

Letters to Chicago Defender:

letter from Cedar Grove, Louisiana, April 23, 1917

I am informed by the Chicago Defender a very valuable paper which has for its purpose the Uplifting of my race that you were in position to show some light to one in my condition. If this is true kindly inform me by next mail the next best thing to do. Being a poor man with a family to care for, I am not coming to live on flowery Beds of ease for I am a man who works and wish to make the best I can out of life I do not wish to come there hoodwinked not knowing where to go or what to do so I solicit your help in this matter and thanking you in advance for what advice you may be pleased to Give I am yours for success.

letter from Houston, Texas, April 30, 1917

I am 30 years old and have good experience in freight handling and fill position in trucking. Would like Chicago or Philadelphia But I don't care where so long as I go where a man is a man.

letter to Defender, not dated and place sent from unknown

I see in one of your recent issue of colored men wanted in the North. I wish you would help me to get a position in the North I have no trade I have been working for one company eight years and there is no advancement here for me and I would like to come where I can better my condition. I want work and am not afraid to work all I wish is a chance to make good.

Louis Armstrong, jazz musician, 1922, remembering his arrival in Chicago from New Orleans:

I never seen a city that big. All those tall buildings. I thought they were universities. I said, no, this is the wrong city. I was fixing to take the next train back home. . . .

Richard Wright, author of *Native Son* and *Black Boy*:

It was strange to pause before a crowded newsstand and buy a newspaper without having to wait until a white man was served. And yet, because everything was so new I began to grow tense again, although it was a different tension than I had known before. I knew that this machine-city was governed by strange laws and I wondered if I would ever learn them.

Lucy Jefferson in 1965, quoted in Studs Terkel, *Division Street: America*

When I first came [to Chicago] from Mississippi, I was so young and ignorant. But I was freer, you know? I had a little more room to move around in than I have now. I think the white man wasn't so afraid then. There wasn't enough of us. There's too many of us now. I think that's what frightened him. Nobody noticed you then. You were there, but nobody bothered about seeing you.