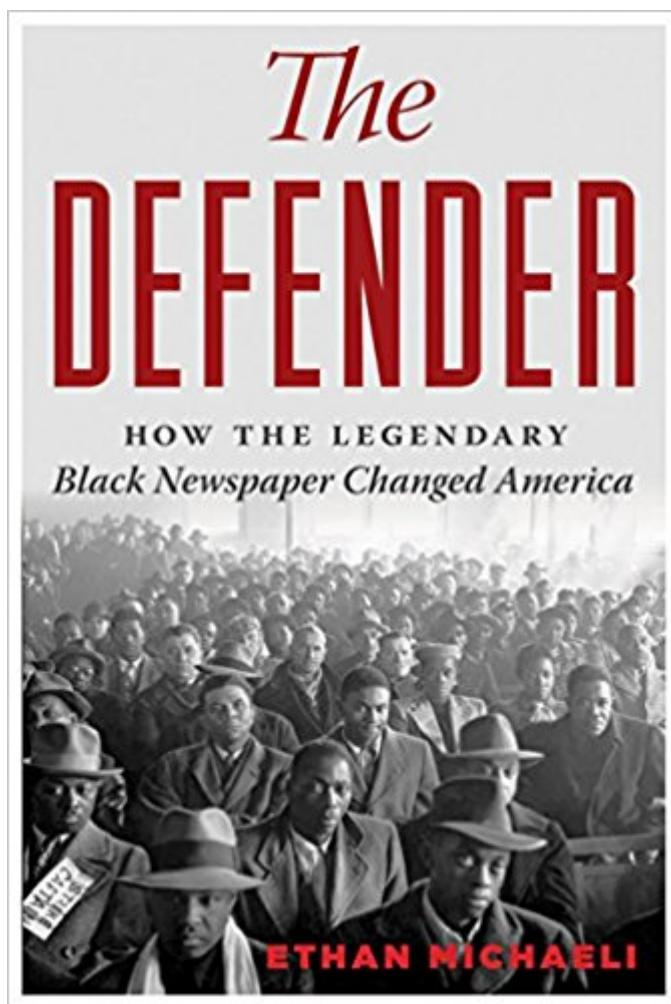


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# The Defender: How The Legendary Black Newspaper Changed America



## Synopsis

“An extraordinary history” Deeply researched, elegantly written—a towering achievement that will not be soon forgotten. • Brent Staples, New York Times Book Review  
NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY The New York Times Book Review  
The Washington Post • Giving voice to the voiceless, the Chicago Defender condemned Jim Crow, catalyzed the Great Migration, and focused the electoral power of black America. Robert S. Abbott founded The Defender in 1905, smuggled hundreds of thousands of copies into the most isolated communities in the segregated South, and was dubbed a “Modern Moses,” becoming one of the first black millionaires in the process. His successor wielded the newspaper’s clout to elect mayors and presidents, including Harry S. Truman and John F. Kennedy, who would have lost in 1960 if not for The Defender’s support. Along the way, its pages were filled with columns by legends like Ida B. Wells, Langston Hughes, and Martin Luther King. Drawing on dozens of interviews and extensive archival research, Ethan Michaeli constructs a revelatory narrative of race in America and brings to life the reporters who braved lynch mobs and policemen’s clubs to do their jobs, from the age of Teddy Roosevelt to the age of Barack Obama.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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Review "Conscientiously researched and fluent, The Defender is essentially a record of the African-American struggle in our times." *Wall Street Journal* "Ethan Michaeli's epic, meticulously detailed account not only reminds its readers that newspapers matter, but so do black lives, past and present." *USA Today* "This prodigiously researched work is a testament to the courage of Defender writers through the century, a chronicle of the influence of an important institution -- and a sweeping history of black America." *National Book Review* "A fascinating account of the legendary black newspaper that spoke truth to power, fought for equality and made history." *Minneapolis Star Tribune* "A captivating read." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* "A sprawling, well-researched panoramic with surprisingly fluid prose." *In These Times* "This is history at its best -- engagingly written, meticulously researched, and infused with fascinating characters and vivid scenes. Ethan Michaeli tells an important American story, and tells it with style and remarkable attention to detail." *Dean Jobb*, author of *Empire of Deception*, writing for the judges of the Chicago Writers Association, from whom The Defender received the 2016 Award for Non-Fiction (Traditionally Published) "Ethan Michaeli's *The Defender* is a rich, majestic, sweeping history, both of a newspaper and of a people. In these pages, Michaeli captures the degradation and exhilaration of black America in the twentieth century, and driving this story are a handful of men and women infused with incredible courage and a deep faith in journalism's power to seek justice." *Alex Kotlowitz*, author of *There Are No Children Here*. "In the spring of 1905 Robert Abbott sat at a card table squeezed into a corner of a realtor's office on Chicago's South Side to put together the first issue of a newspaper he called The Defender. In the 110 years since it has more than lived up to its name, its pages filled with searing reports of racial injustice and fierce editorials in support of its readers' rights. Now Ethan Michaeli has recreated The Defender's remarkable history and reminded us of the power of the press at its courageous best." *Kevin Boyle*, author of the National Book Award-winning *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights and Murder in the Jazz Age* "This is a major work of American history the compelling and richly-researched story of the legendary newspaper and the astonishing collection of history-makers whose lives are forever intertwined." *Jonathan Alter*, author of *The Center Holds: Obama and his Enemies* "Here, at long last, is the story that needed to be told. In *The Defender*, Ethan Michaeli has laid out the power and importance of a fearless newspaper in the struggle for black equality. Meticulously researched, engagingly written, Michaeli's landmark history of this storied

