

The Voice of the People: African Americans in the Early 20th Century

**By Timothy N. Pinnick
Email: pinnick.aabooks@gmail.com**

Despite the Supreme Court sanctioned segregation, Jim Crow laws, and the like, the lives of African Americans were anything but dark and dreary.

But what was the African American community like in the early 20th century?

How did they dress?

How did they play?

What did they read?

What did they think?

What was the makeup of their community when it came to institutions and organizations?

The vibrancy and accomplishments of blacks was chronicled wonderfully through a number of important race publications that emerged in the early decades of the 1900s. And at the start of the century, W. E. B. Du Bois showed the world the essence of African American life at the Paris Exposition where he displayed several hundred wonderful photographs to illustrate the progress and beauty of the darker race. These images were rediscovered in the Library of Congress and more than one hundred and fifty of them were published with essays by David Levering Lewis and Deborah Willis in *A Small Nation of People: W. E. B. Du Bois and African American Portraits of Progress*.

C-Span video of those involved in the publication of *A Small Nation of People*:

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?179466-1/a-small-nation-people>

Detailed Information on the 5 Publications

Although this presentation will not go beyond these 5 magazines/serials/journals, you can learn about them and many others in an indispensable book offering historical and descriptive profiles of over 100 African American periodicals. *Black Journals of the United States* by Walter C. Daniel contains journals dating from 1827 to the 1980s, and entries range from Jet & Ebony, to [Frederick] Douglass' Monthly and Phylon [created by W.E.B. DuBois]. The book is conveniently laid out in alphabetical order.

Locating the 5 Publications

The period being discussed is one in which material is generally out of copyright. Therefore, you can find nearly all of it online. Internet Archives, Hathi Trust, and Google Books are three excellent places to seek out these resources. But there are always advantages to going to a library on a college campus that will have potentially greater online access and offer many of the items in bound volumes. Using

WorldCat is a good way to discover institutions near you that have the material of interest. One additional tip is to find a library that permits member access to Hathi Trust (perhaps as an alumni or Friend of the Library). That platform has a large collection of relevant material for African American research beyond these publications and oftentimes it is severely limited to non-members. If you are fortunate enough to obtain a Library of Congress card, it is a member institution and will give you full privileges.

Links to the 5 Publications

Colored American Magazine. Published from 1900-1909.

Multiple sources online; has its own website that is constantly being improved:
<http://coloredamerican.org/>

Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races. Published from 1910-present. Magazine of the NAACP.

The Modernist Journal Project website has issues from 1910-22: <https://modjournal.org/> See also The Online Books Page (University of Pennsylvania):
<https://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/serial?id=crisisnaacp>

Negro Yearbook: An Annual Encyclopedia of the Negro. Published beginning in 1912. Total of 10 produced with sporadic dates. Edited by Department of Records and Research at Tuskegee.

Tuskegee University Archives Repository | Collection: The Negro Yearbook
<http://archive.tuskegee.edu/repository/digital-collection/the-negro-yearbook/>

Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life. Published from 1923-1949. Magazine of the National Urban League.

Issue information from The Online Books Page (University of Pennsylvania):
<https://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/serial?id=opportunity>

The Voice of the Negro. Published from 1904-1907.

Link for all volumes at HathiTrust (*not sure of the level of access)
<https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/006784893>