
In this article, “Florestine Perrault Collins and the Gendered Politics of Black Portraiture in 1920s New Orleans,” Arthe Anthony provides the reader with a succinct look at one of the first African-American female photographers in this nation. Born in Louisiana, Florestine Collins always knew she wanted to be a photographer from the time she took her first job at the age of fourteen to assist her father with the family’s debt load. Due to the Jim Crow regime of the South, Collins had to “pass” in order to be considered for the job as a photographer since all potential employers were white.

For apparent reasons, Collins had to keep her racial identity secret for years. In an interview, she informs Anthony that had her employers known she was indeed black, they “probably would not have allowed her to take pictures.” During a time when black women served primarily in domestic or servant roles, “the contours of Collins's career mirrored a complicated interplay of gender, racial, and class expectations.” Ultimately, she was still expected to be a wife, mother, homemaker, etc. while performing her career duties. As a result, Collins was required for a few years to obscure her creativity in order to meet cultural demands during the New Negro Renaissance. However, Collins defied the expectations of those around her and took remarkable, yet provocative images of her clientele that often landed her in heated debates with the men within her inner circle.

To culminate the article, Anthony states, “Collins was able to challenge both conservative female gender roles and white racial prejudice by relying on her family and friends—many of whom were not black Creoles—as she refined and expanded her business.” She was able to transcend photographic boundaries by enhancing her friends’ natural beauty and sensuality. Florestine Perrault Collins’s photographs “illuminated how New Orleans African Americans pictured themselves, constructing self-images of black women and children in opposition to the pervasive racial stereotypes that worked to rationalize racial discrimination and segregation.”

This article is of use for one studying the New Negro Renaissance as it provides for the reader evidence of the African-American woman’s struggle for identity. The author makes several references to the gender and social obstacles most black women faced in the early twentieth century. However, Anthony identifies the victories Collins obtained by remaining resolute to her craft.

Teachers could use this article, along with the photographs, to discuss African-American gender roles before, during, and after the New Negro Renaissance. What was the significance of “passing” during the New Negro Renaissance? Would Collins have had to “pass” in order to receive training had she been in the North? Was Collins prolific as a photographer? (Takisha Durm)


Originally published in 1938 in the Journal of Negro History, Jessie Parkhurst’s article provides a rather insightful look into the responsibilities of the “Mammy” figures on the plantation, as well as the benefits those figures enjoyed as compared to others on the plantation.

Parkhurst outlines specific duties of and qualities found in the “Mammy” figure. Of course, she was responsible for household chores such as cooking, cleaning, and child rearing. However, these duties were intended for the “Mammy’s” white household and not her black household—her own children and husband. “Mammies” were also expected to possess the following characteristics: they had to be self-respecting, independent, loyal, forward, gentle, capacious, affectionate, true, strong, just, warm hearted, compassionate, fearless, popular, brave, good, pious, skillful, tender, queenly, thrifty, discreet, tyrannical, and patient.

The article speaks positively about the role of the “Mammy,” suggesting, for instance, that her children often grew up with the Master’s children and were sold only in cases of extreme financial hardship. The article also mentions that in the event that the Mistress was away, or incapacitated, or had died, the “Mammy” would assume temporary—but total—control of the household. Also interesting was the fact that the “Mammy” usually enjoyed a genial, intimate relationship with the Master and Mistress, while the overseer’s wife—a white woman—was often shunned or kept at a distance.

This article is clearly and simply written and would be useful for anyone interested in the historical context from which the “Mammy” stereotype evolved and entered popular culture. (Laura Decker)


The writer sets the stage for this article by quoting a passage from Langston Hughes’s “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” 1926: “If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn’t matter… If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn’t matter.” Hughes strengthens this passage by ending as follows: “We build our temple for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on the top of the mountain, from within ourselves.”

Even before the Harlem Renaissance at the turn of the twentieth century it was said that words, visual images, and musical expression of Black Americans had begun to be celebrated in American Popular Culture like never before. Black intelligentsia of the 1890s displayed a new consciousness. W.E.B. Du Bois, cofounder of the NAACP and editor of its magazine, *The Crisis*, articulated this idealism. Du Bois and new activist Marcus Garvey of the Universal Improvement Association manifesto were strongly promoting black self-esteem and racial pride at that time. For the next twenty-five years, the two activists, Du Bois and Garvey, energized the growth and blossoming of the New Negro Art Movement. This black renaissance, later called the Harlem Renaissance, staged the social and cultural activities of the community a few decades removed from slavery and reconstruction. This new movement was in a position to infuse the old American consciousness with fresh, new positive images of development and self-determination.

The intelligentsia of the 1890s produced a tremendous body of work. Their objective was to engender a realistic portrayal of black life to replace the exaggerated, derogatory images of black-faced minstrel singers and coon-like popular figures at the time. Characters of the commercial market that were used to promote products, like the “Gold Dust Twins,” Aunt Jemima, and Uncle Ben—iconic figures of servitude and slavery—that had to be eliminated and never more used or seen as luminaries. This new, dignified opposition and the sensibility to literature were associated with upcoming playwrights of folklore, the novelist Zora Neale Hurston, poet Countee Cullen, and poet/author Langston Hughes.

The author points out that in the 1920s and 1930s there was a mass migration of blacks from the South to the North. Within this great migration came a group of educated black men and women called “The Talented Tenth,” who were the black elites of that time. “The Talented Tenth” were the brain-trust of this era. “The Talented Tenth” was a term coined by Du Bois during the Harlem Renaissance to describe the phenomenon of one in ten black people becoming influential in the world, through methods such as continuing their education, writing books, or becoming directly involved in social change.

The “new negro” had political influence and black aesthetic involvement in literature, music, film, theater, and visual arts. Allen Locke’s writings discussed the influence of African
Arts on modernism, which was a shift from the stiff traditional forms of European sculpture and paintings to kinetics inspired by African Sculpture.

Egypt was said to be more than a source of motifs of the popular Art Deco Movement. For some blacks it was the birthplace of the “Negro Race” and signaled a line of descent and consciousness. The African-American visual artists’ collective skills left an abundance of work for the contemporary community to draw upon. (Roy Fraction)


**Autobiography / Biography:**


Ben Neihart’s “urban historical,” *Rough Amusements: The True Story of A’Lelia Walker, Patroness of the Harlem Renaissance’s Down-Low Culture,* is a true story. Neihart provides the reader with an intimate look into the life of A’Lelia Walker, the daughter of the multi-millionaire hair and beauty tycoon, Madame C. J. Walker, by incorporating both first- and third-person narratives in the book. The novel begins in the voice of Langston Hughes, who is torn between his fondness for A’Lelia and his devotion to the “Talented Tenth.” According to Hughes, his “uptight writerly peers,” otherwise known as “aristocratic fools,” snubbed Walker “for her decadence, for her roots, for her lack of deep reading in European literature, for her lack of deep recklessness, for her loud, long extraordinary parties…” Furthermore, they [Harlem snobs] considered Walker to be “dumb, or lazy, living off her mother’s hard work.” As a result of the negative stigma that surrounded Walker, Hughes struggled internally with being seen in public with the patroness.

Although Neihart commences with such a dismal overview of the heiress, he continues to give the narratives of those who secretly coveted a relationship with Walker. One such person was Geraldyn Dismond, the chief editor for the *Inter-State Tattler,* one of the most prominent black gossipy weekly newspapers. In Chapter 11, Dismond discusses how she left her husband behind to attend the elaborate parties. In one particular scene, Dismond eagerly anticipates sipping on the finest champagne while reclining on one of Walker’s magnificent sofas, all while absorbing the eclectic scenery.

Throughout the book, Neihart remains true to the subject. He incorporates accurate depictions of the New Negro Renaissance through the voices of those who actually lived during the era. As a result, he flamboyantly paints an intimate portrait of A’Lelia Walker’s life.

This book is an easy read and could be used in any middle school or high school class. However, the book does contain explicit language and should be previewed by the classroom teacher before incorporating it into the curriculum. (Takisha Durm)


In this book, the author Rodger Streitmatter focuses on the lives of various African-American women throughout history. However, Streitmatter has published the accomplishments
of a few women who reached the apex of their career during the New Negro Renaissance by purposefully “defying conformance to the limited spheres that society defined as those of the African-American woman.” He continues to venerate these women by illustrating how each woman “chose not to submit quietly to the oppression with which society attempted to subjugate her.” He goes further to state how “individuals working in the African-American press have been some of the most important leaders of African-American history.”

In the chapter “Charlotta A. Bass: Radical Precursor of the Black Power Movement,” Rodger Streitmatter chronicles the life of Charlotta Bass, the editor and publisher of the California Eagle. Bass, who purchased the weekly at a public auction for fifty dollars, was the paper’s “publisher, editor, reporter, business manager, distributor, printer, and janitor.” Although a prolific business owner, Bass used her literary genius to trump the status quo of the New Negro Renaissance era. In the 1920s, Bass sued and ultimately won a case against the KKK by employing her journalistic skills to expose a “plot to rid Los Angeles of its three most effective black leaders by involving them in a traffic accident and having them unfairly convicted of driving while intoxicated.” Because of her commitment to the advancement of the African-American community, Bass’s popularity grew, allowing the Eagle to hire “a staff of 12 and publish 25 pages a week.” As a result, the Eagle became the “largest African-American newspaper on the West Coast.”

From a gender perspective, Streitmatter devoted his research exclusively to the African-American female. However, to use this book for the New Negro Renaissance, one would have to carefully read each selection because the author does not readily connect the subject to the period. As a result, one has to have some background knowledge of the time period in order to know whether the individual’s contributions were relevant. Classroom teachers will find this book full of primary source information that could easily be translated into any classroom.

(Takisha Durm)

Books / Book Chapters:


This is a book by a collector of black memorabilia for other collectors. Unlike some other books for collectors, the author stresses an understanding of the memorabilia’s historical and social contexts (even including a timeline of African-American history) and hopes collecting will encourage people to learn more about the past. The author recounts his first, shocked encounter with black memorabilia and his coming to terms with it. At first it brought up memories of growing up under segregation and the hurts and indignities of racism. But he grew to appreciate the memorabilia as part of the African-American past, a past that should not be swept away and forgotten. Buster joins many black celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey, Bill Cosby, and Whoopi Goldberg as an avid collector.

For collectors, each chapter ends with advice on auctions, spotting fakes, displaying and preserving memorabilia, collecting specific in-demand items such as dolls and sports memorabilia, and navigating the internet to find and acquire items. Beginning with memorabilia
from slave days, the author ends with a discussion of “Tomorrow’s Memorabilia.” Of particular help is the breadth of the items represented in the book, including entertainment posters, advertisements, knick-knacks, and photos. The high quality photographs assist in identification of objects and other materials. The sections on dolls during the era of the New Negro Renaissance give a good overview of the themes of folk dolls in contrast to manufactured dolls, proliferation of popular dolls that promoted racist images of African-Americans, and the efforts of African-Americans such as Zora Neale Hurston and Mary McCleod Bethune and whites such as Sara Lee Creech and Eleanor Roosevelt to manufacture and promote an ethnically accurate baby doll for black children by the late 1940s.

This book is important in understanding popular cultural images of African-Americans throughout American history. The author is sensitive to the impact that derogatory images of blacks among the memorabilia made on the population, particularly when these images were the only ones seen. How these negative representations impacted the African-American’s self-image is the author’s concern. (Patricia Miletich)


This article sets the stage for attacks on the Harlem Renaissance by stating that this period was an opportunity to improve racial and ethnic distinctiveness by creating an audience for visual art made by Americans of African descent. However the “American Negro Artist” would soon be suspended between what was called the rhetoric of cultural nationalism and the reality of a segregated society that viewed black Americans as yet ill equipped to fulfill their democratic promise. Such attacks sparked lively exchanges on the nature of “black creativity” in black communities during these years in terms of dynamic interaction between race and nationality. However the author continues to emphasize that Negro art was separate from the overarching category of mainstream American Art. Out of this exposure of so-called Negro Art emerged an artificial critical constraint based on racial differences that in effect isolated black art from the mainstream and contributed significantly to its subsequent historical neglect. During the Harlem Renaissance and thereafter, speculation began to be a part of the relationship between race and creativity, which filled the pages of black periodicals and then the mainstream press. African-Americans raised the question and discussed the responsibility of black artists to social issues, as opposed to aesthetic questions about the most desirable ways to represent members of the race. Black artists discussed whether art should furnish cultural models or present actual individual experience. Articles highlighting achievements of African-American artists appeared regularly in the news. The author states that during this period intellectuals and black artists seeking reputations in American Art began to receive complex and conflicting messages about the most desirable ways to represent members of the race. Although critics looked for emerging black artists to review, black artists’ work often was considered interesting only to the extent that it was different from mainstream art. Critical standards were not aligned to accommodate original or innovative expression when it appeared in works of African-American art.
The book references Alain Locke, American writer, philosopher, educator, patron of the arts, and often called the father of the Harlem Renaissance, who in his famous 1925 anthology *The New Negro* declared that the pulse of the Negro world had begun to beat in Harlem. Locke argued that black artists, in order to express themselves characteristically in racial terms, needed to draw on the uniqueness of their experience, and their position as heirs, both of authentic American Folk Culture and of ancestral Africa.

