
The Joy of Finding Periodicals “Not in Danky”

RANDALL K. BURKETT

ABSTRACT

This essay examines the seminal reference tool, *African-American Newspapers and Periodicals: A National Bibliography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), edited by James P. Danky. It provides background on the creation of this highly acclaimed volume and demonstrates its usefulness in building a research collection of rare periodical literature in African American history and culture. It also documents efforts to build such a collection at Emory University.

I met James Danky first by reputation some thirty years ago. My wife, Nancy Burkett, was at the time a librarian at the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts, and AAS was intensively engaged in a nationwide effort funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities to identify and microfilm every newspaper published throughout the country. This massive effort, the United States Newspaper Project, had decided to proceed on a state-by-state basis, and the Antiquarian Society, as the premiere repository for early American newspapers, was centrally involved. Their curator of newspapers served on the project's national advisory committee.

Word filtered back to me of a troublesome presence on that committee—a young, cantankerous fellow from Wisconsin who insisted the approach being taken would result in a final product that, if not fatally flawed, would fail significantly in its goal of comprehensiveness. A policy decision had been made not to search specifically for “genres” of newspapers, for example, Irish, German, African American, or other group-based papers, as the project was working from the top down, through state and national institutions. The Wisconsin fellow argued this approach would dramatically underrepresent African American newspapers if special efforts were not made to search out holdings at historically black colleges and universities. These often understaffed institutions would not be able

to respond effectively to written surveys, and many of them did not participate in OCLC, the national online library database. Further, the “main-line” repositories, whether state libraries or others, would never have collected much of this material in the first place, so even the most extensive of searches would not be sufficient to the task.

I don’t have access to the protests, appeals, and recommendations filed by this fellow, James Danky, but my understanding is that his nettlesome and well-thought-out critiques fell on deaf ears. “They” had a plan, and “they” had no intention of revising it. Naturally, I found this fellow to be quite interesting. I knew he was absolutely right about the difficulty of ferreting out such material. For the first fifteen years of my academic career, my primary interest was in the area of African American religious history. I had founded a newsletter to foster research in this field, and I knew how wide and deep one had to dig to secure the obscure pamphlets, periodicals, and newspapers published within and for the African American community since the early nineteenth century. Danky was soon one of my most faithful subscribers. He wasn’t particularly interested in religious history itself, I later found out, but he was very interested in newsletters. He collected mine and thousands of others, for that great research repository for American history in all of its dimensions, the Wisconsin Historical Society.

I first met Jim in Madison while undertaking research for a rather wacky project my wife and I had hatched in the early 1970s to index every sketch found in any pre-1951 book or section of a book that provided biographical information on people of African descent in North America. Our task did not seem daunting at the outset. All we had to do was locate every book, be it *African Methodists of Mississippi* or *A History of Colored Baptists of Nova Scotia* or *Cincinnati’s Colored Citizen*, that seemed to fit our criteria, then borrow or photocopy the biographical section, and create an index. For starters, we had not calculated just how difficult it would be to locate these volumes. Searching “Negroes—biography” in library catalogs would not identify all relevant items, and even the Moorland-Spangarn Research Library at Howard University and Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture Library catalogs would not be sufficient if we were to be thorough in our work. We decided we needed to go to as many repositories as possible, to search their catalogs and consult with their library staff, to see what obscure or otherwise neglected sources might be of help for our master list. Danky was intrigued by the project and immediately saw its potential. He not only helped identify volumes that, from their titles, would have appeared irrelevant, but he also gave us the names of key librarians around the country who were knowledgeable and would think imaginatively about potential sources. The result, some fifteen years later, was the multivolume *Black Biography: 1790–1950*, a cumulative index to biographical sketches and photographs of about 35,000 African Americans published in nearly 350 collective biographies.

That project was published under the auspices of the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for Afro-American Research at Harvard University. It was the first research/reference tool published under the imprimatur of the institute, where I worked as associate director for more than a decade. It was the institute's second research project that allowed Jim and me to form the much closer personal friendship that has lasted to the present day. The idea for the *Harvard Guide to African-American History* was conceived by the late director of the institute, Nathan I. Huggins. He wanted to show his colleagues at Harvard and around the country that there was much more to the field of African American studies than they imagined. We conceived an unwieldy structure that resulted, eventually, in selection of thirty-one leading scholars throughout the United States who would be responsible for the particular period or specific genre of material for which they were among the foremost authorities.

By this time, I was aware that Danky had committed himself to directing a massive effort to identify *every* African American newspaper and periodical for which original copies could be located and examined. With sustained support from the Wisconsin Historical Society and the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and with substantial funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Ford Foundation, and others, Danky had launched a major project to fill the "sluices and interstices" of one critical aspect of American history: the gap in our knowledge of the rich history of black newspapers and periodicals created within and for African American communities. With the capable assistance of Maureen E. Hady and a small army of assistants, he set out to visit virtually every repository that might hold original issues of African American newspapers and periodicals. It was critical, he knew, that the papers themselves had to be handled, one by one. So-called "complete" runs of newspapers would only be verified as complete if each issue was inspected separately. Title and editor changes could be identified, and confusing numbering and misnumbering accounted for.

Danky was, of course, the obvious choice to prepare the genre essay on newspapers for the *Harvard Guide to African-American History*. He came to our first planning meeting with no idea that that venture would stretch into a thirteen-year-long project. I shall only say, in reflecting on the pitfalls and peregrinations of that effort, that one should *never* conceive a plan for a reference work that entails the collaboration of thirty-one of your colleagues, flung across the country, with varying states of bibliographical skill, and with unknown work habits. Successful reference works are major feats of intellectual endeavor, organizational acumen, and sheer perseverance, and need at least one key member who has an authoritarian personality.

