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Johnson Publishing Company and the Search for a White Audience

E. James West

History Department, University of York, York, UK

Johnson Publishing Company, the publisher of *Negro Digest* and *Ebony*, made efforts to expand its white audience during the 1940s and early 1950s. Johnson Publishing aggressively sought "to sell white readers the idea that a Negro magazine is worth buying," through the regular publication of letters from "white" readers, consistent references to its influence among whites, fundraising and subscription drives to circulate its magazines among white readers and within white institutions, advertising campaigns in major national publications, and other projects and editorial content. This study argues that these efforts can be situated within both a longer history of white readership of Black periodicals and are connected to a broader turn toward Black literature by white Americans during—and immediately following—World War II. In doing so, Johnson was able to position his publications as both recognizably Black periodicals and the "interracial magazine[s] that America needs."

In the July 1946 issue of *Ebony*, its editors printed news of a complaint from a reader in Texas. In the nine months since it had first appeared on American newsstands, *Ebony* had cemented itself as "the biggest Negro magazine in the world," with a monthly circulation that was "easing towards the half million mark."[1] Alongside the continued popularity of sister publication *Negro Digest*, whose own monthly circulation frequently topped 200,000, *Ebony*'s rise confirmed Johnson Publishing's status as the nation's leading Black-owned publishing enterprise.[2] However, it was this popularity—and *Ebony*'s popularity among one group of readers in particular—that was the cause of disquiet. The Texan correspondent complained that it was becoming impossible to secure copies from his local newsstand, with *Ebony* reporting that "it seems the 'white folks' get there

CONTACT E. James West ejwestuk@gmail.com History Department, University of York, York, UK.

first, buy out all the copies of the magazine, and leave none for the colored folks." It was, *Ebony* acknowledged, a "strange kind of complaint," albeit one that appeared to reiterate the publication's broader appeal within white America and the magazine's willingness to play up this appeal. Its editors declared that "in the little more than a half year that *Ebony* has been going, perhaps the most gratifying part of our work has been the tremendous response from white readers."[3]

Without access to Johnson Publishing's business records, it is difficult to quantify exactly what this "tremendous response" might have looked like as a specific percentage of the magazine's total readership. While references to *Ebony*'s "large white audience" can be found throughout the magazine's history, these are often frustratingly vague.[4] Audience surveys and market research data available through the archives of former Johnson Publishing employees tend not to distinguish readers by racial identity. A rare exception is a 1979 survey conducted by Simmons Market Research Bureau, which indicates that 12.6 percent of *Ebony*'s adult audience was "White/Other."[5] However, figures cited by publisher John H. Johnson have often been significantly lower or higher than this figure. In 1965 Johnson claimed that white readers constituted around five percent of *Ebony*'s one million monthly audience.[6] The following year he suggested that the success of *Ebony*'s special issue "The WHITE Problem in America" had seen its white audience double to around 100,000 per issue.[7] By the early 1980s Johnson was reporting that as much as twenty percent of *Ebony*'s audience was white.[8] Several years later Johnson revised this number again, suggesting that whites constituted a little over nine percent of its monthly audience—roughly 180,000 white readers, based on circulation data from the period.[9]

This article is less concerned with identifying the specific percentage of *Ebony* or *Negro Digest*'s early readership that *might* have identified as white, and more interested in exploring why Johnson Publishing repeatedly emphasized that a small but significant percentage of its magazines' readers *were* white. Similarly, it interrogates why Johnson would later claim that his company did not "aggressively seek" white readers, when previous evidence indicates otherwise. Examining the early development of Johnson Publishing during the 1940s and early 1950s reveals a concerted effort to emphasize and expand the company's white audience—an effort that included the regular publication of letters from readers who self-identified as white, consistent references to its popularity among and "surprising percentage of" white readers, open appeals for readers of all races to help "getting whites to subscribe," fundraising drives to ensure its magazines were distributed to predominantly white Southern schools and colleges, the publication of articles such as "A Negro Magazine for Whites Also," and advertising campaigns in major publications such as

the *Chicago Tribune* and the *New York Times,* where "millions of White Americans opened their morning paper and found big ads urging them to subscribe to *Ebony*."[10]

