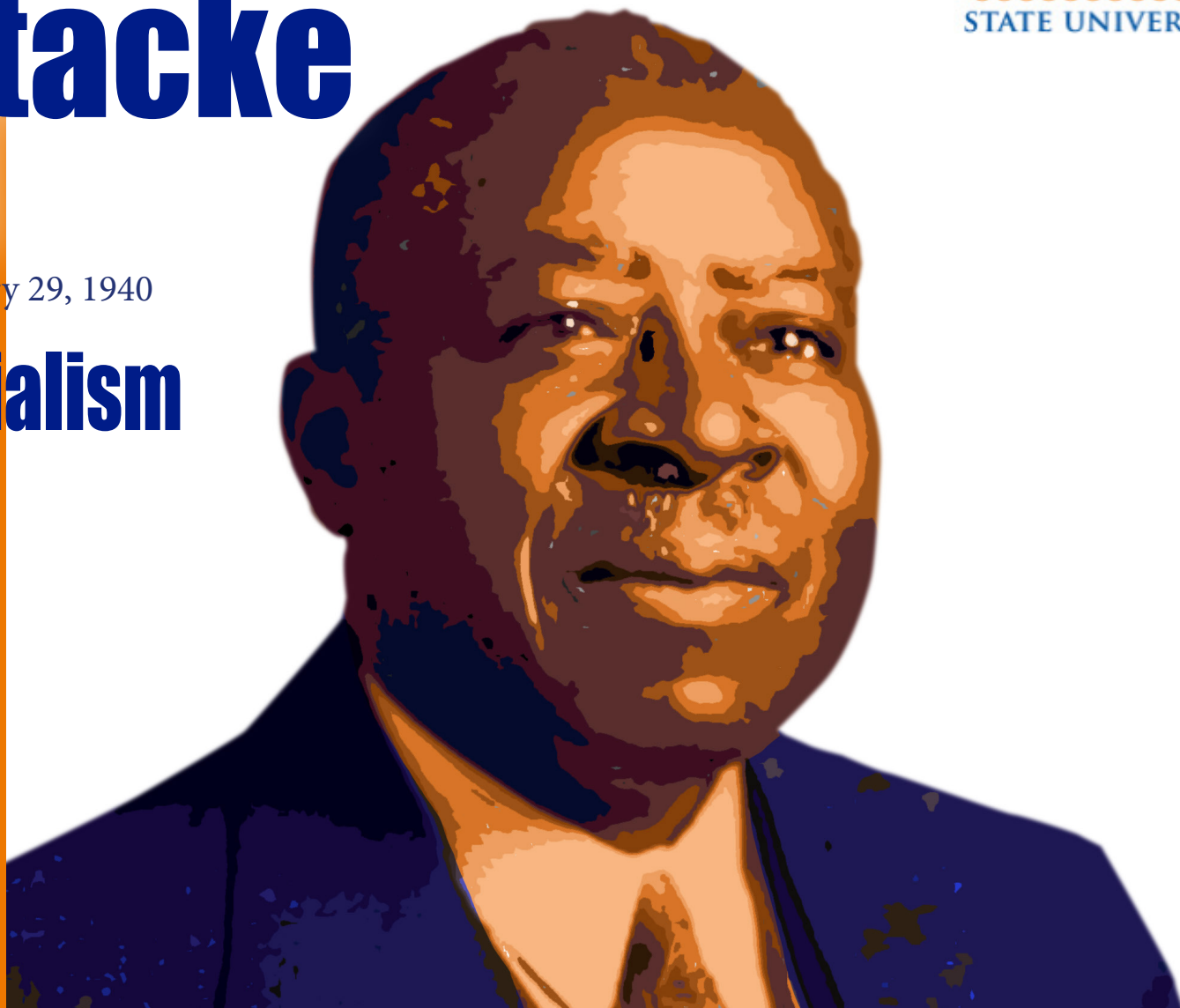


Robert Sengstacke Abbott

November 24, 1870 - February 29, 1940

Entrepreneurialism



“No greater glory, not a greater honor, is the lot of a man departing than a feeling possessed deep in his heart that the world is a better place for his having lived.” Robert Sengstacke Abbott

Robert Sengstacke Abbott was one of the first African American self-made millionaires due to his success with the most widely-read African-American news papers in the United States, *The Chicago Defender*, supporting racial advancement, promoting pride and documenting the case against injustice within its pages.

Abbott was born to former slaves on St. Simons Island, Georgia on November 24, 1870. He studied printmaking at *The Hampton Institute*, exposing him to options outside of the South. Abbott then decided to study and practice law, which he attempted, but returned to his roots in printing due to the prejudices in the legal system. Utilizing **the soft skill of entrepreneurialism** Abbott founded *The Chicago Defender* (*The Defender*) specifically to meet the needs of the African American community and the success was much more than he ever imagined. The publication reached more than 200,000 people by the 1920s. *The Defender* is known to have been read aloud in group settings in barber shops, on trains, and at beauty salons throughout the African American communities, likely reaching as many as 500,000 each week. The descriptive “Black” and “Negro” were never used in publications and were substituted with the term “the Race.” The paper was

distributed throughout the South and encouraged African Americans to leave the South and move Northeast, Midwest and West in order to increase opportunity. *The Defender* is credited with causing the African American population in Chicago to triple into the 1920s. As a result of *The Defender's* Success, the entrepreneur Abbott became one of the first African American self-made millionaires.

In 1923, Abbott created Bud Billiken, a fictional character embodying a symbol of pride for African American hope for the residents of Chicago during the Great Depression. In 1929, a parade was organized by Abbott in the name of Bud Billiken and is still the oldest and largest African American parade in the United States.

Robert Sengstacke Abbott died of an acute kidney disease on February 29, 1940, at the age of 69. Although Abbott had no children, he left the paper in good hands with his nephew, John H.H. Sengstacke, III. *The Chicago Defender* remained a printed newspaper until 2019, when it became an online-only publication. The Robert S. Abbott House in Chicago is now an historic landmark.

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