institution, which has served at key moments as lens, interpreter, catalyst or voice for blacks—full citizenship rights, will become an essential resource in African American cultural and political studies. •Carol Anderson, Professor of African American Studies at Emory University, author of *White Rage* “The story of the Chicago Defender is one of the great untold stories of black America — if not the great story. At every crucial juncture, from the northern migration, to Pullman strikes to civil rights right up to Barack Obama, the Defender was there chronicling, advocating and building an entire civic, political and intellectual universe. It is remarkable to me that this book wasn’t written until now and an absolute god-send that Ethan Michaeli has stepped in to fill the void.” •Chris Hayes, author of *Twilight of the Elites*, host of MSNBC’s “All In with Chris Hayes.” “Ethan Michaeli’s compelling book represents social history at its finest. The Defender explores America’s long struggle with race through the unique lens of an essential and underappreciated Chicago newspaper at the center of it all.” •David Maraniss, author of *Once in a Great City: A Detroit Story* “For more than a century, the South Side of Chicago has been a hub of African-American history, and throughout the years, that saga has been told through the pages of the Chicago Defender newspaper. In this compelling book, Ethan Michaeli shares the story of the Defender and the essential role it has played in Chicago’s black community and beyond.” •David Axelrod, author of *Believer: My Forty Years in Politics* “With meticulous attention to detail and in immensely readable prose, Ethan Michaeli, who once worked for the paper, tells The Chicago Defender’s story and, through it, that of African Americans in the twentieth century. It is a masterful work that goes a long way toward explaining why we are where we are now.” •Jessica B. Harris, Professor of English, Queens College/ CUNY and author of *High on the Hog: A Culinary Journey From Africa to America* “Just as the Defender has broken important journalistic ground time and again in its storied history, author Ethan Michaeli is an original and intrepid force in Chicago media, having devoted his life to elevating and celebrating the silenced voices of Chicago’s public housing projects. Michaeli on the Defender is an unbeatable combination.” •Dave Isay, founder of StoryCorps, author of *Listening is an Act of Love* “The Defender is the kind of superb nonfiction you don’t see much anymore—a big, fluidly written, marvelously researched story about fascinating people who shaped American culture. Ethan Michaeli has written a book that is as important as it is compulsively readable.” •Jonathan Eig, author of *The Birth of the Pill*