Despite the criticism of the artistic movement of the Harlem Renaissance, African-American artists’ enthusiasm, styles, ideologies, and emerging talent showed the significance of an invigorated American Culture. (Roy Fraction)


In this book Ralph Cooper vividly paints a portrait of theatrical life as it relates to African-Americans during the Harlem Renaissance. Cooper, whose sole creative genius launched the Apollo theatre’s “Amateur Night,” explicitly recounts the “insults, deprivation, and unbelievable hardship” black artists faced during that particular time in history. Of all accounts cited by Cooper, he most colorfully and fluidly narrates his role in ending the use of blackface in theatre. Cooper commences his discourse by defining what blackface looked like from the early 1900s through the middle of the Harlem Renaissance. For the unacquainted reader, the definition given by Cooper is clear: “wearing burnt cork to darken their faces, as well as white grease lips, a nappy wig, and white gloves.” He augments this vibrant illustration with an overview of the history of blackface. The author then interjects the assumption that “whites felt more comfortable around blacks if they were in blackface,” continuing with the notion that “they [whites] could feel superior,” thus contributing to the myriad of insults inflicted upon blacks.

Cooper’s discussion continues with examples of extremely successful white men and women who appeared in blackface while imitating the “antics, movements, and dances of black blues artists.” Although his remarks are highly controversial, Cooper does soften the blows by asserting that white Americans were “emulating the black comics, not making fun of them.” Following this brief synopsis of the history of blackface, Ralph Cooper tells the story of Pigmeat Markham, a black comic, and his devotion to wearing blackface.

Mr. Cooper chronicles the career of Pigmeat Markham and his loyalty to blackface. During a time when most thought of blackface as debasing and appealing only to “yokels, morons, and nincompoops,” Pig, in all sincerity, continued to wear blackface. Cooper states he simply did not have the “heart” to show Pig how the audience truly felt about seeing him in blackface, and it was not until a day when Pig happened to be running late for work that Cooper convinced him to go on the stage natural. Thus Cooper played an integral role in ending the use of blackface on stage.

From a historical view, the Apollo was vital to the fruition of the popular culture of African-Americans during the Harlem Renaissance. Because of all the improprieties thrust upon the black artists by their white counterparts during that time, the Apollo offered a place of hope and a sense of freedom that was not often afforded on the entertainment front. Without the likes
of Cooper in Harlem, black theatre may not have had the progressive force needed to propel the careers of the artists.

This book can be easily integrated into the classroom not only to educate the students on the relevance of the Apollo Theatre to the popular culture of African-Americans during the New Negro Renaissance, but also to provide a more intimate “behind the scenes” look into the lives of some of the great artists of the day. However, the use of this book should be limited to preselected clips as some of the language may be offensive to younger students. (Takisha Durm)


This is an early scholarly biography of Marcus Garvey with a foreword by John Hope Franklin. Written in the context of the early civil rights movement, the author takes a serious and not unsympathetic look at Garvey and his movement. The historian brings out the importance of Garvey and his message for African-Americans in the late 1940s and the early 1950s when the civil rights movement accelerated.

The book takes the reader from Garvey’s birth to the apex of his movement and Garvey’s fall. But the book goes further than a standard discussion of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and its activities or Garvey’s life and philosophy to include his significance during his life and his “Echoes and Reverberations” as the last chapter in the book is titled. The author goes beyond stereotypes of Garvey and his movement and shows the appeal to blacks then and since of a message of nationalism, pride, independence, and self-reliance.

This book develops the themes of race consciousness and pride, of seizing control of how blacks are represented and addressing the socialization of black youth in a time when blacks were challenging the racial status quo. Garvey’s vision of and plan for Negro redemption included black dolls. The Negro Factories Corporation, which included the doll factory, was not Garvey’s primary vehicle for black economic independence. The Black Star Line seized the attention of the movement far more. Even within the movement, the Negro Factories Corporation’s other activities, laundries, restaurants, and millineries, received more attention. But the doll factory combined the message of economic independence to investors and consumers of dolls with a rousing call to control the representations of black people in such an intimate object. Garveyites knew that offering a black doll produced by blacks to the racist and demeaning alternatives available would develop a positive racial consciousness and a pride in color and culture among young children. As one ad that ran in the *Negro World* reported: “Little Thelma Miller, eight years old, is very fond of her little colored doll. She has never had the opportunity and pleasure of playing with no other doll except a colored doll. She is real Garveyite.” (Patricia Miletich)


This book is a comprehensive study of African-Americans in golf that shows both the advancements and struggles of African-Americans to gain respect as athletes and eventually integrate American sports. The main components of the book are the development of black golf itself, perceptions of it by black golfers, its presentation in the press, and the battles over desegregation. For the purposes of the New Negro Renaissance the most valuable component is Chapter 4: “The Organization of Black Golf: The United Golfers Association.” This chapter chronicles the development of the black golfers’ league and championships.

There is a great deal of debate about the exact dates and original leadership of the United Golfers Association (UGA), mostly because of arguments over its founding and its "official" chartering. In general the authors concede its slightly earlier beginnings in 1926 under the leadership of Robert H. Hawkins, today considered the "Father of Negro Golf." In 1926 Hawkins began the creation of Mapledale Country Club in Stow, Massachusetts, as a private club for African-Americans that would become the first home of the UGA championships that same year. Although some city tournaments were desegregated, no golf associations were and most major tournaments were for whites only. Thus, much like participants in other leading sports such as baseball and basketball, black golfers created their own leagues and tournaments, the largest association being the UGA. By the 1930s the association was expanding its Open Championship sites outside of the Northeast and into the Midwest and West to expand its fan base and popularity. Also by the 1930s many of the Open champions were from golf clubs in the South, substantial evidence of the growth of black golf in America, as pockets of golf centers (such as Atlanta) created nurturing places on black private golf courses for golfers to play. A final push for the growth of the sport of golf in African-American society was the addition of boxing star Joe Louis, not only as a fan but also as a participant. Beginning in 1940, Louis entered the UGA Open and even established his own tournament in Detroit.

Although the book makes few direct links to the idea of the New Negro or to the societal changes among African-Americans in the New Negro Renaissance period, several themes are evident. Similar to the Negro leagues of basketball and baseball, the idea of black ownership and control of black leagues in relation to white professional leagues bears great importance. Geographical themes are evident as well, for example, the concentration of early advancement and acceptability in the Northeast (think Great Migration) and the central role played by Chicago (even by the Chicago Defender in the media), and the theme of southern success stories generally relying on a move to the North to fulfill potential. One way the golf world differs from boxing, baseball, and basketball is in its perception of being a more elite sport. Although this comparison is not mentioned in the text, the reader can see the perception of golf fitting very comfortably with many of the elements of elitism in the New Negro Renaissance, proving that African-Americans could be successful as more than caddies! (Whitney Coonradt)

**Determeyer, Eddy. Rhythm Is Our Business: Jimmie Lunceford and the Harlem Express.**

This book deals with one of the hottest swing bands ever. The Jimmie Lunceford Orchestra, under various names, was said to have rivaled Ellington’s in sophistication, polish, danceability and style. Mr. Lunceford's innovations included showmanship and even using an electric guitar and bass. The book also unveils a romantic link with Yolande Du Bois, daughter of W.E.B. Du Bois.

James Melvin "Jimmie" Lunceford was born in Fulton, Mississippi, on June 6, 1902. Little is known about his parents, though his father was a choirmaster in Warren, Ohio, before
the family moved to Denver. Lunceford went to high school in Denver and studied music under Wilberforce J. Whiteman, father of Paul Whiteman, whose band was soon to acquire a national reputation. After high school he continued his studies at Fisk University. During 1922, Lunceford played alto saxophone in a local band led by George Morrison that included Andy Kirk, another musician destined for fame as a bandleader.

In 1927, while teaching at Manassas High School in Memphis, Tennessee, Lunceford organized a student band, the Chickasaw Syncopators, whose name was changed to the Jimmie Lunceford Orchestra when it began touring. Lunceford was the first high school band director in Memphis. This band recorded in 1927 and 1930. After a period of touring—which included a formal at Cornell University, on an opposite stage from Guy Lombardo’s orchestra, where they blew the roof off and got rave reviews among bookers in New York—the band accepted a booking at the Harlem nightclub The Cotton Club in 1934. The Cotton Club had already featured Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway, who won their first widespread fame from their inventive shows for the Cotton Club’s all-white patrons. Lunceford's orchestra, with their tight musicianship and often outrageous humor in their music and lyrics, made an ideal band for the club, and Lunceford's reputation began to steadily grow.

Comedy and vaudeville played a distinct part in Lunceford's presentation. His songs displayed a playful sense of swing, often through bizarre lyrics and clever arrangements by trumpeter Sy Oliver. Often Lunceford's stage shows featured costumes, skits, and obvious jabs at mainstream white jazz bands, such as those of Paul Whiteman and Guy Lombardo.

The orchestra began recording for the Decca label and later signed with the Columbia subsidiary Vocalion in 1938. They toured Europe extensively in 1937 but had to cancel a second tour in 1939 because of the outbreak of World War II. Columbia dropped Lunceford in 1940 because of flagging sales. (Oliver departed the group before the scheduled European tour to take a position as an arranger for Tommy Dorsey.) Lunceford returned to the Decca label. The orchestra appeared in the 1941 movie _Blues in the Night._

On July 12, 1947, while playing in Seaside, Oregon, Lunceford, age 45, collapsed and died from cardiac arrest during an autograph session. Allegations and rumors circulated that Jimmie had been poisoned by the owner of a fish restaurant, unhappy at having to serve a "Negro" in his establishment. This story is given credence by the fact that other members of Lunceford's band who ate at this restaurant were sickened within hours of the meal. Jimmy Lunceford was laid to rest at Elmwood Cemetery in Memphis. (Gerry Liebmann)


This book is for collectors of black dolls. Beyond a four-page introduction, there is little discussion of the historical context or significance of the dolls. Like other books about collectibles, this one stresses the transformation in the images of African-Americans as seen in dolls, becoming more positive and less exaggerated and stereotypical.

Consisting primarily of colored photographs of dolls from the early 1800s through the 1990s, this book presents high quality images printed on glossy paper. Dolls manufactured before the 1950s are organized by material composition, and from the 1960s through the 1990s, they are arranged by manufacturer. The book ends with specific topics: dollhouse dolls, paper
For each doll reproduction there is a short description of what the doll is made of and how it is constructed. Basic information such as height, date, and approximate value on the market concludes the information given. Although most of the images are from the 1960s onward, the photographs of rare (some valued for as much as $3,000) or representative antique dolls create a kind of visual time line of the issues over how and who will determine the representation of the images of African-Americans.

“Reading” the images of the dolls from the 1800s through the years of the New Negro Renaissance, we begin to understand the struggles of African-Americans over how to seize control of the definition of the Negro. Early dolls, imported primarily from Europe, exhibited exaggerated facial features, kinky or woolly hair, extremely dark skin, and distinctive clothing styles that often reflected servant garb. There were exceptions, and these dolls dressed more in keeping with the middle and upper classes were the very dolls marketed in advertisements in *The Crisis* and other African-American publications. Although dressed more appropriately for the middle and upper classes, dolls with ethnically accurate facial features remained an important concept, as many European manufacturers simply used white doll molds and colored them dark. There emerges more variation in skin color and facial features as more materials were used in the construction of dolls, for example, composition, latex, rubber, and especially plastic and vinyl. Few dolls produced by African-American doll companies exist from the early twentieth century, and many simply imported appropriate “colored” dolls in upper-class dress and resold them. For black leaders in the 1920s such as Du Bois and Garvey, the advent of black-owned doll companies was a sign of both economic independence and control over the representation of the image of blacks to children—essential in developing racial pride and consciousness. (Patricia Miletich)


This book makes an attempt to look beyond the exhibitions, including magazines, book illustrations, and isolated studies of black artists’ illustrations in the field of art history. I sensed while reading this book that there was a feeling of neglect, and a general failure to appreciate the broad impact of modern black art expression during the Harlem Renaissance period. However, this significant body of paintings and sculptures associated with the Harlem Renaissance highlighted the early interplay of visual art and literary production in print beginning in the late teens and the early 1920s. The interracial subtext became intriguing as an underlying theme, or an implied relationship between the characters depicted in the art works, when it came to the roles of black and nonblack illustrators. Mainstream publishers exploited black artists as well as white artists. However, interracial relationships emerged that demonstrated unexpected arrangements, for example when the black author Countee Cullen acted as intermediary and sponsor of the white illustrator Charles Cullen in the late 1920s.