My own major "gift" to Jim Danky, I have no doubt, came through my introduction to him, in the course of these meetings, of our dear, now departed, friend and colleague, Richard Newman. Newman was not just

a brilliant bibliographer; he was an extraordinary raconteur, a talented mimic with a biting wit, and a man who loved learning, gossip, fine food, good wine, and the preservation and advancement of African American history. His powers of memory were extraordinary, and he was genuinely interested in the scholarship of others and in doing all in his power to assist folk in their scholarly work. He and Jim became fast friends, and on behalf of Danky's bibliographic quest the two of them made many trips to small colleges throughout the United States but especially in the South, turning pages of newspapers by day, cajoling the staff into searching even further into back shelves to locate fugitive titles for the next day, and then retiring to the best dining establishment in the area to fortify themselves. Never has money from the public trust been better invested!

The result of his multiyear project was *African-American Newspapers and Periodicals: A National Bibliography*, edited by James P. Danky and Maureen E. Hady, and published by Harvard University Press in 1998. This impressive 740-page volume is a guide to in excess of 6,500 titles by and about African Americans identified, as the brief history of the project makes clear, "through direct examination of each issue of every title." That phrase bears repeating: "direct examination of each issue of every title." The project, over a ten-year period, took staff members to libraries and archives in over thirty states. The bibliography is comprehensive: it covers "literary, political, and historical journals as well as general newspapers and feature magazines. It includes titles that have long ceased publication as well as those which still appear." The work is "the most extensive yet compiled," and, I dare say, the most extensive that will be compiled; it represents virtually all phases of African American thought and action, "from the religious, abolitionist, and educational press of the antebellum era to the publications of nationalists, Hip Hop musicians, and business and professional groups that appear today."

In the world of rare books, the creation of a landmark bibliography earns its creator a great distinction. It quickly becomes the standard by which rare book dealers, collectors, and repositories judge the importance of material *not* found therein. In African American studies for much of the twentieth century, the standard test of rarity was Monroe N. Work's massive *A Bibliography of the Negro in Africa and America* (1928). "Not in Work" was a designation that appeared in rare book catalogs and in other settings to indicate that the item was indeed unusual and considered valuable. Within a very few years of the publication of *African-American Newspapers and Periodicals*, the term "Not in Danky" became the accepted way to identify periodicals that possess special value for their rarity. The very day I received my copy of the bibliography I began examining my personal library of Afro-Americana to see if I owned newspapers or periodicals not listed there. It is the principal test I now apply, as curator of African American Collections at Emory University, in deciding whether to purchase periodicals.

My first "Not in Danky" (NID) acquisition for Emory University was an excellently produced periodical entitled *The Prospect: A Monthly Magazine for the Colored People of America* (Volume 1, Number 1, April 1898), published in New York for the Prospect Publishing Company (see Figure 1). This title turned up in a small collection of approximately twenty pamphlets we acquired, all of which had been owned by the distinguished educator, intellectual, and founder of the American Negro Academy, Alexander Crummell. This particular volume is not only Not in Danky, but it is, so far as I can tell, completely unrecorded. It does not appear in *WorldCat*, the global network of more than 57,000 libraries. Only one other publication appears to have been produced by its publisher, John Habberton's *My Country, 'Tis of Thee; or Great National Questions. America's Marvelous Development, and Boundless Possibilities*. That book was published in 1895, so the timing is right, though the catalog record of the item suggests (Chicago?) as the possible place of publication.

This issue of *The Prospect* was doubtless preserved by Crummell because it included an article he had written—very possibly the last that he wrote—as he died in September 1898, the year of publication. The periodical, according to its lead editorial, "will be an outlet for the pent-up literary talents of all aspiring Negroes." Among the other notable authors whose work appeared in this issue, are Will Marion Cook, John Edward Bruce, and Maritcha Remond Lyons.

Emory also holds an apparently unique copy of *The Colored People's Magazine* (Volume 1, Number 2, May 1910), published in Atlanta and edited by the poet Welborn Victor Jenkins. This title is reported in Danky, but he shows only one holding, at Howard University, of Volume 1, Number 5. Our earlier copy features an article by William Pickens, soon to be active on behalf of the NAACP, as well as short stories (including one by Jenkins) and numerous poems.

The Liberator is title to a dozen newspapers published between the one founded by William Lloyd Garrison in 1831 and a weekly established in New York City in 1996 (see Figure 2). Missing from Danky's list, however, is any reference to *The Liberator: A Weekly Newspaper Devoted to the Cause of Good Government and the Advancement of the Negro*. Emory has two issues of this newspaper, produced in Los Angeles in April and May, 1913, edited by Jefferson L. Edmonds, Sr. and Jr., and published by "The Liberator Publishing Co." at Broadway and Franklin Streets in Los Angeles, California. These are respectively Volume 12, Number 4 and Volume 12, Number 5, indicating that the paper had a substantial longevity. One issue announces a "grand reception and banquet . . . tendered Dr. Du Bois at Wesley M. E. Church," and both issues denounce the candidacy of the former city attorney, a Mr. Shenk, for the position of city mayor. The paper also advertises for job printing done by the Liberator printing company: "We print everything from a visiting card to a family bible."