This is a major work of American history the compelling and richly researched story of the legendary African American newspaper and the astonishing collection of history-makers whose lives are forever intertwined. Jonathan Alter, author of *The Center Holds: Obama and His Enemies* Giving voice to the voiceless, *The Chicago Defender* condemned Jim Crow, catalyzed the Great Migration, and focused the electoral power of black America. Robert S. Abbott founded *The Defender* in 1905, smuggled hundreds of thousands of copies into the most isolated communities in the segregated South, and was dubbed a Modern Moses, becoming one of the first black millionaires in the process. His successor wielded the newspaper's clout to elect mayors and presidents, including Harry S. Truman and John F. Kennedy, who would have lost in 1960 if not for *The Defender's* support. Along the way, its pages were filled with columns by legends like Ida B. Wells, Langston Hughes, and Martin Luther King Jr. Drawing on dozens of interviews and extensive archival research, Ethan Michaeli constructs a revelatory narrative of race in America and brings to life the reporters who braved lynch mobs and policemen's clubs to do their jobs, from the age of Teddy Roosevelt to the age of Barack Obama."

This is a beautiful book and is well deserving of all its recognition. I am grateful to Mr. Michaeli for writing it crisply and capably. It recounts history that is poorly understood. I am in my late 60s and lived through many of the events that form the backdrop to what the exceptional people at the *Defender* accomplished. I had missed many of them in both tone and specificity. For example, while I knew that both Truman and JFK had won close elections and that the African American press made a big difference in JFK's, it had not been counted out for me that this very newspaper led these victories. It makes little difference that I am finally learning more about how institutional racism erases the memory of the past, since I near the end of my life. If you are young, please read this book. Mr. Michaeli deals very well with the challenges and mechanics of how the *Defender* rose. He is less analytic (and maybe not interested) in how it declined and if its decline could have been stopped. I recently watched Henry Gates' documentary about Black America Since MLK which deals more analytically about how the successes of the movement were the foundation of many of the problems that we face today. As we all know, only about 10% of the population are leaders and in both the civil rights and the women's movement, when we were ostracized, our leaders were concentrated and many constructive things happened. As wealthier neighborhoods and high end schools integrated, many leaders have appropriately left the community, leaving concentrated poverty, and perhaps concentrated followership, behind. A similar thing has happened to feminism. As we enter a new federal administration, I was surprised by power of a whole new media

constructed by a cohort of white supremacists financed by the Koch brothers' network. It has a language that is the opposite of respectful and has reincarnated the fact free world of yellow journalism and threatened violence that the Defender confronted when it was founded. I have been astonished by how well it has played our MSM for fools. Per Caitlin Moran, we will not be able recover until we have an honest platform and a language that is respectful. Hence, reading about how the Defender confronted and chipped away at a far worse media and far worse white supremacy was uplifting, if sad. The Defender's model of a subscription based media platform is being replicated to a limited extent today. If you are in pain about how middled aged women put a groper in the White House, read this book. The heroes in it lived through far worse and did not lose heart.

A must read those who wish to understand, not just Chicago, but the entirety of 20th-mid 21st Century Black/White race relations in the US. Ethan Michaeli's gripping historical account of the impact of the preeminent Black newspaper, The Chicago Defender, is not an easy read, but a thoughtful, carefully crafted one. Michaeli's brief report on his own tenure at the press as a young Jewish journalist is written with a clarity and modesty that other authors could (and should) emulate. The fact that he was assigned to report on the early activities of Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam, and was accepted by them to cover their stories lets us know that he is a reliable (and courageous!) author. For important economic and social insights into the history of our American racial disconnection, look no further than "The Defender. "

This is a rare journey through the history of Black journalism in America. It's revealing, detailed and forthright, a credit to the author's insight and his dedication to giving the reader a complete picture of the fascinating evolution and influence of The Defender. The story of America is often the story of race and this is an important chapter in that continuing saga.

This book was very well researched and was extremely interesting and informative for the first half. The story became less focused after that, probably because the Defender was in decline and the events of those years were much more familiar to me.

I originally listened to this book on a Playaway and it was so full of great historical information I decided I to go ahead and just buy the book for future reference!

So much I did not know. Excellent description of the struggle for human rights and those in the forefront. I loved the book. Major

An urgent and necessary education as to the meaningful, significant efforts of Chicago's preeminent news reporter / publisher .

Offers an in depth view of a particularly significant era in African American politics and life in Chicago . I thoroughly enjoyed The Defender and recommended it to other ex-Chicagoans.

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