The author asserts the importance of illustration as a modernist medium that connected art and the commercial culture. The publication covers many stages of “The New Negro, the artists, racial up-lift, the past, modernism, race, gender, religion, culture resistance, and racial/sexual crossings.” Conceptions of artistic modernism reveal the products of African-American
illustrations created by Harlem artists, as well as mainstream graphic artists. It is indicative of the stylistic diversity that animated modern African-American art of the early twentieth century.

During the 1920s and 1930s, black artists and writers achieved something totally unprecedented: they created a new image of African-Americans that truly reflected their times as well as their history. In so doing, they set the artistic agenda of the Harlem Renaissance and gave form to some of its most compelling visions.

The author’s innovative study examines the efforts of Harlem Renaissance artists and writers to create an expression of black identity that drew on their ancient past, while participating in a contemporary American culture. The author investigates a critical component of the Harlem Renaissance print culture, which until now has been largely overlooked, arguing that black artists’ illustrations became the timeliest and often most radical visual products of the Harlem Renaissance Artistic and Literary Movement. (Roy Fraction)


Goings’s book, which features four thematic chapters filled with text and both color and black and white photographs, examines the birth, evolution, and reemergence of the Mammy and Uncle Mose black caricatures. However, the book also addresses other stereotypes such as the pickaninny, golliwog, and Jezebel. In his preface, Goings admits that this project started on a smaller, simpler scale: he only wanted to “examine the ways in which stereotypes about African-Americans were created and passed along over time and space.” However, as a result of his research he became obsessed with black collectibles. His book, then, demonstrates his attempts to examine these stereotypes as well as his vast personal collection.

The collectibles range from cookie jars to soap dishes, to tin signs, to advertisements, which, as Goings intends, show the myriad ways in which these stereotypes have been used in twentieth-century popular culture. Each picture includes a text box that indicates the nature of the object and its approximate date—most are from the 1920s, 1930s, or 1940s. As fantastic—though surely frightening—as the collectibles themselves are, Goings’s text is excellent as it provides a linear history of how these stereotypes have continued—from their original purpose—to place the black experience outside, or separate from, the American experience. To prove this point, Goings uses examples such as the Harlem Renaissance, the 1936 Nazi Olympics, Malcolm X, Roe v. Wade, and the 1988 election, when African-Americans were blamed for the failed liberal agendas in Mississippi. Thus, this book is more than just photographs.

Goings’s book would be a great addition to any library or classroom whose students were interested examining the ways in which harmful racial caricatures and stereotypes have been used since slavery. As advertisements, posters, signs, toys, and collectibles are still modes of media in American culture, this book fits into the popular culture realm. (Laura Decker)


Nancy Goldstein provides the reader with an intricate study of the life of Chicago elitist Jackie Ormes, otherwise known as the first African-American woman cartoonist. Ormes, born Zelda Mavis Jackson in 1911 in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, did not experience the traditional impoverished upbringing most African-Americans knew all too well. Because of the liberalism that is often associated with prosperity, Ormes was able to experiment with art as a young child. As the years progressed, Ormes’s artistic talent was noticed by those around her. Although a
highly gifted artist, she nonetheless yearned to become a journalist. During a time when most esteemed journalists were men, Ormes relentlessly pursued her passion, ultimately becoming an editor for the Pittsburgh Courier. Not being fully satisfied with simply being an editor, she continued her pursuit of journalism, eventually becoming a writer for the Chicago Defender.

After a suffering a personal loss, Ormes became committed to her passion of drawing. She developed several cartoons that featured “beautifully dressed and coiffed females, appearing and speaking out in ways that defied stereotyped images of blacks in the mainstream press.” Ormes became known as a political and social activist, and in her short life was influential in developing a doll (Patti Jo) that more definitively represented the African-American race.

Although this book is not wholly devoted to the New Negro Renaissance, it does embody the movement in certain aspects. Jackie Ormes worked for one of the most prominent African-American weekly newspapers during the height of the New Negro Renaissance. Furthermore, her comic strip, Torchy Brown in “Dixie to Harlem,” peaked during the aforementioned era.

Whether one is seeking to implement a cursory or exhaustive study on the subject, this book would be deemed highly beneficial to the educator. It is well constructed, yet it can still be enjoyed by an array of students. Lastly, the book contains dozens of the artist’s illustrations, which in turn will provide the student an opportunity to engage in a primary source study of Ms. Ormes. (Takisha Durm)


Half-Century Magazine was a magazine owned and edited by African-American women during the New Negro Renaissance as a “colored monthly for the business man and the homemaker” and then later for the “home and the homemaker” as the focus of the content shifted towards women. Half-Century Magazine, whose name referred to the fifty years that had passed since the Emancipation Proclamation, is a primary source that reflects the scope of change for African-Americans during this time and the many diverse manifestations of the renaissance—from the arts and politics, to daily life and fashion. The magazine is rich with advertisements, editorials, joke columns, serialized works by writers such as James Weldon Johnson as well as serialized romantic stories, poetry, fashion articles, news such as that featured in “General Race News,” letters from readers, a section providing legal advice to readers, and recipes for the homemaker.

Though the Negro Universities Press offers reprints of all issues of Half-Century Magazine, this annotation focuses specifically on the binding of the 1920-1921 issues solely for the purpose of hoping to cover them with some measure of specificity. The entire series of the magazine would function as a useful resource, and it should also be noted that they are a part of a series of reprints by the Negro Universities Press titled The Black Experience in America: Negro Periodicals in the United States, 1840-1960, which also includes periodicals such as The Crisis, The Messenger, and Douglass’ Monthly.
The magazine touches on so many topics and issues within African-American life and a study of the New Negro Renaissance that it is hard to know where to begin, but the publication definitely stands out as an artifact of racial uplift. Students would only need to look at the covers to see this; the January 1920 cover is titled “Her First Birthday” and features a young, very dark-skinned child celebrating her first birthday at a table with a doll cast in her own image. The issue contains a call for submissions of pictures of readers’ young children that later end up being displayed in the March issue with the title “The Future Leaders in the Affairs of Men.” The focus on the child as an emblem of the renaissance and hope for the future is repeated throughout the issues. The magazine continues to reflect pride and hope by calling for pictures of high school and college graduates that are featured and celebrated in the July issue. The magazine also celebrates mothers and fathers with pictures of and odes to both. Additionally, in “the beauty number” the magazine honors the diversity of beauty amongst colored women in a similar pictorial display and a cover featuring a presumably beautiful woman whom a reader in a later issue applauds as making him “glad that he is colored.” In addition, the magazine uplifts through pictures and articles that detail achievements in education and business, while calling for more of the same. Through the pictures, ads (which feature African-American models), and stories the editors of the magazine consciously define Black people as beautiful, educated, and respected.

The magazine is also rich with artifacts that reflect increasing migration, urbanization, education, and wealth attainment. The advertisements of the magazine include ads for The Winona Hair Emporium, which offers to “Improve Your Looks” through a variety of hair pieces, electric washers and ironers for clothing, PU-RI—an antiperspirant product, and The Chicago Watch and Jewelry Company, which offers to settle all of your gift giving questions with their silver cigarette case or convertible bracelet set. Perhaps most telling, though, are the many articles and photos concerning fashion. An article titled “Additions to the Winter Wardrobe” features models in “simple” silk-collared outfits, velvet evening wraps (which another article calls a must for every complete wardrobe) trimmed in raccoon, and seal coats. Every issue features a similar fashion article that reflects not only the growing amount of leisure time and income but the need to dress in order to establish and to fit into the black middle classes of cities such as Chicago.

The magazine also provides a wealth of commentary on politics and race. For instance, the January 1920 issue opens with an article, “Are We Ashamed of Our Lineage?” which discusses the term “Negro” and calls for a term more specific to colored people in the US, eventually recommending “Libranian,” a term the magazine would stick to in subsequent articles and issues. Other articles discuss recommendations for the next president, race riots, the content of ads—admonishing other magazines for selling fake skin lightener (while delicately attempting to deal with the issue of selling skin lightener in general), and a very interesting article entitled “Are We Our Brother’s Keeper?” likens good manners and dress to “help[ing] the race to break the shackles of prejudice.” Letters from the readers also provide information that covers topics such as the boycotting of businesses that enforce Jim Crow laws and complaints about offensive toys such as Aunt Jemima dolls.

The bottom line is that Half-Century Magazine was a very full publication with a distinct agenda at work in a time of cultural, ethnic, and economic renaissance. As such, there are probably thousands of items embedded within the series that would serve as excellent jumping off points for writing, discussion, or further study for any class dealing with this time period.
(Aimee Hendrix)


The author of this book is a social scientist with a very specific goal: “to inquire more systematically” into the development of racial attitudes and how they may be altered. Responding to the conflicts between racial and ethnic groups in the early decades of the twentieth century, Lasker sees children as a key focus of study. How a child’s racial attitudes develop, how they are taught, and how they may be changed are important issues for Americans. The audience for this book is broader than merely other social scientists; Lasker specifically addresses how the home and particularly the school can play a role in bettering future racial and ethnic relations.

The author studies racial attitudes in children systematically from what racial attitudes were and how they were expressed to their acquisition, especially in the segregated public schools of the era, and how attitudes are taught more broadly through recreation and leisure pursuits. The final task of the book is to suggest what the home, the school, the churches, and other voluntary agencies may do. This is a work of early sociology, and the author relies upon a wealth of experiments, case studies, interviews, and scholarly works. Dolls as a means for the transference of racial attitudes, reinforcing both positive and negative views, are important in both the home and school contexts.

Themes of racial representations in the perpetuation (and possibly modification) of racial attitudes during the 1920s and the development of racial pride and consciousness among both whites and blacks are key concerns during the New Negro Renaissance. Dolls that reduce African-Americans to caricatures, such as the golliwogs, or reinforce blacks as subservient domestics (the prevalence of the Aunt Jemima dolls) breed a negative self-image in black children and feelings of superiority in white children. Stereotypical and racist dolls send a message to children of both races that black people have only one role to play in society—to serve whites as servants in a status of second-class citizens. The development of black entrepreneurs who manufacture black dolls or import European dolls (“of a superior type”) reflect the concerns of African-American leaders from Du Bois to Garvey in the 1920s. (Patricia Miletich)


The first two sections of this book serve as an introduction to the subsequent section that contains chapters 1-15. In Part I, Lowe cautions readers to avoid “rubber stamping” the blues as solely rooted in African traditions. He maintains that although the predominant strains have undeniable African roots, other influences are apparent in the development of the blues. He emphasizes the folk culture roots (black and white) inherent in blues and jazz. His focus is on the music itself, rather than the socio-political ramifications of the music or the musicians.

In Part II, Lowe expounds on the origins of several of the predecessors of early jazz. His discourse is somewhat anecdotal and somewhat philosophical. Since most American popular music was fairly localized, the marketers of these recordings targeted the respective regions with various different styles of music: blues, bluegrass, vocal harmonizers, gospel, and many other ways the local folks made their favorite music.

In Part III, Lowe begins discussing specific recordings. He includes information about the instrumentation and brief biographical anecdotes for each of the selected years. The selections are intermittently familiar. After the end of Chapter 15, the book provides a section for notes, a bibliography, a discography, a listing of music sources, and indexes. Good reference material. (Gerry Liebmann)


Jeanette Murphy, a white sociologist who grew up in the South—and therefore was proclaimed an expert on Negro matters and life—supposedly wrote this composition out of seriousness and respect for black “Mammies,” as the epigraph to the piece reads: “Dedicated to Every Faithful Black Mammy.” The lyrics appear to praise the “Mammy” figure, holding her kitchen skills and unyielding love in utmost esteem.

However, Murphy’s musical composition is very interesting in terms of its lyrics, as it at once praises the “Mammy” caricature yet would also certainly have had damaging effects. For instance, one line in particular resounds throughout the song: “Dat’s what de Mammy good for.” The lyrics also comment on the “Mammy’s” talents—cooking and eating gumbo and Hoppin’ John, nurturing the master’s children, telling rabbit stories, singing gospels—while certifying that among her talents, reading and comprehension are not included, as “[i]n all her Holy singin’, [Jesus] de only name she known.”

Murphy’s lyrics are important to look at in the context of the actual history and role of the “Mammy” stereotype and figure. As white culture sentimentalized this caricature (and in many places, continues to sentimentalize it today), this song, though written in 1903 and
therefore pre-dating the New Negro Movement and Harlem Renaissance, sheds light on the attitudes that fed large-scale sentimentalization of the “Mammy” in white popular culture and the push against that stereotype by black arts. (Laura Decker)


W.E.B. Du Bois created *The Crisis*, a premier African-American literary journal, because the magazine was one of the most important showcases for the early works of many young writers of the Harlem Renaissance. Du Bois saw this new literature as a tool for improving race relations. In February 1926, Du Bois attended a symposium entitled “The Negro in Art: How Shall He Be Portrayed.” He created a list of seven questions, which appeared in the journal the next month. The list was reprinted with each of the seven installments of the symposium. The questions reflected legitimate concerns about the effects of white patronage on African-American art, and the reinforcement of negative images of black people in the white popular imagination, and rhetorical posturing.