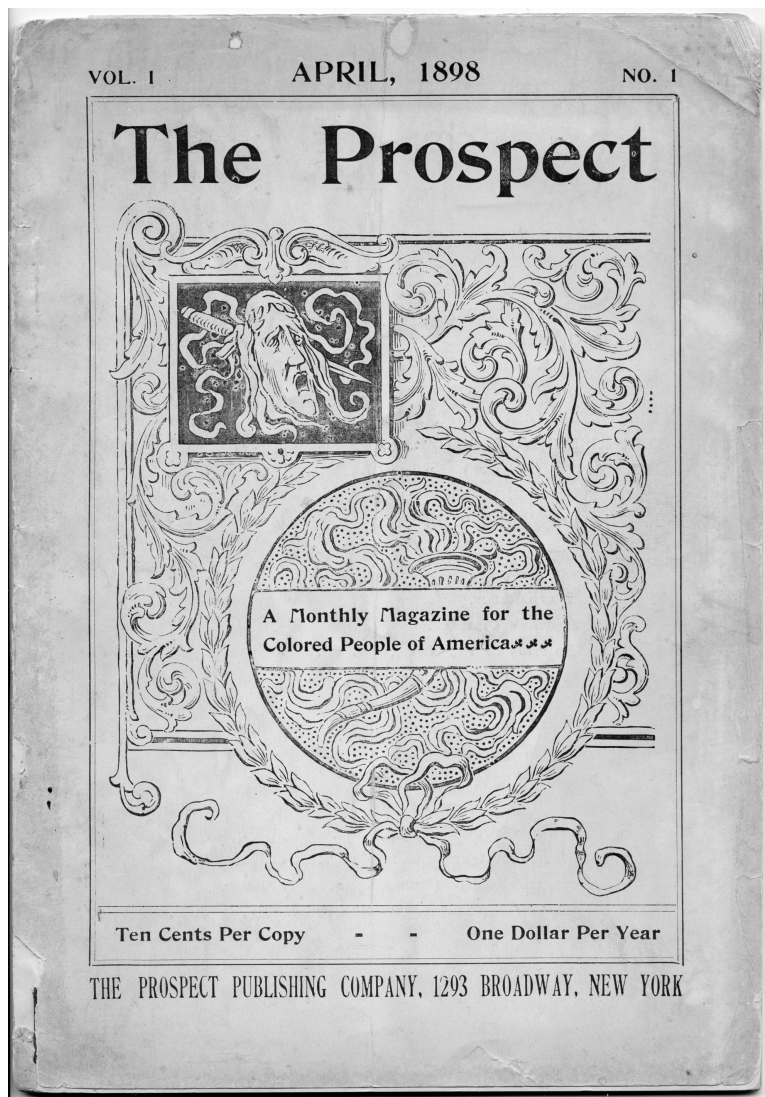


Figure 1. The Prospect (1898)

From the estate of the late Richard Newman, Emory purchased three issues of a periodical titled *The Editorian* (Volume 1, Numbers 1, 2, and 5, for March, April, and July 1919). The first issue states that the periodical was published in St. Louis for the National Colored Young Mens (*sic*) League. This journal is not only "NID" but it is also not in *WorldCat*.

The Postal Alliance, published on behalf of the National Alliance of Postal Workers, is a periodical that appears in Danky, with an initial date

THE LIBERATOR

A Weekly Newspaper Devoted to the Cause of Good Government and the Advancement of the American Negro

Vol. XII 5 cts. a copy LOS ANGELES, CAL., APRIL 25, 1913 \$1.50 a year No. 4



Judge H. H. Rose
Next Mayor of Los Angeles

If Los Angeles is to keep pace with the other great cities of the country she will have to have a big progressive man for Mayor—that man is Judge Rose. He stands for a square deal for all; a rigid enforcement of the law without regard to race, color or creed. The only way to keep Harriman from being mayor of this city, Judge Rose will have to be nominated at the primaries. A vote for Judge Rose is a vote for a clean progressive city. A vote for Shenk is a vote for Uncle Alec.

Figure 2. The Liberator (1913)

of publication as "1917?—?" but the first issue located in *African-American Newspapers and Periodicals* is Volume 14, Number 4, for the year 1929, held by Howard University. Of particular interest to me is that the Emory copy, "Volume 6, Number 2," dated November 1919, was published in Atlanta. The editorial offices were at 164 Auburn Avenue, and the business manager is identified as Welborn Victor Jenkins. Jenkins was also editor of the Atlanta-based *Colored People's Magazine* mentioned earlier, and he published

several volumes of poetry. *The Postal Alliance* was likely founded in Atlanta by one A. L. Green, listed as editor, who was residing in the city at 424 Houston Street (see Figure 3).

In Danky, *The Progressive March of the Negro* (see Figure 4) was identified as a "Monthly Magazine Published by John E. Patton." Though this issue is identified as "Volume 9, Number 1," and is dated 1920, there is no evidence, either in Danky or other bibliographical sources, of the existence of another issue of the periodical. It is conceivable that the "9" is a typographical error and, in fact, this was Volume 1, Number 1, and thus the only number published. The entire text appears to be poetry written by John E. Patton, identified as "of Chattanooga, Tenn," and includes two rather inelegant illustrations. There are two pages of advertisements, all for businesses in Chattanooga. A handwritten note on the Emory copy, however, notes that this issue was "printed by J. P. Wharton 447 Lenox Ave., Lenox Ave, New York." It is not clear why the editor would use a New York printer, and no biographical information has been uncovered for either Patton or Wharton.

