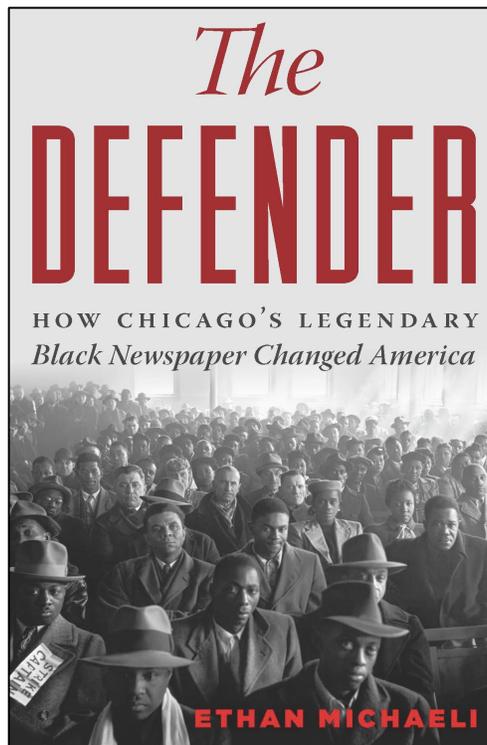


How Frederick Douglass Went to the 1893 Chicago World's Fair and Inspired a New Generation of Civil Rights Leaders

A **Black History Month** Public Lecture by **Ethan Michaeli**

Thursday, February 18th, 12:30pm, 222 O'Leary

Drawing on research for his recently published book:



“Deeply researched, elegantly written ... a towering achievement that will not be soon forgotten.” – *New York Times*

Ethan Michaeli is an award-winning author, publisher and journalist based in Chicago. He was a copy editor and investigative reporter at *The Defender* from 1991 to 1996.

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The 1893 World's Fair was a transformational moment for millions of Americans, an explosion of light and sound and technology in a nation that was still mostly dark and quiet. For African Americans, the Fair was also a chance to organize resistance to the legal segregation then being imposed on them. Throughout the former Confederacy, less than 30 years after the end of the Civil War, whites used lynching, rape and other forms of violence and intimidation to keep African Americans from participating in the democratic process, then passed laws which made life in the region separate and unequal.

But at the World's Fair, Frederick Douglass did his best to stem the tide. Dubbed the 'Sage of Anacostia,' the 75-year-old escaped slave, abolitionist and confidante of Abraham Lincoln was indefatigable, speaking at multiple events and gathering a new generation of young African American activists to the Haitian Pavilion, where Douglass served as ambassador. Among those mentored by Douglass at the Fair were the anti-lynching journalist Ida B. Wells and poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar as well as James Weldon Johnson, who would go on to run the NAACP, and Oscar DePriest, who would become the first African American congressman from the North.

Robert Sengstacke Abbott was also one of those who was inspired by Douglass. Abbott was born in rural Georgia to two emancipated slaves, but his experiences in Douglass's circle at the World's Fair convinced him that Chicago was the place to launch his personal mission of starting a newspaper that would be a "defender of his people."

Taking advantage of the technology which changed newspaper publishing from a boutique, artisanal effort into a cheap, industrial process, Abbott launched the Chicago Defender in 1905. After years of penury, Abbott succeeded in making the Defender the first-ever national communications vehicle for Black America. The Defender would go on to catalyze the Great Migration, prompt the integration of the U.S. Armed Forces, and focus African American electoral power to elect congressmen, mayors and presidents, including Harry Truman and John F. Kennedy, who certainly would have lost the 1960 race to Richard Nixon if not for the Defender's support.

All the while, even decades after Abbott's death, the Defender would operate under a "Platform for America" whose first tenet was paraphrased from one of Douglass's speech at the World's Fair: "American Race Prejudice Must Be Destroyed."