The author noted that the varied responses to the questions in this symposium mirrored a larger debate in the Harlem Renaissance about the responsibilities and freedoms of the African-American artists, and the proper roles of the white critics and publishers. The other symposium installments revealed the second to the last set of responses to the seven questions. In October 1926, Du Bois issued his own manifesto on black creative production, “Criteria of Negro Art,” in which he asserted, “All Art is Propaganda.” His position regarding the criteria of Negro Art is that it should always be used for propaganda. (Roy Fraction)


This book presents a concise, chronologically organized history of African-American Music. Beginning with the 1740s, Peretti briefly discusses each phase of development of the music African-Americans have produced. The book is expansive in scope—roughly from 1740 to 2004. Discussions cover the Fisk Jubilee Singers, James Reese Europe, the blues, the Great Migration to cities, the recording industry, and much more. Included are a chronology of selected significant dates; a glossary of musical terms; a discography, bibliography and index. This compact volume (223 pages) offers a solid resource for introducing this fascinating topic. (Gerry Liebmann)


In this book the author chronicles one of the best baseball teams of the Negro League, the Black Barons of Birmingham, Alabama. The first half of the book describes the teams and players from the teams, beginning in 1920. The Negro League was formed in 1920 to accommodate black teams who were prohibited from playing with the all-white major league
teams. Birmingham’s Black Barons (taking the name from the white Birmingham Barons) was one of the first eight teams to join.

The book begins by debunking the popular myth that Jackie Robinson was the first black American to play major league baseball, pointing instead to William White, who played one game in 1879 with the Providence Grays, and Fleet Walker who played forty-two games in 1883 and Weldey Walker, who played six games in 1883, both brothers playing for Toledo. Their careers were short-lived, however, with the team managers deciding that integration was too dangerous to continue. No other players would play for the majors until Jackie Robinson broke the color line in 1947 by playing for the Dodgers. Consequently, the Negro League was born.

Playing under adverse conditions and working in the coal mines or cotton fields to support themselves, these players served a “social function for the black community and an important cultural role for the nation.” Birmingham players were poor, learning baseball in the streets, and working in the coal mines or for companies like ACIPCO (American Cast Iron and Pipe Company). Unlike the white league, there were no minor teams to feed the Negro League. Serving this purpose were industrial teams, sponsored by employers like ACIPCO, who felt that baseball helped employee loyalty and often hired workers because of their baseball skills.

The first three chapters offer brief biographies of the early players and their accomplishments. Notable players in the 1920s included “Dizzy” Dismukes, who after the color barrier was broken by Robinson worked as a scout for the New York Yankees and Chicago White Sox; and George “Mule” Suttles, who in 2006 became the fourth Black Barons player to be inducted in the Baseball Hall of Fame, joining Leroy “Satchel” Paige, Bill Foster, and Willie Wells. Leroy “Satchel” Paige played for the Black Barons from 1927-1930. He was the first African-American to be inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame. Born in Mobile, Alabama, Paige credits a five-year juvenile detention sentence (for shoplifting) for making him a ball player.

The last half of the book chronicles players after Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier for playing in the major leagues. Some of the Black Barons went on then to play for the major leagues, for example Parnell Wood, who played for the Oakland Oaks in 1949. Unfortunately, he was thirty-nine by this time, so his term was short.

The 1940s saw new ownership for the Black Barons: Tom Hayes, who owned a Birmingham hotel that catered to Black clientele, and Abe Saperstein, who owned the Harlem Globetrotters. Several of the players during this time would work for the Globetrotters during the off-season. One player, Reese Tatum, played for the Globetrotters as “Goose” Tatum, the Clown Prince of Basketball. The new owners booked the team in national arenas such as New York’s Yankee Stadium. In 1943, the Black Barons won the Negro American League pennant but lost the World Series to the Homestead Grays.

The ability for black players to play in the major leagues dealt a fatal wound to the Negro League, which did not survive long afterward. The 1948 season was arguably the last World Series for the Negro League. The stars of the ’48 season included a young rookie from Fairfield (Birmingham area) named Willie Mays. In spite of this rising star, Birmingham lost again to the Homestead Grays. Even though the league was dwindling, Birmingham still fielded a team, in part because of deep-seated prejudice in the South hindering integration. In 1949, Jackie Robinson brought the all-stars to Birmingham to play the Black Barons (the all-stars won).

The team continued to play at Rickwood Field—America’s oldest ball park and still the oldest park in use today. It was rented out to black and white teams. The seating was segregated, but when the Black Barons played, the whites sat in the segregated section. Nevertheless, the
black team was not allowed to use the home team lockers and had to share with the opposing team or get dressed at home. Major league teams scouted the Negro League for players, and players admitted they often were “playing to get signed.” Players who made it to majors included Dan Bankhead, Willie Mays, Piper Davis, Jehosie Heard, and Bill Greason. Others made it to the minor leagues. One player, Cleophus Brown, declined a contract with the New York Yankees because “I just didn’t see that baseball had that much in it for me.” Another player who became famous for something besides his playing was country singer Charley Pride, best known for songs like “Kiss an Angel Good Morning.”

This book is of obvious interest to me and to my students because of our location in the Birmingham area. It is written for a general audience, not necessarily for academic readers. With its mini-narratives about the players, the book is accessible to my high school students and will keep their interest.

Although it is not about the New Negro per se, this book discusses the challenges faced by African-Americans during this time around the nation even in sports. Black athletes became icons of the New Negro, for example, the heavy weight fighter Joe Louis. The New Negro attitude of stoicism under pressure had to be maintained, even for players in the Jim Crow South. Written by a Birmingham native, the book is frank about the discrimination of the period, and yet the author makes the book about the players and their dreams and not so much about the politics of the time. As Powell says, “Their goal was not to break down barriers, but merely to pursue a personal dream. But, in doing so, they helped to save the soul of a nation.” I believe students will be inspired by the heroes of this book. (Diane Weber)


Rayl's article, Chapter 8 in Basketball Jones, focuses on the role of the "Father of Black Basketball" Bob Douglas. Ultimately Rayl wants to recognize the pioneering role of Douglas, but also to contrast it with today's lack of black representation at the higher levels of management in basketball.

The article describes the role Douglas played in creating the Rens and his business acumen in keeping them alive with the challenges of segregation, the Great Depression and WW II, while highlighting some of the team’s successes. Douglas negotiated with the black ownership of the Renaissance Casino and Ballroom to provide practice and game space in return for naming the team “New York Renaissance,” thus providing advertising for the ballroom. In a time of limited black ownership of property and businesses in Harlem, this business icon represented a great image of New Negros and their self-reliance. Amsterdam News reported the Rens "...became an institution in Harlem. The colored fans found in it a vent for their emotions and an outlet for the pride in race" (107). Many of the Rens’ games were played against all-white professional teams, mostly because these matchups brought in the most at the gate. Many players and fans hoped that on the field of play, African-Americans could show their potential and success, and that ultimately this success would overflow into non-athletic elements of society. Such a strategy is very similar to the more commonly known idea of blacks during the Harlem Renaissance utilizing cultural advances to gain equality and respect that would in turn spread to other aspects of society.

The Rens experienced many on-court successes, such as their defeat of the legendary Original Celtics beginning in 1925. The Rens and the Original Celtics were both known for their
endurance and teamwork and their very serious professional approach to basketball. For the Rens this professionalism was in particularly strong contrast to the often more famous Harlem Globetrotters who, though very skilled, often played into the comedic stereotypes of African-Americans in order to draw crowds of whites to their games. The basketball philosophies of the Rens and the Globetrotters parallel many of the essential questions of the New Negro movement such as what role should white leadership take, what should black leaders look and act like, what image for black America or white America should the team present. The Rens took very seriously their role in representing their community and often benched or traded valuable players who did not adhere to team guidelines for morality and work ethic. The Rens were also very involved in benefit games, including one to benefit the defense fund in the Scottsboro case. The Rens organized semipro and youth league basketball programs both for community uplift and to serve as farm teams for their professional team. The Rens went on to experience many other successes, championships and even admission for the team to the Basketball Hall of Fame in 1963. Although at the time their social and political successes seemed minimal, they provide a great tool for understanding the powers of segregation, the successes of those who empowered themselves, and the limits of those successes. (Whitney Coonradt)


The author, William Rhoden, sets out to create a book that will help today's black athlete reconnect to their history and community through the legacy of struggle, advancement, and vision of African-Americans in sports. Rhoden argues that in the past black athletes have looked at professional sports as a vehicle to reach the "promised land." However, as indicated by the intensely provocative title, he believes that although there have been incredible financial gains which may look to the outsider like success, access to power and control is still denied, recreating the plantation system for the players.

The book in its entirety includes chapters on early-to-mid-nineteenth century examples of black athletes, like boxer Tom Molineaux, and analysis of Jim-Crow-era jockey traditions. Chapter 4, by far the most relevant to New Negro Renaissance discussions, addresses the Negro Leagues. The remaining chapters trace integration of sports and turning points for African-Americans like the career of Michael Jordan or the role of black female athletes. The final section of the book addresses Rhoden's belief that today's athletes have lost their connection to the black community and their sense of communal mission.

This very sense of community and mission is what makes the Negro League chapter so relevant to an understanding of African-American history in the 1920s and 1930s. Where Du Bois and other black leaders looked to art and literature to "prove" African-American legitimacy and humanity, Rhoden argues many saw similar potential in sports, an alternative route for the New Negro. Rhoden claims "black athletes have symbolically carried the weight of the race’s eternal burden of proof; their performances were among the most visible evidences that blacks, as a community, were ‘human’ enough—to share in the fruits of this nation with full citizenship and humanity" (3). This is very similar to the potential the Renaissance leaders saw in cultural achievements.

Although there were multiple attempts at Negro baseball leagues, the one with the most vision and New Negro spirit was founded by Rube Foster in 1920. Rhoden describes Foster as part of the Renaissance generation of New Negros who "sought to redefine, celebrate, and make sense of the African American presence in the United States. Black poets wrote their poems,
black singers sang their songs, black artists made their art. Foster used his baseball league as a canvass to express a new physical art form” (100). Part of Foster's vision included being independent of white patronage, similar the "Buy Black" philosophies of Renaissance political leaders like Marcus Garvey. Foster created a league of black owners, with their own fields, independent of white major league owners and booking agents, black athletes, and a predominately black consumer base of fans. Foster particularly wanted to create a powerful league because he believed in the inevitability of the integration of baseball, and he wanted black owners and athletes to be in a position to negotiate their merger into white leagues and not just have white baseball poach the best players on their own terms. In the discussions of integration, Rhoden makes an interesting observation about the impact of integration, which happened well after the collapse of Foster’s league and his own death. Although Jackie Robinson's heroic integration was an inspirational turning point for African-Americans, Rhoden reminds readers that it also "enriched white institutions while weakening and in many cases destroying black institutions,” occurring much in the way Foster had feared (101). Rhoden continues to argue that in many ways Foster should be a famous name in black history, maybe even more important than Jackie, who enriched white businesses, because Foster used black resources to nurture black talent and created an economically viable alternative to white baseball, aligning the empowerment philosophy of the Renaissance with advancement in sports and business. (Whitney Coonradt)


Ribowsky sets out to write a book about the history of the Negro Leagues that tries to remove sentimentality and search for truth. In his own words, “quite possibly for the first time in the omnibus of Negro league literature, sentimentality has been excised for the sake of truth. That means the whole truth, an element hard to find in the normal Negro league tract, in which the retroactive shame of segregation overlooks the human frailties and deceits inherent in all history” (xii). A lofty and probably unattainable goal, this “whole truth,” but Ribowsky tries to present these truths of the Negro leagues because he feels there are valuable lessons to be learned in their realities, not just the “overripe drama and over-romanticized folklore” that he criticizes in other works.

In the introduction, Ribowsky presents the importance of black ownership in the history of the Negro leagues, arguing they were some of the first national level black-owned businesses. He also addresses the role that uplift, hope, and possibility play in the Negro leagues along with the role of region and migration in the post WWI era, stating, “Just as baseball was a common carrier of aspirations within the white working class in the late 19th century, the tides of blacks migrating from the rural south to the urban north identified strongly with the upward mobility embodied by teams playing for pay and representing the under classes of Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, Detroit, Kansas City, and Pittsburgh” (xiii). And much like the focus on art and literature in the New Negro Renaissance, “black players could take pride in their art, which seemed to them as legitimate as jazz and ragtime blues” (xiv).