Another Not in Danky periodical came to us as part of a large gift of the papers of William L. Dawson, the composer, conductor, and arranger who founded the School of Music at Tuskegee Institute. This is *Music and Poetry* (Volume 1, Number 1, January 1921) and was produced by Nora Douglas Holt (see Figure 5). The Chicago-born Holt (1885–1974) was herself a composer and served as president of the Chicago Music Association and cofounder and vice president of the National Association of Negro Musicians, organized in 1919 "for the purpose of furthering and coordinating the musical forces of the Negro race for the promotion of economic, educational and fraternal betterment." The "centerfold" of this periodical (apparently the only issue published) contains the only musical composition of Holt's that has been preserved. Though reportedly a prolific composer in her early years, none of her other works survives. She placed her papers in storage for more than a decade while she lived in Paris. When she returned to the United States, she discovered all of her manuscripts had been stolen, and she never returned to composition. Nora Holt has been described as "one of the most remarkable personalities of the Harlem Renaissance" (Bruce Kellner, *The Harlem Renaissance: A Historical Dictionary*, 1984, p. 172) and was, according to Kellner, the model for the steamy courtesan Lasca Sartoris in Carl Van Vechten's 1926 novel *Nigger Heaven*. Three other libraries report holding a copy of this handsomely-produced periodical.

One of my personally most satisfying finds was a single issue of a proto-Garveyite periodical, *The Black Man: A Race Magazine*, published in Vicksburg, Mississippi, in 1921 (see Figure 6). This antedates the periodical of that same title founded by Marcus Garvey in Kingston and London, published between 1933 and 1939. Emory's issue, NID and not in *World-Cat*, is identified as Volume 3, Number 1, and documents the penetration



Figure 3. The Postal Alliance (1919)

of Garveyite thought in the deep South at a very early period. The editor and general manager was John James Morant, a Selma, Alabama-born journalist and minister of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. *World-Cat* notes the existence of a periodical by this title as a monthly, published in the years 1890–1902, but it notes no holdings as late as the early teens by which time, clearly, it had turned into a weekly newspaper.

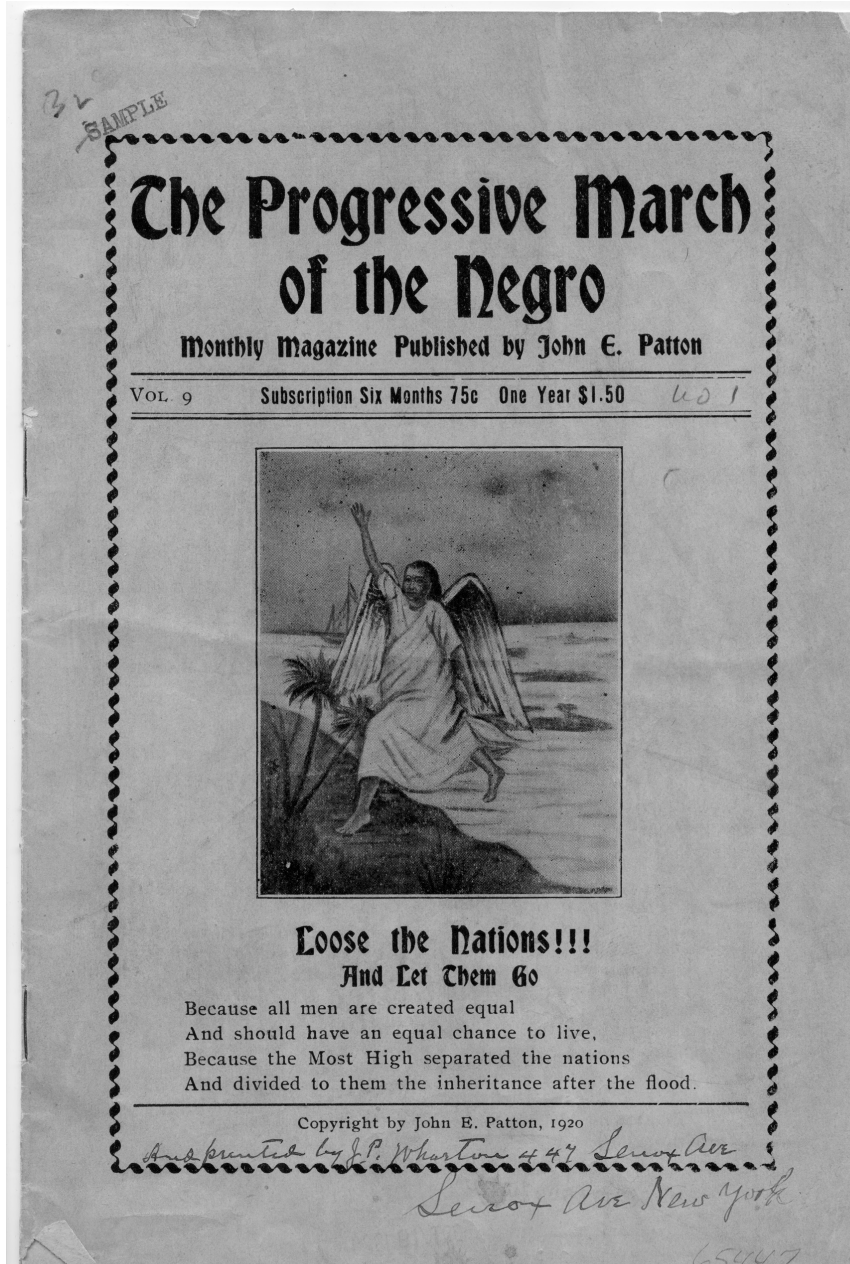


Figure 4. The Progressive March of the Negro (1920)

