience. In the first half of the 20th Century the *Defender* frequently reported news relating to race relations. Starting around 1910, the *Defender* began running articles and political cartoons urging southern Blacks to move north. These articles often portray the North as a “promised land” and an escape from the tensions of the Jim Crow South. Below, Images A and B offer two examples of content from the *Defender*. Image C reveals the anxious reactions the *Defender*’s promotions sometimes generated in the white South.

In 1925, south of the Mason-Dixon line, the vast majority of southern African Americans worked in rural areas as sharecroppers or landowning farmers. Only 6% of the region’s African Americans were employed in urban industrial jobs. In the North, however, 55% of employed African Americans were working in urban areas at industrial jobs, in textiles, steel, automobile manufacturing and more. Most of that work involved unskilled labor, done under white direction.

Image A

Invites All North

The Defender invites all to come north. Plenty of room for the good, sober, industrious men. Plenty of work... Come join the ranks of the free. Cast the yoke from around your neck. See the light. When you have crossed the Ohio river, breathe the fresh air and say, "Why didn't I come before?"

The Chicago Defender, 1915

Image B

BOUND FOR THE PROMISED LAND

BY MR. WARD

From Florida's stormy banks I go,
I'll bid' the South hood-bye;
No longer shall they treat me so,
And knock me in the eye.
The Northern States is where I'm bound,
My cross is more than double—
If the Chief Executive can be found,
I'll tell him all my trouble.
Thousands of boys have gone before,
And enjoying their Northern lives,
There's nothing at all they can deplore,
So they wrote their wives.
Thousands of others are clamoring to go,
To join the glorious son.

If me and a cracker should have a fight,
And he knocks me in the jaw,
It's counted to him as being "right"
According to "Cracker" law.
But if I swing on a "Cracker's" jaw
With all my feeble might,
Right from that will start a war,
And I'll have the State to fight.

All they've sown against the "nigger,"
They'll reap as sure as you're born.
Their time is out, they can't grow
bigger!
They've dragged my race to scorn.
Yes, we will rise up, bye and bye,
And make the "Crackers" sink below,
Big tears shall drop from each one's eye,
They've been warned of this before.

The Chicago Defender, 1918

Image C

'THE DEFENDER' BANNED

PINE BLUFF, Ark., Feb. 24.—Eighteen leaders of the Colored community here, including two ministers, two school principals and professional men, have been named defendants in a suit filed by city officials seeking an injunction to prohibit circulation in the county of a Chicago newspaper on the ground that the paper tended to incite the Colored people. A temporary restraining order was obtained.

Arkansas Democrat, 1917

Questions for Groups

1. What evidence can be found that reveals *The Chicago Defender's* view of life in the North? Provide specifics.
2. Why might the *The Chicago Defender* be banned in the South?
3. Based on the types of jobs and living environments available to African Americans in the North versus the South, speculate as to how everyday life might have been different in the two regions?
4. The Northern industries in which migrating African Americans often found employment were typically white-owned and white-managed. Migrants regularly assumed the lowest positions in those industries. With this in mind, do you think prejudice remained an issue in the everyday lives of the African Americans who settled in the North, hoping to leave the inequities of the South behind them?
5. What value does a primary source have as historical evidence?