Another topic Ribowsky addresses is the social scene created at these elaborate games, most exemplified in the East-West All Star games in Chicago, as well as the important role of black media in promoting and supporting the Negro Leagues. Many of these elements of black ownership, pride, role of newspapers, and uplift reflect the mentality of the New Negro movement more typically limited to Harlem and the arts and scholarly pursuits. For example, the
author uses black owner Gus Greenlee’s lack of emphasis on a championship series to expound on his overt goals as owner and head of the league. He states, “Gus had not formed this circuit to play a World Series; he did it to prove that black businessmen could make a profit in baseball, as that would be the most effective lever in prying open the major’s closed door” (178). The business of black baseball leagues was part of a plan for uplift and change.

Ribowsky does also display the devastating sides of the Negro Leagues such as the exploitation (by whites and blacks), low profits for players, frustrations with segregation, and the mixed blessings of integration. One of the most powerful quotes of the introduction is from Cuban American black ballplayer Luis Bustamente, who, frustrated by the limits set upon him by his race and segregation, leaves behind the following in a suicide note: “I’ll drink until I become stupefied. Thus, I will eliminate myself [from baseball] as useless, keeping deep within me the conviction of what I am worth but what they won’t let me prove simply because I have had the immense misfortune of being a Negro” (xviii). (Whitney Coonradt)


*Ladies Pages* analyzes the various ways in which magazines for African-American women of the early twentieth century and the fashion they promoted were used as tools of racial uplift and redefinition, particularly to create a black elite and black middle class. The magazines, as described by Rooks, are both an example of and products of the New Negro Renaissance. It is not insignificant that the magazines were owned by, edited by, and written for African-American women, who now had greater literacy, better opportunities in business and beyond, and more time and money for the pursuits of style than ever before.

Contrary to what some might think, style went far beyond the superficial. Rooks makes it clear that fashion and the print culture surrounding it were as much of a vehicle for change as the more formal institutions of the New Negro Renaissance. This leads to some interesting discussions throughout the book.

In her discussion of *Ringwood’s Journal*, Rooks points out that the African-American women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were stereotyped as being either excessively sexualized or as victims of rape by white men. Light skin was at this time an undeniable reminder of that legacy. The advice on fashion and behavior in *Ringwood’s Journal* seeks to erase that legacy by elevating African-American women into the same sort of ladyhood enjoyed by white women.

Rooks also ties the magazines directly to the story of migration and urbanization. Articles from *Half-Century* magazine are aimed at creating a black middle class, at promoting the acceptance of that black middle class by whites, and at initiating new urban arrivals into that culture. This is to be accomplished, according to the magazine, through increased domesticity, admirable but smart fashion choices, good grooming, and polite manners. According to Rooks, full citizenship is represented as a process of becoming a full consumer.

Another important aspect of *Half-Century* magazine is the fact that it featured models of color. Just as it was important for African-American children to be cherished in the pages of *The Crisis*, pride in black beauty seems to be central to *Half-Century*. Not only does the magazine represent black women as beauty queens and models, but, unlike the ads in *Ringwood’s Journal*, African-American models also were used to display the fashions. Finally, women of color could see themselves represented as not only beautiful, but also capable of owning the items being sold to them. This perception is furthered by the fact that the models are anonymous (the woman in
the picture could be anyone; anyone could be that woman in the picture) and that the ads featured models of various skin tones and sizes.

The book also includes a discussion of magazines produced beyond the scope of the New Negro Renaissance such as *Tan Confessions* and *Essence*. *Ladies Pages* would be excellent for someone looking for more than just a surface understanding of fashion and style during the New Negro/ Harlem Renaissance. In general the book is best for scholarly research or background knowledge for the teacher and not necessarily as reading for all students. (Aimee Hendrix)


The chapter from this book or the book itself would be a highly readable resource for both teachers and students studying standards of black beauty and participation of African-American models in the fashion industry. “Breakthroughs” covers the early part of the twentieth century; the book in its entirety covers the history and culture of the fashion industry and fashion icons through the rest of the twentieth century.

The author of the book, Barbara Summers, uses the inclusion of black American models in a 1973 Versailles fashion show as a marker of achievement, indicating their full inclusion in the modeling industry and an embracing of a specifically black aesthetic of beauty by this industry. In the first chapter, titled “Breakthroughs” Summers ties this achievement back to the early achievements of three specific black women in the beauty and fashion industries: Josephine Baker, Madam C. J. Walker, and Lena Horne.

Summers gives a brief bio of Baker, tracing her from her roots in East St. Louis to her stage career both in America and Paris. The chapter’s discussion of her 1925 Le Revue Negre details her talents but also references the discussion that this inspired about Baker and black sexuality: did she truly promote black beauty and pride or was her admiration another form of cultural condescension wherein she was admired only as an exotic other? Summers refers to this dialogue, but in the end maintains that Baker’s stardom and glamour were important and groundbreaking counters to images of black women as mammy or domestic figures.

Summers connects Madam C. J. Walker to later achievements of women of color in the beauty industry by pointing out the inspiration and opportunity she provided for men and women seeking to advance socially and professionally, both through the use of her grooming products or through the actual employment opportunities provided by her business. In this biographical account there is an embedded discussion of the role of beauty products and appearance for
African-Americans during this time period. Summer’s partial answer to the questions raised is that Walker, like many other women of her time, was practical: “They understood what Black women needed to succeed and what America demanded as the price of that progress.”

Lena Horne is described by Summers as “the first glamorous Black Hollywood star.” It is her beauty that is held up as breaking the most ground for women later. Again Summers gives a basic biographical account that can be found pretty readily in other sources but makes sure to refer to some of the controversy surrounding Horne’s career which progresses from the Cotton Club to the stage and then to Hollywood, where she, along with other black actresses, had a hard time finding quality roles. Summers states that Hollywood was confused because Horne was neither stereotypically black, able to pass for white, or exotically other.

It is interesting to look at Summer’s idea that these three women pave the way for later African-American women in the industry, but each story also seems to perfectly tell the story of the New Negro Renaissance. Each story represents an expansion of opportunity for African-American women, but also represents numerous struggles about how African-Americans should present themselves, what is required for racial uplift, and how African-Americans can (or cannot?) control how others see them. The chapter would work alone as a basic introduction to three women whose careers intersect with the New Negro Renaissance, but it would also be an excellent jumping off point for a discussion about the beauty industry, race, sexuality, class, and skin color. (Aimee Hendrix)


Topsy. Aunt Jemima. Roger Rabbit. Sound familiar? Ever hear or see any of these African-American caricatures? Well, they were tremendously popular in the past and still have a big influence on our culture today, according to writer Patricia A. Turner in her book *Ceramic Uncles & Celluloid Mammies.*

The book focuses on two topics: “Insidious Iconography” and the “Blemished Depictions” of blacks. Turner begins by talking about how media (TV, movies, literature, etc.) in society have affected almost every facet of our lives. The introduction is particularly captivating because she tells an array of stories about race and how it is depicted in America. Chapter 1 examines contemporary collectibles (African-American dolls, advertisements and other objects) within the context of other material cultural artifacts. Most importantly Turner compares and contrasts the depiction of blacks with depictions in other cultures. The comparisons stand out because the images of black men, women and children look ridiculous when held next to images of whites. The next few chapters on the “Blemished Depictions” are the strongest and most important of the book. Chapters 4 through 12 detail such topics as how the character Uncle Tom, from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin,* was turned into a caricature of what the author intended it to be or how the mammy stereotype was used to condition black women. The book has multiple black-and-white pictures of objects that range from a collectible pickaninny doll to a toothpaste advertisement called “Darkie Tooth Paste” with a grinning black man on the front of the box. Not only do the images reinforce Turner’s point, but they also show the horrible effects of propaganda in the media.

Turner’s book would be an excellent resource for the New Negro Renaissance since many of the images discussed in the book were popular during the period. The main question that Turner’s book raises is the following: What is the difference between the way blacks are in reality in comparison to the negative images created by whites? (Barrett Taylor)

Walker’s opening chapter of Style and Status contextualizes African-American beauty culture (cosmetics, hair products, and professions within the industry) within the general expansion of this industry in the 1920s. Beauty culture in the 1920s and 1930s was a main avenue to the sort of independence and economic gains that were aspired to and attained during the New Negro Renaissance. Additionally the artifacts generated by this industry illustrate dominant ideas and conflicts about race and appearance in popular culture.

Most of Walker’s chapter centers on the vying for control of the African-American beauty culture market. Whereas newspapermen like Claude Barnett often worked to increase the attention of white-owned companies to a black market that was largely undervalued and ignored, in the case of the beauty culture industry, such people were very protective of black ownership and control of the industry. The chapter explains that the reason for this apparent contradiction was that the black-owned companies were a perfect example of black economic nationalism that enriched the black community. Madame C. J. Walker and company, for example, provided thousands of black women with an employment opportunity that was not connected to domestic service to whites. Walker also contributed some of the money generated from her company to organizations that benefitted the race, like the NAACP.

In relating the story of the struggle to retain control over this industry, Walker also provides an analysis of the advertising of beauty products by both black- and white-owned companies. While conceding that both sold products that were problematic in terms of their implications for the issue of racial pride, such as hair straightener and skin bleach, Walker shows that white-owned companies’ markets assumed that kinky hair and dark skin were extremely undesirable while black companies focused on promoting the possibility of beauty for women of color (albeit with light-skinned models.) Black companies embraced what has been called a democratic ideal of beauty—any woman can be beautiful provided she purchases the correct products. The embedded advertisements used to illustrate this ideal are excellent primary sources; they also show how white-owned companies masqueraded as black companies in order to appeal to racial pride. Subsequent chapters follow the African-American beauty culture and this struggle into the 1970s.

The chapter is reasonably readable; however, its main audience will probably be teachers and scholars seeking more knowledge on the topic or perhaps researchers at the high school level. (Aimee Hendrix)


This chapter from Worsley’s collection of critical essays looks closely at Alice Randall’s 2001 film, *The Wind Done Gone*. For her film, Randall draws on Margaret Mitchell’s use of superficial sketches of black females in the South in her 1936 novel *Gone With the Wind*. Randall’s film not only simplifies its white characters in the same manner Mitchell simplified her black ones but also gives names and histories to its black characters. This chapter in Worsley’s text seeks to determine whether Randall’s attempts at subverting the “Mammy” and “Jezebel” stereotypes are successful in granting power and autonomy to black female bodies or whether they fail and prolong harmful images in a culture that is far removed from slavery. Worsley draws on interviews with Randall as well as the opinion of film critics and her own judgments to determine that through Randall’s mulatto character, Cynara—the child of Pallas and Planter (Mammy and Gerald in Mitchell’s book)—Randall is successful at undermining early twentieth century stereotypical depictions of black women and returning autonomy and power to black women.

This chapter (as well as the entire collection of essays) is written for anyone interested in the ways in which black female sexuality has been repressed through popular culture and has been, in recent history, granted to black females through the same modes. As my project aims to look at the ways in which the Mammy caricature was presented in early twentieth century popular culture, and later how black (female) poets used the same stereotypes to subvert previous power hierarchies and grant power to black female bodies, this chapter provides good information on the use of Mammy in Mitchell’s *Gone With the Wind* and a very modern subversion of that stereotype. (Laura Decker)


**Children’s Books:**


In this young adult novel the protagonist, an aspiring jazz musician named Mark, takes us through the main streets and back alleys of Harlem during the New Negro Renaissance era. As his family hits hard times, the sixteen-year-old Mark finds part-time work to help with family finances. His father was laid off when the Cotton Club was closed during prohibition, and he now works part-time cleaning at Connie’s Inn. Although Mark would rather have been cleaning or waiting tables at one of the jazz clubs, he takes a job as errand boy at a magazine called *The Crisis*. Through his eyes of innocence and naiveté, we meet many of the major figures of the Renaissance era: W.E. B. Du Bois, Jesse Faucet, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Effie Lee Newsome, Marian Anderson, Wallace Thurman, and others.

Mark aspires to be another Fats Waller and deliberately makes an acquaintance with the musician. In trying to befriend him, Mark takes a side job with Fats and unknowingly delivers bootleg liquor to gangster Dutch Schultz. When the delivery driver takes off in the truck full of liquor crates, Mark and his friend are blamed for theft; Dutch Schultz threatens them for his money.
Through the conflict with the gangsters, the reader meets the seedier side of Harlem, but the real conflict is within Mark as he tries to decide his place in his world. He dreams of being a musician and really doesn’t want any part of the “New Negro,” whom he describes below:

I had finally figured out just what she was talking about when she referred to the New Negro. It helped if you looked a little square and spoke like you were trying to taste the words as they were coming out, but mostly you had to be doing stuff that Old Negroes weren’t doing. (98)

Mark doesn’t want any part of being a New Negro, preferring the life of a jazz musician. Trying to fit in at work, he does fib and say he would like to be a poet like Langston Hughes (“It looked like a pretty easy way of making a living”) and even attempts one poem modeling “A Negro Speaks of Rivers” (“A Negro Speaks of Livers”).