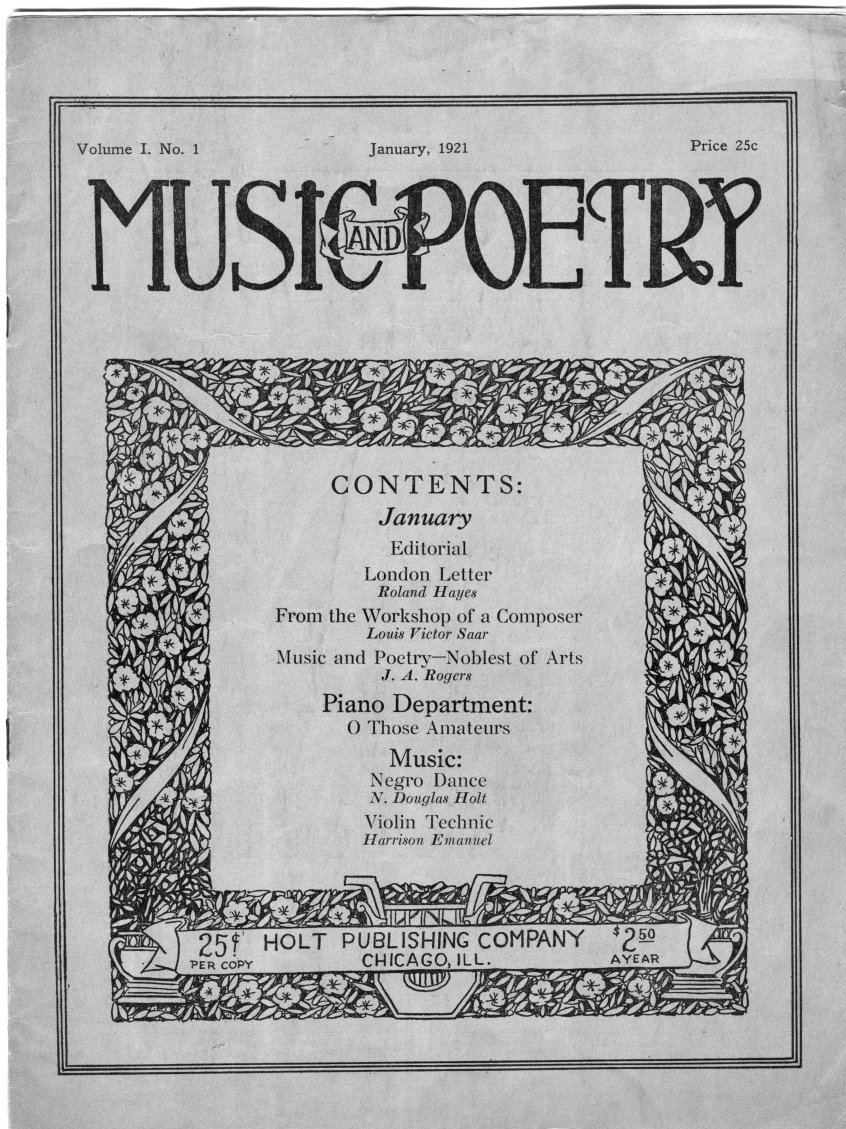


Figure 5. Music and Poetry (1921)

Another of our unique Mississippi holdings is *The Afro-American Courier* [sic] published in Yazoo City, Mississippi. Although this title is listed in Danky, we appear to hold the only issue of Volume 1, Number 1, dated June 1, 1926. Danky points out that this began as a journal of the fraternal order, "Afro-American Sons and Daughters," which was also an insurance company. Albert Banks is identified as president and one T. J. Huddleston as "Custodian."