Mark is eventually arrested for being “connected with interstate bootlegging” but is released after Fats Waller agrees to play at a club frequented by the detective. Mark achieves notoriety but decides a life of crime isn’t for him: “I did know I wanted to be in Harlem, though. I wanted to be around the music and all the people. New Negroes as well as old ones. I loved them all.”

Following the end of the story, the author offers a section called “Real People and Places in Harlem Summer.” Here he has pictures and explanations of the major characters and places in the novel. This section will be extremely helpful to students.

This short novel may be a good introduction to the Harlem Renaissance for grades 6-12 (or precocious students in upper elementary grades) but could serve more as a summary assignment. The students really need to have knowledge of the characters and places mentioned in the book to appreciate the story line. Otherwise, they are likely to feel frustrated with the inundation of names. Either way, the book offers an entertaining if cursory overview of the era. (Diane Weber)


This children’s book, written by Carole Weatherford and illustrated by Eric Velaquez, is targeted for elementary aged children, probably grades three and above. It tells the story of Jesse Owens’s Olympic victories in the Berlin games of 1936. Jesse Owens was the first American track-and-field star athlete to win four gold medals in a single Olympics and one of the most famous Olympic athletes of all time. He was also an African-American living in the Jim Crow South during the era of the New Negro Renaissance of 1919-1941.

The book begins by calling on Jesse Owens to “Go!” from the “cotton fields” and Jim Crow to follow his dreams. It follows him to Berlin and contrasts his dreams with the Berlin he is not meant to see: “concentration camps… guns firing far away… Hitler’s hatred.” Outlined next are Owens’s victories in the 100-meter dash, running broad jump, 200-meter finals, and 400-meter relay. Owens is followed back to a ticker-tape parade on Broadway, in New York City, where “for a few miles, the world is at your feet.”

The main part of the book ends there, with Owens victorious and being hailed as the fastest man on earth. The next two pages, entitled “Jesse—Beyond the Track,” give a brief biography of Jesse Owens. It mentions that because he was African-American, he was “barred
from the dormitories” and had to “eat at black restaurants. That is about all the prejudice of the time that is explained. As for his later life, the author offers only that he was not offered commercial sponsorships because of his race, that he dropped out of college to support his family by racing—people, cars, motorcycles, and race horses. Afterwards, Owens was a “sought-after speaker and the owner of a public relations firm” and was later awarded the Medal of Freedom in 1976 by Gerald Ford.

Since this is, after all, a book geared for elementary-aged children, it probably has enough detail of the racial tribulations suffered by Jesse Owens and other African-Americans at this time. However, as the students are mature enough for more detail, the teacher should augment this information. Certainly, if the children are mature enough to ask questions such as why Owens was treated as he was (or what the “concentration camps” were), these questions should be answered. Suggestions for further reading are offered at the end of the book.

Jesse Owens is of particular interest to me since he is from my school’s state, Alabama. While this book is not targeted to high school students, it is one that I can have on my bookshelf to recommend to students of limited reading ability or as a casual introduction to the topic of prejudice and Jim Crow. In class, as we study the New Negro Renaissance, a more serious study of Jesse Owens will offer a chance to contrast the life of an African-American living in the South with that of an African-American in the North at this time. (Diane Weber)

**Documentary Films:**


This DVD format collection includes several U.S. cartoon shorts. The cartoons contain very racist stereotypes and some interesting music. Cartoons include *Little Black Sambo* (1935); *Uncle Tom and Little Eva* (1932); *Fresh Hare* (1942); *Sunday Go To Meetin’ Time* (1936); *Uncle Tom’s Bungalow* (1937); *Angel Puss* (1944) *Confederate Honey* (1940); *Little Ol’ Bosko and the Cannibals* (1937); *Pop-Pie A La Mode* (1945); *Voodoo in Harlem* (1938); and *Tin Pan Alley Cats* (1943).

These selections present a range of insulting depictions of characters, which was unfortunately all too common in the media of the day. Offered as a historical document, these cartoons could start an interesting discussion among students of the period (1920-1945). (Gerry Liebmann)


This film explores the historical visit to America of this famous Czech composer. He set out to get a feeling for the relatively new nation, in order to create a “national music.” He discovered that there already was an American music based on the “Negro melodies” he heard. This observation from a respected European composer caused some controversy as well as some serious encouragement among the up-and-coming community of African-American musicians.

This film features classical and popular music; Dvorak’s original scores for the *New World Symphony* and *The American Quartet*; unpublished personal letters, oral histories, and rare wax cylinder recordings, as well as photographs from Prague, New York, and the American Prairies. Emphasis is on the links between various cultures. Also featured are some pieces by
Dvorak’s students, Will Marion Cook and Maurice Arnold. Total running time is 60 minutes. 
(Gerry Liebmann)


This 1950s black-and-white film about Jackie Robinson stars Jackie as himself. This is a “feel good” story targeted for general audiences. It is presented as a good man persevering over obstacles and proving himself worthy of admiration. Jackie Robinson may not have been the best actor, but his presence certainly lends verisimilitude to the film. The film begins with Jackie and his brother Mack as they played football and then basketball. In the film, Jackie’s brother, Matthew “Mack” Robinson, manages to get a college education but then can only find a job as a street sweeper. (Mack actually won the silver medal in the men's 200 meters at the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin, finishing just 0.4 seconds behind Jesse Owens.) Jackie likewise cannot find a job, quitting just shy of graduation from UCLA, although he applies for what seems like a hundred coaching jobs. Apparently no one wants an African-American coach. Jackie enlists in the military and earns the rank of lieutenant and, coming home, still cannot find a job. He finally joins the Black Panthers baseball team, even though he doesn’t consider baseball his strongest sport. With the team, Jackie encounters Jim Crow laws and attitudes as the players have to sleep on the bus and are not allowed to eat in diners or to use the white lavatories. Finally a scout for the Brooklyn Dodgers spots Jackie and invites him to play for its Montreal franchise. His mother offers him advice, saying playing for the white league would “take a lot of courage.” In spite of Canada’s being somewhat more open to integration, Jackie still encounters prejudice among the players. His recruiter warns, “You can run, you can hit, but can you take it?” meaning the slurs and disrespect he would inevitably encounter from other players and fans. He is told that no matter what happens on the ball field, he cannot fight back. As a model of the New Negro, he must display this stoicism under the extreme pressure of racism.

Jackie encounters racism not only among his teammates but in the communities where they play, with some parks canceling the game and locking the gates to black players. He is booed and taunted with black cats, watermelons, shoe-shine kits, and of course racial slurs. At one point a half dozen of his teammates sign a petition to keep Jackie from playing. But his manager, Blanch Richey, stands firm in his decision to play Robinson. Jackie Robinson perseveres in this “feel good” film and makes history, paving the way for African-Americans to play in the major leagues and earning a spot for himself in the Sports Hall of Fame.

This film tiptoes over the hardships of the pioneer players of this era and ignores altogether the seedier side of underground activities surrounding organized sports, especially in the larger cities. Ignored also are the efforts of African-Americans to help those suffering from other types of persecution, such as protesting the lynching in the South and defense of the
Scottsboro case. But this is a feel good movie, and with his stoicism and polished appearance, Jackie Robinson shows himself to be a good example of the New Negro of the era. Teachers can use this film as a springboard for discussion of the surrounding circumstances of Robinson’s story and the society in which he lived. (Diane Weber)


Classified X takes a detailed look at the negative depictions of African-Americans in movies. Director, writer, and producer Melvin Van Peebles argues that since Thomas Edison’s first black-and-white images over 100 years ago, African-Americans have been stereotyped and depicted as bumbling, moronic, Uncle Tomming fools who are incapable of doing anything intellectual or serious.

Audiences of varying demographics might be drawn to this simple yet insightful film. Those who have seen the movies referenced may look at those films through a different lens, while people who have not seen the movies excerpted can gain a better understanding of how prevalent and nonchalant the images of blacks as dispensable and foolish really were.

The New Negro Renaissance focused primarily on the New Negro Movement, a redevelopment or redesign of the black aesthetic. While African-Americans created and produced new forms of literature, poetry and music that helped to redefine them as a people, white producers, directors and film companies created and perpetuated old and new negative images of blacks. In terms of film, the New Negro did not surface until after WWII. Movies such as Birth of Nation and Pinky helped to market the degradation of black people. Van Peebles does an excellent job putting the stereotypical images of African-Americans in context. After viewers watch the 53-minute film, Van Peebles leaves them with a thirst or taste for more. Van Peebles addresses and introduces a series of issues and problems; however, he does not answer or address them all. Several questions are as follows: What is the influence of White Hollywood on Black America? How does over 100 years of negative depictions of blacks affect the way white people see blacks and the way blacks see themselves? (Barrett Taylor)

**Dissertations:**

**Fiction:**


**Films:**


A researcher or educator looking for images of African-American stereotypes in D.W. Griffith’s The Birth of a Nation would not be disappointed. The controversial film, based on a book called The Clansmen by Thomas Dixon, was released in 1915. Its horrible and violent
depictions of blacks makes the viewer question what Griffith was thinking when he made the movie. The NAACP even protested the movie when it premiered and called it the catalyst for attacks on blacks during white riots across the country.

This three-hour black-and-white film was billed as an early history of America. It starts with slaves being brought to America and then progresses to the Civil War. While it does start off chronicling events such as the Civil War and creation of the Ku Klux Klan, the deplorable depictions of African-Americans stand out the most.

The New Negro Renaissance was essentially about the redevelopment of the Negro whereas The Birth of a Nation epitomizes everything that blacks of the period fought against. From the Topsy-like child with nappy hair to the dancing and singing slaves (played by white men in black face) in the slave quarters, the images are disturbing. While these scenes are negative, the worst and most degrading in the movie occur when the former slave, Gus, tries to marry the lily-white character Flora. Gus, also played by a white man in blackface, is a “renegade” Northern soldier who lusts for what every black man wants the most, the white female. When he proposes to Flora, she denies him and jumps to her death after he chases her through the forest. Her death eventually leads to his being tried (by a group of all whites) and killed by the Ku Klux Klan. The Birth of a Nation was called “one of the greatest American movies of all time” by the American Film Institute. The quote is ironic because it is far from being great. (Barrett Taylor)


Director John M. Stahl’s famous movie _Imitation of Life_, made in 1934, focuses on a range of issues, but especially the color line. The main character, Peola Johnson, a light-skinned black woman, is torn between two worlds: the white one, where there is no limit to potential opportunities, and the sad, segregated black one. Her mother, Delilah, is a hefty Aunt Jemima-like maid who does everything she can for her daughter; however, her daughter rejects almost everything her mother gives her because the mother is a dark-skinned black woman. Early on, Peola rejects her blackness by denying it and crying about being black. Her complaints and rejection of her color continue throughout the movie, until sadly, she denounces being black and decides to pass for white. After the loss of her daughter, Delilah falls ill and eventually dies. Her funeral ends with her distraught daughter running back to see her mother’s casket one last time. The movie itself closes with Peola crying and screaming for the love her mother once tried to give her while she was alive, but, sadly, it is too late.

_Imitation of Life’s_ main character is the stereotypical tragic mulatto. The tragic mulatto was a common archetype used in film and literature during the 1930s—1950s. This character is typically light or very fair skinned and lost in society. The movie raises a bevy of interesting questions from what is it like to be a black female in Western society to why are blacks commonly only depicted as maids or butlers in movies during this period? Most interesting is
the issue of the color line: Why can’t African-Americans feel comfortable being black in American society? Also, most importantly, how do the negative images whites created on screen affect blacks? (Barrett Taylor)


Looking for images of stereotypes of black children during the New Negro Renaissance? If so, watch the classic TV show, _The Little Rascals_. Also known as “Our Gang,” _The Little Rascals_ was created in 1927 as a series of silent shorts that eventually evolved into the TV program with sound that we know today. This children’s comedy followed a group of playful and adventurous kids. Characters such as Spanky, Stymie, Alfalfa and Buckwheat were hugely popular and, in turn, the actors playing the characters became stars.

The episode entitled “Spanky” deals with a young Spanky being obnoxious while his older brother, Brisbane, is directing and performing a few scenes from the play _Uncle Tom’s Cabin_. Uncle Tom’s character is played by a young Stymie, who unfortunately has to play the roles of Uncle Tom and Topsy since his sister cannot attend the play. Stymie, luckily, rises to the occasion by speaking horrible English and wearing a ridiculous outfit to play Topsy. He also does a great job of getting whipped during the play by his white master. The episode’s antagonist, Spanky, causes trouble throughout the play and eventually finds his father’s secret stash of money at the end.

Characters such as Buckwheat and Farina, who are played by young black kids, fall under the pickaninny archetype. “Pickaninny” is a derogatory term used to refer to young black children; these two characters fit the description to a “T.” Buckwheat wears raggedy clothes and speaks poor English. In addition, he has a huge, nappy Afro that is always uncut and wild at the top. Farina’s dress and English are equally bad, and he has long pigtails that at times that hang loosely from his unkeempt head.

_The Little Rascals_, while seemingly innocent, is series that constantly stereotyped and made fun of African-Americans. Kids across America watched the show during the 1930s, 1940s and even into the 1980s. The show’s depictions of the young children are quite negative, from the white children in blackface picking cotton while acting out the play _Uncle Tom’s Cabin_ to the character Buckwheat’s outlandish dress and haircut. (Barrett Taylor)


“The Rasslin’ Match” and “The Lion Tamer” are two examples of racist cartoons that were produced during the time period of the New Negro Renaissance. Both cartoons, produced in 1934 by Van Beuren Studios, are about 10 minutes each and are about the characters from the controversial radio show _Amos ‘n’ Andy_. The radio and TV show were hugely popular in America throughout the 1920s—1950s.

In “The Rasslin’ Match,” Andy, a large black man with huge lips and bulging eyes who speaks a garbled version of English, prepares for a wrestling match. His companion, Amos, who doesn’t dress or talk any better, helps him prepare for the fight. “The Lion Tamer” is no better. Amos and Andy somehow can’t tell the difference between a fake and real lion while pretending to be lion tamers at the circus. All this leads to Andy’s being chased by a lion and eventually

Oscar Micheaux’s Swing! is a film that addresses black caricatures as well as racial “uplift” politics. Mandy Jenkins, the main character, moves to New York in an effort to redefine herself, despite her no-good man, Cornell. Through her friend Lena she secures a position as a wardrobe mistress for a Negro musical troupe with a black director—exemplifying the important themes of economics and black ownership of the New Negro Movement. When the star of the show is injured, Mandy is asked to step in and play the lead, and the show becomes an overnight success.

This film addresses the black stereotypes, particularly the Mammy, as the role that Mandy acquires and that makes her a star is that of the familiar Mammy. Also, after the show becomes a success, a white director buys it and changes the name to “I Lubs Dat Man.” However, as critics have pointed out, Mandy signifies in the role rather than inhabiting it, and it is the white director in the end who is humiliated by the back stereotypes in his musical rather than the actors themselves, as viewers differentiate between the two.

For anyone interested in the popular culture of the Harlem Renaissance and the New Negro Movement, or even in the 1930s, this film would be a useful resource. Micheaux’s film Swing! provides a good counter to Margaret Mitchell’s Gone With the Wind, so teachers might find it useful to discuss the two in tandem. Micheaux, touted as the first black filmmaker, should be addressed in any course that looks at the artistic front—and even political struggles—of the New Negro Movement or the history of film in America. (Laura Decker)

Musical Recordings:


This collection was produced and annotated by Steven Lasker. A and B sides of originals, as well as artist credits, composer credits, master numbers and release dates are all included. All original sessions were recorded at Brunswick’s New York studio (located at 799 Seventh Avenue at 52nd Street) This studio was the only one in America actively recording from the Acoustical era to the Digital era. Ellington recorded there from the 1920s through the 1960s.

This collection offers a great opportunity to sample the “Ellington Sound” in its various stages of development, from “East St. Louis Toodle-o,” with Tuba and Banjo, through “Wall Street Wail”—in two different “takes”—to “Creole Rhapsody,” parts 1, 2, and 3. There are 67 individual selections in all. Cover notes include some biographical information, anecdotal background about the sessions, session personnel, and several black and white photographs. (Gerry Liebmann)
Poetry:

Shadowed Dreams is a collection of poetry by black female writers of the Harlem Renaissance. Nellie McKay provides a short but insightful preface, and Maureen Honey, the editor, provides a critical introduction to women’s poetry during the Harlem Renaissance, including basic information on the ways in which female poets negated and subverted the Mammy stereotype by addressing black, female sexuality and motherhood. Honey’s collection would be helpful for any lover or teacher of poetry or the Harlem Renaissance, as it includes a wide variety of female poets. Readers with a specific interest will appreciate that the poems are divided into chapters by themes: “Protest,” “Heritage,” “Love and Passion,” and “Nature.” Also, Honey includes original publication information, in such magazines as Opportunity and The Crisis—as black female poets were mostly excluded from anthologies of the 1920s. Thus, Honey does much of the heavy lifting for readers who don’t want to dig through the original sources.

A few poems that would be helpful to look at concerning the subversion of the Mammy stereotype are “Black Baby” by Anita Scott Coleman, “Lullaby” by Aqua Laluah, “Rime for the Christmas Baby (At 48 Webster Place, Orange) by Anne Spencer, and Jessie Fausett’s “Oriflamme.” These four poems specifically deal with black motherhood and assert that unlike the Mammy caricature, black mothers nurture their own black children. For instance, in Coleman’s poem, the speaker emphasizes that the baby in this black mother’s arms is a black baby. The comparison of the baby with the rich loam and coal at once creates agricultural and industrial connotations—which are important, as much of the New Negro Movement was based in economics—as well as uplift connotations through the growth associated with the nutrient-rich loam and the image of the diamond.

Although this source may better fit the literature genre than the popular culture genre, my particular project seeks the ways in which “Mammy” poems subverted the Mammy caricature. Thus, this collection of poems may be very helpful in the classroom when discussing the emergence and rejection of black stereotypes in the early twentieth century. (Laura Decker)

Web Sites:


This Web site covers the life and accomplishments of Madam C. J. Walker, the daughter of former slaves, who came up from humble roots as a laundress to create her own beauty industry enterprise and to become one of the most successful African-American female entrepreneurs of her time. Her story would serve as a great example of the expanding possibilities for both women and African-Americans at the beginning of the New Negro Renaissance and points to the expansion of the black middle class who bought her products. According to the biography included on the Web site, Madam C. J. Walker started by selling her line of hair care products door to door and eventually expanded her business to include a factory in Indianapolis, training schools, and salons such as the heralded Walker Salon in Harlem. In addition to offering details of her hair care business, the bio also discusses Walker’s accomplishments as a businesswoman, including speaking at the National Business League Convention in 1912 and holding the Hair Culturists Union of America Convention in 1917. Also covered are Walker’s philanthropic and political contributions like supporting the NAACP anti-lynching campaign with funds from her business.

The Web site is described as the official Web site of Madam C. J. Walker, authored by “A’Lelia Walker, her biographer and great-great granddaughter.” In addition to the biographical information, the site also offers a scrolling timeline of Walker’s life and career, a section about events and speeches including videos of past speeches, additional audio and video links, a bibliography of respected sources, an FAQ section that clears up misconceptions like whether or not Madame C. J. Walker invented the straightening comb, and quotes and pictures. There is also a separate tab for students and teachers.

This Web site is ideal for imparting basic information about Madam C. J. Walker and her accomplishments to teachers or students who are in middle school or beyond. While it does provide plenty of information, the Web site does not provide very much in the way of analysis of the significance of Walker or any interpretation of the cultural implications of the success of her products. Users should also note that the site devotes a significant amount of space to establishing A’Lelia Bundles as Walker’s authorized biographer and the best resource for information about Walker. For this reason, and because much of the information that the Web site has to offer is not terribly well organized, it might be helpful to direct students to very specific portions of the Web site. (Aimee Hendrix)


The Crisis, a monthly publication of the NAACP edited by W.E.B. Du Bois, had a national audience of both blacks and whites in the years of the New Negro Renaissance. It is particularly important for gaining the perspective of middle and upper class African-Americans in the early twentieth century. The advertisements at the back of the journal are useful for insights into popular culture.

From the 1910s through the 1930s (when I stopped searching the journal) there are many advertisements for Negro or colored dolls. These ads address issues of color within the African-
American community, education or socialization of African-American children, development of racial pride and a positive race consciousness, white- vs. black-owned businesses selling to black consumers, and ambivalence over the representation of black Americans. “Image making,” of which black dolls were a part, demonstrated class distinctions among African-Americans during this era.

The earliest black doll advertisement (August 1911) promoted what may be the first African-American doll company, the National Negro Doll Company, established by Reverend R. H. Boyd, one of the founders of the National Baptist Publishing Board in Nashville, TN. The headline of the ad proclaimed, “The Most Beautiful of all the Toys in the Market are the NEGRO DOLLS.” Boyd articulated themes that black doll entrepreneurs, whether Boyd or Garvey, followed: black dolls as a means to instill race pride in children, as well as establishing black-owned businesses to promote economic independence from whites. In the 1930s subscribers could receive a free “beautiful brown doll” with four yearly subscriptions to The Crisis. The advertisement urged subscribers to acquire these dolls because “Race Appreciation Must Be Taught Early, What Better Time Than in Childhood.” Advertisements came from a variety of doll and toy companies, both black and white, but most emphasized the brown skin or pretty features of the dolls, and most stressed that the clothing was in “the latest style”—no “mammy” or “pickaninny” outfits. Several of the doll companies, probably white owned, downplayed the race pride theme and focused upon the light skin and attractiveness of the dolls, often including pictures of the dolls, many resembling white dolls “colorized.”

Many African-American households had both white and black dolls, and The Crisis published a poem in 1930 that examined the ambivalence of “Melissa—Little Black Girl” to her white, blond, and blue-eyed baby doll Rose. The girl tells her doll, “I don’t love you…I positively don’t…” and asks the doll to “suppose you were me…and you knew how it felt to be lonely and black.” Interestingly, this poem foreshadows Toni Morrison’s much later work The Bluest Eye and Claudia’s relationship with her blond, blue-eyed doll. (Patricia Miletich)


The online exhibition titled “Harlem 1900-1940” is presented by the New York Public Library through the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. The Center’s Web site itself (and presumably the center, too, if one is located near NYC) should be an excellent resource for any teacher concerned with African-American studies or the global black experience. “Harlem 1900-1940” is only one of nine online exhibitions including “Lest We Forget: The Triumph over Slavery” and “In Motion: The African American Migration Experience.” Plenty of other items from the collection are also presented online.

“Harlem 1900-1940” begins with a brief introduction that gives basic facts about Harlem in the first part of the twentieth century, but also does an excellent job of providing a historical context for the developments that take place for African-Americans and in Harlem. The introduction paints a full picture of the New Negro movement, including business development, activism, and politics, rather than just focusing on the artistic or literary aspects of the Harlem Renaissance as some short summaries do. The strength of this introduction is that it is highly readable and accessible without being elementary or simplistic.

The exhibition itself is organized into sections on arts, community, business, activism, intellectuals, and sports. Users select from 30 photographs that tell a story by themselves, but are
also paired with the same sort of informative but accessible text found in the introduction. Popular culture and arts topics include social clubs, the Layfayette Theatre, The Brownies’ Book, James Van Der Zee, Duke Ellington, Aaron Douglass, James Reese Europe, Fletcher Henderson, The Frogs, and Florence Mills.

In addition to the exhibition, the “For Teachers” and “Timeline” sections of the site are noteworthy and useful. The timeline, which is divided by the four decades, is excellent for reflecting the diversity of activities, people, and events that supported this renaissance. As the students are led through the events of each decade, they can read about some more commonly discussed items such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Langston Hughes, but they also read about black musical theatre, the building of the Harlem Hospital, Madame C. J. Walker, the Harlem Renaissance Basketball Club, and the Black Swan Phonograph Corporation. The relationship between institution building, popular culture, fine arts, literature, and politics is evident in this simple timeline.

The “For Teachers” section of the site contains helpful tips on teaching this time period as well as suggestions for lessons and activities on many of the specific topics covered in the exhibition and the timeline. The lessons are mostly appropriate for the high school and middle school level, but could be adapted to fit other age groups as well. Overall this site would be ideal either for teachers wishing to build background for a social studies or a literature lesson, or as a source for students to use directly. (Aimee Hendrix)


Hattie...What I Need You to Know is a musical play based on the life of Hattie McDaniel, the first African-American to receive an academy award. Hattie received the Oscar for Best Supporting Actress for her portrayal as Mammie in Gone with the Wind in 1939. The musical stars Vickilyn Reynolds, who has written and sings most of its songs. The musical score is orchestrated by Michael A. Williams. The play previewed in Denver in 2008, and the Web site suggests that it is being produced in 2010, but I could not find any dates of performance. Nevertheless, the Web site is available and the subject of this review.

The Web site, produced to accompany the musical, is targeted toward a youthful audience, with a general vocabulary (“depression,” “racial prejudice,” etc. are often defined for the reader). The site runs a sound track of Reynolds singing some of her numbers as the reader browses through chapters on Hattie’s life and production notes for the musical play. These are presented as if the reader is leafing through a scrapbook of Hattie’s life.