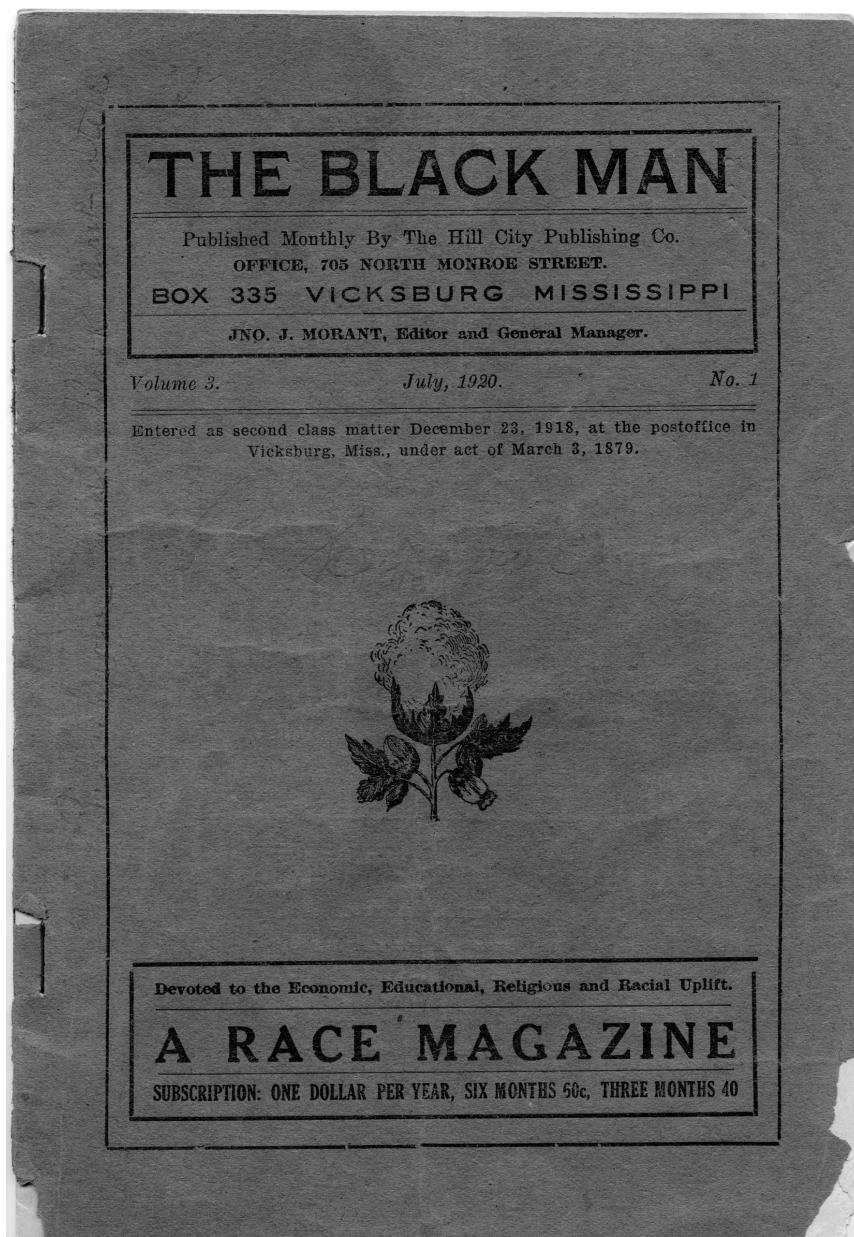


Figure 6. The Black Man (1921)

Yet another distinctive periodical holding, found in a stack of print ephemera from an African American communist bookstore owner, William Crawford, is *New ASPECTs* (Volume 1, Number 1, Spring 1952) (see Figure 7). This periodical, for which we have located no other copy, was published by the Philadelphia Council of the Arts, Sciences and Professions to provide "a literary media of expression" for those "who would otherwise be denied their right to free expression of ideas." In the statement of purpose, the (unnamed) editors describe the focus of the periodical to be "the struggle for recognition of the cultural and professional contributions of the Negro people, and of the other Americans who have been denied expression by deliberate exclusion from branches of art." In this issue (alas, missing the final page), one finds articles by the artist Allan Randall Freelon, historian Arthur Huff Fauset, poet Lucy Smith, labor organizer Thelma Dale, and others. The cover bears a portrait of W. E. B. Du Bois drawn by the well-known artist Charles White.

A much later unique publication from Georgia, for which we have only a single issue, is *The Other Side*, Volume 1, Number 1, for July 1967. This is a four-page civil rights newsletter edited by Ed Bedford in Albany, Georgia, with Glen Percy listed as photographer and Rev. Charles Sherrod as among the contributors. This may be the only issue published, as no issue is reported in *WorldCat* or in *Danky*, but there was an avalanche of local publications such as this created within the movement throughout the South. Documentation for them is sketchy. This issue contains a photograph of a performance of members of the Free Southern Theater, founded by Doris Derby, Thomas C. Dent, and others. It also contains a photograph and profile of twenty-year-old Andrew James, an employee of the Lee County Manufacturing Company, who was planning to run for president of the local AFL-CIO union. "James," as reported in the paper, "likes to argue, farm, and dance. He enjoys 'psyching out' the white people he works with at the plant. He says he spends a lot of his time in the plant office answering accusations made against him by whites. 'These people are hard to understand,' he says. 'They even cuss out northern whites.' James' talent to win arguments has made him want to become a lawyer."

Searching for obscure publications such as these is one of the pleasures of serving as a curator; finding the rare or unique title gives immense pleasure and a great sense of reward. Doing this "one issue at a time," of course, is time-consuming, and entails much good fortune. Once in a great while, a gift of considerable rarities comes along. This happened a few years ago when I encountered the writer Thulani Davis, whom I had met briefly years earlier and who was speaking at Emory University. When apprised of my new position as curator of African American collections, she said "I don't suppose you would be interested in a bunch of old newsletters, periodicals, and print ephemera I gathered during my student days at Barnard?" These had been turned down by several institu-

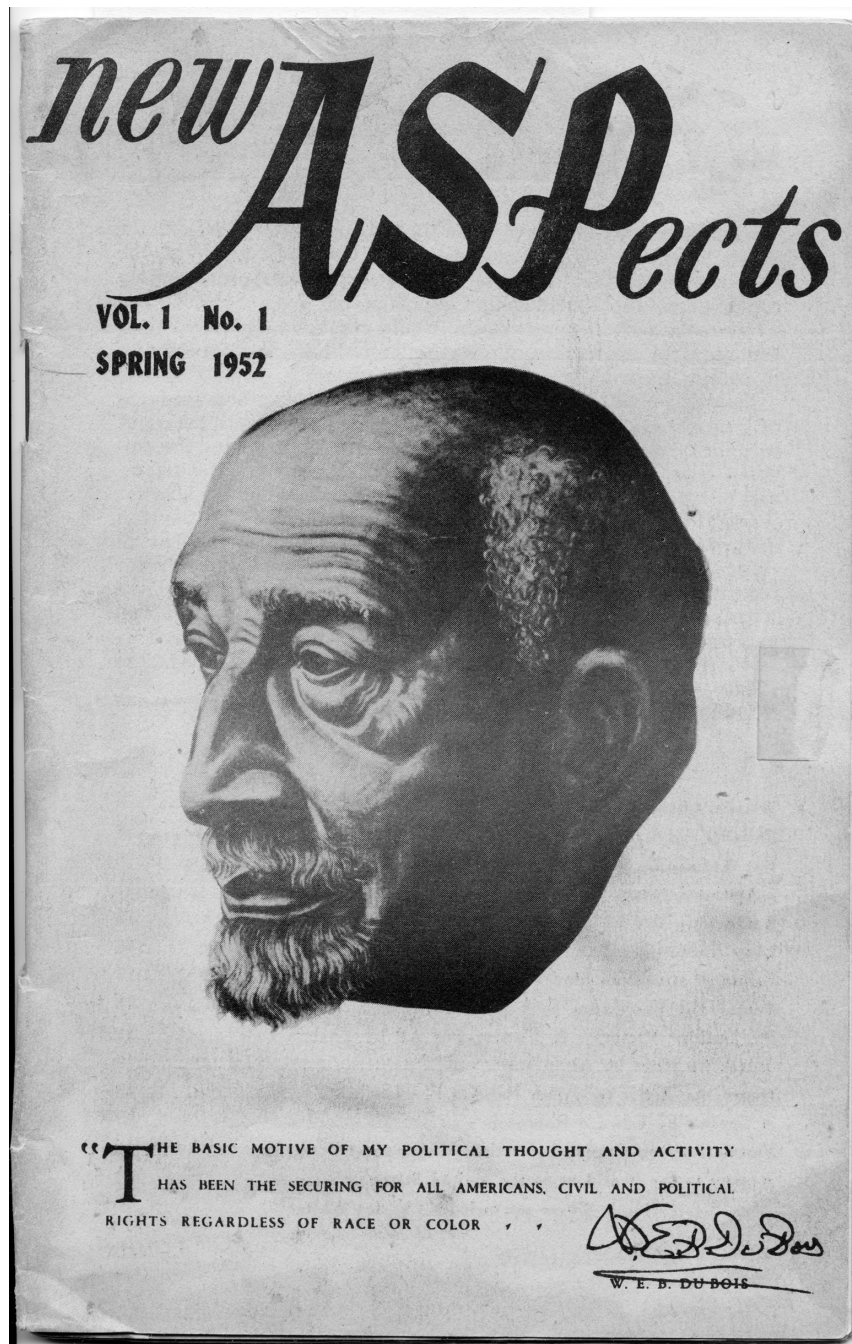


Figure 7. New ASPECTs (1952)

tions on the (as it turns out, incorrect) assumption that they already had them. Naturally, I was interested, and in a few weeks, I held in my hands numerous titles that—you've guessed it—are Not in Danky and not in *WorldCat* either. These include the following:

- *MOJO: Organ of the Black Student Congress* (Volume 1, Number 1, December 1967), published in New York with an editorial staff that included Samuel Jackson, Julian Ellison, Leon Denmark, S. E. Anderson, and William Sales, Jr. The lead editorial was by Bill Strickland, "On Black Unity," writing as codirector of the Black Power Conference, July 1967.
- *The Black Messenger: Dedicated to the Redemption of the Talented Tenth* (Volume 1, Number [?] hand-dated 1/69). Published at Barnard College.
- *The Black Voice* (Volume 1, Number 4, February 17, 1969; and Volume 12, Number 5, March 3, 1969). Published at Columbia University.
- *The Experiment* (Number 2, March, 1969), edited by Lawrence Aaron, with Oliver Louis Henry, editor-at-large. This nine-page issue includes reviews of major African American literary texts (Wright, *Native Son*; Ellison, *Invisible Man*; Johnson, *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*) as well as poetry and short essays.
- *Black Fire* (Volume 1, Number 3, 1973), published by Black Fire Distributors, Washington, DC, by Jimmy Gray, George Simpson, Joanne Jimason, Black Majik, Sonny Ra, and Sylvia Potts.
- *Images: A Contemporary Newspaper for the Black Man* (Volume 1, Number 3, July 1975), published by Bob Low in Brooklyn, NY, with Carlos Russell, executive editor. It contains a "guest editorial" by Frederick Douglass, an editorial on contemporary black politics, and several columns on beauty culture.
- *Third World Media Letter* (Volume 1, Number 2, May 1974), published by the Third World Media Collective at the School of Arts, New York University.
- *Cosmic Colors: A Black Music Magazine* (Volume 1, Number 1, July 17, 1974) appears to have been published in New York in only one issue. George Edward Taite was publisher and editor, and this issue, with a beautiful, multicolor cover by Abdul Rahman, was created as a tribute to the late, great, John Coltrane. It included poetry, art work by Leroy Clarke, and photographs.
- *OO-sh'Bop: A Journal of Creative Black Culture* (Number 1, Spring 1977) (see Figure 8). This issue, apparently the only one published, was produced by "a fledgling organization of Howard University students deeply concerned with Black culture in all its permutations." Calvin Reid was one of three co-editors, along with Greg Tate (who writes in the magazine pseudonymously as "Iron Man" and also as "I. M. Lost"), and Morris Campbell. Reid did the artwork for the cover, published several photographs, and wrote a critique of Langston Hughes and Roy DeCarava's *Sweet Flypaper of Life*, as well as an interview (coauthored with Morris