Hattie...What I Need You to Know’s stated purpose is that it “honors and pays tribute to the historical, theatrical accomplishment” of Hattie McDaniel. As such, it is unapologetically complementary of her and her work. Nevertheless, the site addresses the controversy that surrounded much of McDaniel’s work. For example, the NCAAP President Walter White pressed actors and studios to quit making films stereotyping and ridiculing blacks, singling out Hattie’s roles as particularly demeaning. She answered back that she had a right to choose the roles as she saw fit and claimed that her roles often exceeded those of her employers on the show. She is quoted as saying, “I’d rather play a maid for $700 a week than be on for $7 a week.” The posted reviews and news clippings in the Press section offer a little more light into the controversy about media roles of the 1930s, and there are many more sites to offer more scholarly information on the subject for further research, but this one is appropriate to spotlight
one performer and her response to the difficulties of finding roles in a racially-prejudiced institution.

With its easy-to-use format and colorful and upbeat appearance and lively soundtrack, this site is appealing to students of elementary through high school age. This is one that can be accessed through the classroom and will offer a window into the life of one of the actresses who had to play the demeaning roles available to performers during the New Negro Renaissance era. The site could be a valuable aid in discussing the Popular Culture of the time. (Diane Weber)


http://www.explorestlouis.com/media/pressKit/africanAmerSites.asp

This Web site, titled St. Louis All Within Reach, offers brief descriptions of more than two-dozen St. Louis sites that have significance in African-American History.


The Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia is both a real place and a virtual site. The actual museum is located on the campus of Ferris State University in Big Rapids, Michigan. The museum’s and Web site’s stated targeted audience is high schools, universities, government agencies, and human rights organizations for purposes “including, but not limited to, producing original research, planning and hosting conferences, and conducting anti-racism training sessions.” The material is presented in a friendly format that makes it accessible to high school students as well as adults. Considering the offensive subject presented, it is probably not a good site to suggest to unsupervised younger students.

The stated objectives of the Jim Crow Museum include the following:

(1) Collect, exhibit and preserve objects and collections related to racial segregation, civil rights and anti-black caricatures; (2) Promote the scholarly examination of historical and contemporary expressions of racism; (3) Serve as a teaching resource for Ferris State courses which deal, directly or indirectly, with issues of race and ethnicity; (4) Serve as an educational resource for scholars and teachers at the state, national, and international levels; (5) Promote racial understanding and healing; and (6) Serve as a resource for civil rights and human rights organizations.

Named after Jim Crow, an offensive antebellum minstrel show character created in the early 1830s, the museum houses ordinary items, such as sheet music, ashtrays, children's books, notepads, fishing lures, salt and pepper shakers, postcards, dolls, and matchbooks. Most items in the 4,000-piece collection of racist artifacts were gathered, catalogued, and donated by Dr. Pilgrim, but patrons who wished to contribute to the museum have sent in pieces as well. All items, however, represent African-Americans in a “stereotypical, degrading fashion.”

In addition to physical artifacts (available through virtual, online tours), the museum offers examples and links to discussions of Jim Crow beginnings and statutes and discussions and examples of African-American caricatures (Brute, Pickaninny, Tom, Sapphire, Mammy, Jezebel, Coon, Tragic Mulatto, Gollywog, and Nat). The site also offers selected videos, as follows:
The Mike Wallace Interview: James McBride Dabbs (8/31/58)
The Mike Wallace Interview: Orval Faubus (9/15/57)
The Mike Wallace Interview: Senator James Eastland (7/28/57)
The Mike Wallace Interview: Eldon Edwards (5/5/57)
American Experience: Interview with James Baldwin
American Experience: Interview with Martin Luther King Jr.
Racial Stereotyping (Part 1 of 2), Television: Inside & Out
Racial Stereotyping (Part 2 of 2), Television: Inside & Out
Black & White Minstrels
1950 Blackface Performance: Vernon & Ryan
Thank You Note to Lynx and Lamb Gaede
Racist Cartoon Clips
Minstrel Show Rap
JFK Announces Civil Rights Act
Martin Luther King "I Have a Dream"
Christopher Newman: Tuskegee Airman (Documentary)
Unforgiven: Legacy of a Lynching
Tom and Jerry in "Plane Dumb" (1932)
The Struggle

The Mike Wallace Interviews are described on the site as follows:
8/31/58. James McBride Dabbs, South Carolinian, plantation owner, elder in the Presbyterian Church, president of the Southern Regional Council, and author of The Southern Heritage, talks to Wallace about the psychological burden of the Southerner, segregation, school integration, and the consequences of the Civil War.
9/15/57. Orval Faubus, governor of Arkansas, talks to Wallace from the Governor's mansion in Little Rock during his standoff with the Federal Government over the integration of Little Rock Central High School. He had called in the National Guard to bar the African-American students from the school and had met the day before this interview with President Eisenhower in an effort to resolve the conflict. (University of Texas at Austin)
7/28/57. Senator James Eastland of Mississippi, who has been called "The Voice of the White South," talks to Wallace about segregation, slavery, the Soviet Union, voting rights laws, and the Ku Klux Klan.
5/5/57. Eldon Edwards, Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, talks to Wallace about the South's attitude toward the KKK, the Klan's membership, segregation, the NAACP, communism, and J. Edgar Hoover.

As we study the New Negro and the efforts to counter prejudice and stereotypes from 1919 to 1941, it is important to recognize the seeming ubiquity of racist statutes, media, and the casualness with which racism was accepted during our studied time period as well as during more recent history. We have discussed lynching, Jim Crow laws, minstrels, and racial stereotypes in the media. This site offers examples of and commentary on all of these. This Web site, suitable as a resource for teachers and for high school research, will contribute to our understanding and will be a valuable aid for our teaching this time period. (Diane Weber)

McCollum, Sean. "Photographer James Van Der Zee." Scholastic.


The PBS series online of American Masters begins with a brief summary of Paul Robeson’s career and contributions to American history. The Web site is intended for popular consumption by the general public, but has specific sections for teachers with expanded resources, including links to other popular and academic Web sites.

The general overview provided describes Robeson as the epitome of the twentieth century Renaissance man for his wide range of talents and abilities, but it can also be used to tie him to the New Negro Renaissance that was all about professional, successful African-Americans. Robeson excelled in athletics and academics throughout college, pursued a law degree and joined a New York law firm. After problems within the firm, he pursued a second career in entertainment as a singer and actor in some popular and controversial plays such as All God’s Chillun Got Wings and The Emperor Jones, as well as a 300-performance run as Othello. The article touches upon Robeson’s other interests like the history of Africa and foreign languages, as well as his powerful appeal as an early superstar. Although brief, the introduction is concise. But the real value of the site is in its added resources like an illustrated timeline of Robeson’s life that includes the context of other relevant historical dates. The site also includes a section with teacher lesson plans. Even if the full lesson plans are not of direct use, the lessons include lots of links to good Robeson Web sites that are relevant to many different aspects of Robeson’s career. (Whitney Coonradt)


This Web site provides a good overview of some of the race relations, migration (1910s), fraternal organizations, education, housing, baseball, politics and civil rights activism issues in St. Louis, MO.

In this short snippet and book excerpt, National Public Radio is addressing a new book by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, *On the Shoulders of Giants: My Journey Through the Harlem Renaissance*, which looks at the history of the famed Harlem Renaissance Ballroom. The introduction to the book and the excerpt are meant to give readers a brief glimpse into the new book, hoping to prompt readers to pursue it further. Its brief length allows this excerpt to become a very usable resource in a classroom. The book itself addresses the role of the ballroom for music, dancing, and athletics.

The book focuses a good deal on the Harlem Rens, the black basketball team whose home was the Renaissance. The introduction to the NPR article addresses very simply Abdul-Jabbar’s argument that while the famous Globetrotters “clowned around” and “conformed to negative racial stereotypes,” the Rens were serious and professional about the game of basketball and its potential to gain them respect as Americans. This in turn, as Abdul-Jabbar argues, makes the Rens exemplary of the essence of the New Negro and the Harlem Renaissance. The excerpt from the book included on the NPR segment actually contains little about basketball, but focuses on the goals and vision of the Renaissance, often critical of Harlem because it seemed “giddy with innocent celebration of life,” in turn hiding the daily struggles of life in Harlem for African-Americans. The bulk of the excerpt is focused on comparing the images of African-Americans and interwar Harlem portrayed by two of its most famous clubs, The Cotton Club and the Renaissance Casino and Ballroom. Abdul-Jabbar argues that the Cotton Club exemplified the white perception, stereotypes, and comfort level with African-Americans, focusing on happy, sensual, primitive African-Americans as employees, not owners or patrons. Meanwhile, the Renaissance Casino and Ballroom “symbolized the ideals of self-reliance and community values that the Harlem Renaissance was preaching.” To add to the complexity, however, Abdul-Jabbar acknowledges that the popularity of African-Americans at the Cotton Club, “provided a platform for the innovative Jazz music of Duke Ellington, which led many listeners to embrace authentic black culture and led to a dispelling of the silly stereotypes from the Cotton Club.” Ultimately Abdul-Jabbar proposes that in many ways The Harlem Globetrotters are like the Cotton Club, in some ways pandering to the white audience through stereotypes yet also reaching a broad audience with evidence of talented successful African-Americans, while the Rens promoted the New Negro ideals within the African-American community and beyond through talent and professionalism.

This short article addresses the Renaissance question of the role of white people in the movement very clearly by creating two concrete examples (Cotton Club vs. Renaissance Casino and Globetrotters vs. Rens). This debate about working within stereotypes and under white control through employment or focusing on creating black-owned establishments with black patrons was key to the discourse during the Renaissance and today when assessing its gains. This article has a lot of potential to spark classroom discussions because its length is easily manageable as is the reading level, but also the concrete examples establish a starting point that can be expanded to other elements of the Renaissance argument about high and low culture, black and white ideals of art, beauty, etc. (Whitney Coonradt)

**St. Louis African Arts Festival.** [http://stlafricanartsfest.org](http://stlafricanartsfest.org)

This Web site provides a history and program descriptions for the St. Louis African Arts Festival.


The Wisconsin Historical Society currently features online twenty-eight objects from its black dolls collection. Both historians and collectors would use this site. For each of the black dolls in the online collection, a photograph of the doll is shown with a brief description. An interested viewer can click on the brief description and go to a page that identifies the object and gives a detailed description, a history of the object, a physical description (for instance, height), and the date of manufacture. For the historian such careful curatorial research helps recreate the history of black dolls in America, and for the collector this site is invaluable in learning to identify the dolls she or he may hope to acquire.

The online collection features a variety of dolls from the mid-nineteenth century through the American Girl’s Addy Walker. Most of the dolls are from the early twentieth century, especially the 1920s and 1930s. The site also illustrates the range of materials used to make dolls during these years, as well as the contrast between the folk dolls and first European-manufactured and then American-made dolls. The oldest dolls are composition and bisque dolls from the nineteenth century, manufactured in Europe, mostly by the Germans and French (as were most dolls sold in the US). These early dolls exhibited the common characteristics of exaggerated dark color and facial features on the one hand and use of white doll molds painted black on the other. The racial identifier most common was dressing the dolls, male and female, in servant garb reminiscent of the Old Plantation. The folk dolls from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries included walnut, rag, cloth and wooden dolls. As most were handmade, the materials used were those commonly available to African-Americans—scraps of cloth, bones, wood scraps, and nuts. In the early twentieth century, new materials such as rubber, celluloid, and printed cloth brought manufactured dolls to the forefront as companies within the United States began more widely producing dolls for the home market. The most popular of the manufactured dolls were the Mammy dolls. Another popular doll was the topsy-turvy style with one black and one white head, the two dolls in their clothing and hair demonstrating the very different status of the two dolls, servant and “master.” The collection includes a celluloid doll manufactured in Japan that has the deepest black complexion and most exaggerated racial features—the doll clearly an export for the American market.

This online collection illustrates many of the key concerns and themes that arise out of a study of black dolls in the early twentieth century through the 1930s. The virulent racial stereotyping in both European- and American-manufactured dolls had an impact on both the white and black children encountering these dolls. Popular culture depictions of the Mammy or advertising with extreme racial stereotyping directed primarily at adults surely sent messages of inferiority and degradation to children as well. But the presence of dolls that conveyed such messages surely had negative impacts on white and black children, reinforcing feelings of superiority for white children and inferiority for black. Dolls then become a means of transmitting racial prejudices. Homemade and folk dolls for African-American children offered somewhat of an alternative, but for the black middle and upper classes of the period, folk and rag
dolls would not have been prized. Instead the European imports and American-manufactured
dolls would be what children craved. This is the context in which black entrepreneurs (and a few
black doll makers) would attempt to offer black children alternatives to the mostly racist
depictions of African-Americans in dolls. The black elites during the era of the New Negro
Renaissance, as well as the Garveyites, wanted to claim and control the image of blacks as seen
through dolls. (Patricia Miletich)