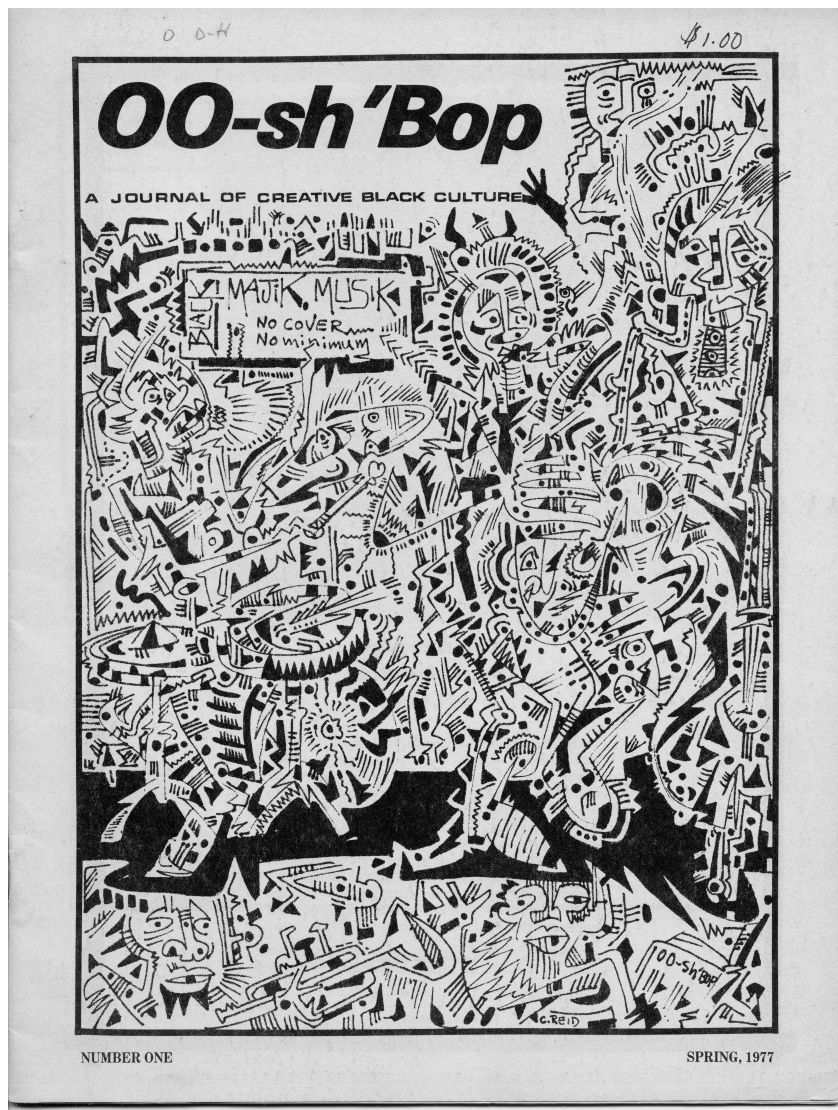


Figure 8. OO-shBop (1977)

Campbell) of the saxophonist, Oliver Lake. This issue also featured poetry and an essay on "Roach Embryo Blues" by Rick Powell. In a phone conversation with Calvin Reid, who now is a senior editor at *Publishers' Weekly*, I learned that this was the only issue of the journal published. Reid recalls the period of the 1970s with great nostalgia and said there were perhaps a half dozen or more friends in and around the Washing-

ton area involved in publishing poetry and other "arty" periodicals in this period. He said they took turns helping one another in producing and hawking their publications.

- *The Journal* (Volume 1, Number 1, Winter-Spring 1984), by the Society for the Study of Black Philosophy in conjunction with the Minority Book Publisher's Institute, New York, Alfred E. Prettyman, Publisher. Lucius Outlaw and Cornel West both published articles in this issue, the only one apparently published, along with Richard Popkin, Wesley Brown, LaVerne Shelton, and others.

The list of Emory's Not in Danky African American periodicals could be extended and it will be extended every year. This is not a criticism of the stunning accomplishment that is represented by the signal work, *African-American Newspapers and Periodicals: A National Bibliography*. On the contrary, it is the highest compliment we can pay to a colleague who has labored hard in so many areas of American cultural studies to seek, find, identify, preserve, and make available to the scholarly and general public the obscure as well as the well known world of print culture. Jim once memorably described bibliography as "the humus on the forest floor." It is the fertile soil from which scholarship grows. Jim has made an enduring contribution enriching that soil by documenting the diversity and richness of the printed word in American society. For his vision, his perseverance, and his passion, we are in his debt.

NOTE

All of the illustrations are courtesy of the Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

Randall K. Burkett is curator of African American collections in the Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library at Emory University. Formerly associate director of the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for Afro-American Research at Harvard University, Burkett is the author of two books on Marcus Garvey: *Garveyism as a Religious Movement* and *Black Redemption: Churchmen Speak for the Garvey Movement*. He coedited *Black Biography 1790–1950: A Cumulative Index* (a four-volume index to biographical sketches and illustrations of 35,000 African Americans and now a Web-based research tool). He was associate editor of *The Harvard Guide to African-American History*. He recently co-authored with Pellom McDaniels and Tiffany Gleason *The Mind of Carter G. Woodson as Reflected in the Books He Owned, Read & Published: A Catalog of the Library of Carter G. Woodson and the Association for the Study of African American Life and History*. Burkett is a member of The Grolier Club, the oldest society of bibliophiles in North America.