As this article demonstrates, such efforts can be linked to a longer history of white readership of Black periodicals. Just a few years before the launch of *Negro Digest* in 1942, sociologist Frederick Detweiler declared that "the Negro newspaper is not read by white people."[11] Yet such blanket dismissals ignore ample evidence to the contrary. Concurrently, Johnson's willingness to play up his white audience, alongside his efforts to expand it, can be situated within a broader turn toward Black literature by white America during the 1940s and early 1950s. This approach was certainly strategic—in the case of *Negro Digest,* it helped to ensure the publication's survival in a period of stringent wartime regulations; in the case of *Ebony,* it complemented Johnson's efforts to tap into the growing warmth of white advertisers toward Black periodicals.[12] Nevertheless, it also appeared to reflect a genuine faith in the value of *Ebony* and *Negro Digest* as tools for interracial education. As *Ebony*'s editors informed readers left frustrated by newsstand shortages: "sometimes we feel that *Ebony* will do more good in the hands of white[s] … than our Negro friends who already know the 'interracial score.'" In an era of ascendant racial liberalism, Johnson tapped into a belief that greater exposure to Black life and culture could help foster "interracial understanding" and smooth the road to an "anti-racist, liberal-capitalist modernity."[13] By positioning itself as "a good will ambassador for Negroes with white people everywhere," Johnson Publishing sought to both capitalize on and contribute to these sensibilities. For many readers, the result was the "interracial magazine[s] that America needs."[14]

The Black Press' Dual Role to 'Reach Both Whites and Blacks'

Over the past two decades, a wave of new scholarship has helped to deepen our understanding of the influence and legacy of the Black press in the United States.[15] Since the publication of *Freedom's Journal* in 1827, Black periodicals have played a critical role in shaping African American communities and providing a voice for Black concerns. The Black press helped to draw attention to continued racial injustice, cataloged Black accomplishments and societal happenings, and showcased Black life and culture in fuller and more representative ways. Perhaps most importantly, the Black press provided a vital public forum for delineating issues for and about African Americans, interpreting public issues from a Black perspective, and providing leadership in addressing these issues. As the editors of *Freedom's Journal* declared in its first issue, "too long have others spoken for us. Too long has the public been deceived by

misrepresentations in things which concern us dearly."[16] Building on landmark studies by historians such as Roland Wolseley, Armistead Scott Pride and Clint C. Wilson, the work of Eric Gardner, Kim Gallon, Benjamin Fagan, and other scholars has eloquently reiterated the importance of the Black press as a "voice for the race."[17]

At the same time, some scholars have begun to explore the interracial politics and circulation of the Black press in greater detail. This is particularly true of the nineteenth century Black press, with John Ernest noting that many early Black periodicals were reliant on white editorial and economic support and counted a significant and, at times, majority of whites among their audience. Publications such as Frederick Douglass's *North Star* were made possible by the help of white American and European supporters, and at many Black newspapers "whites were as significant a presence on the page as they were behind the scenes."[18] While Black editors understood the problems associated with white patronage, they also saw the value in cultivating white readers as part of their broader audience. This led Douglass and other Black activists and publishers to envision a dual role for the Black press; one that twinned its importance as a forum for intracommunal debate with the aim of increasing Black visibility in white civil society. Accordingly, the development of a vibrant Black press would provide an outlet "to reach both whites and blacks."[19] Frankie Hutton and Benjamin Quarles suggest that this desire influenced the efforts of many Black newspapers "to mold white attitudes," and that Black editors "hoped to attract white readers, thus furnishing an evidence of Negro abilities as well as an exposure to his viewpoints."[20]

Throughout the decades following the Civil War, Black publications fought to retain their early influence over white readers. Accordingly, reports of falling white readership were greeted with frustration. In 1897, the *Indianapolis Freedman* bemoaned how the antebellum Black press "wielded a larger influence among the whites … than the entire Negro press of today," and suggested that the Black press's declining crossover audience was stymieing its ability to address "questions of vital importance to the race."[21] With the rise of a national Black press during the early twentieth century, many Black publishers continued to actively pursue white readers, shaping their content and arguments "not simply with black readers in mind but to awaken the consciences of white readers as well." As William Jordan notes, while the number of white readers of publications such as the *Chicago Defender* and the *Pittsburgh Courier* paled in comparison to their Black audience, they exerted an oversized influence on editorial content.[22] This was also the case for Black Southern newspapers such as the *Norfolk Journal & Guide,* which were praised for their "intelligent, reliable exposition of the Negro community" by

prominent whites, and even subscribed to wire services such as Hearst's International News with the aim of attracting white readers.[23]

The success of such initiatives notwithstanding, a significant majority of white Americans remained largely or wholly ignorant to the influence of the Black press.[24] Moreover, when the efforts of Black periodicals to penetrate the consciousness of white America did succeed, they were just as likely to be met with anger as understanding. In many cases, Black publishers only became aware of their effectiveness in crossing the color line when they received angry messages from white readers, or when their offices came under attack from white mobs. Pioneering Black journalist Ida B. Wells' career at the Memphis *Free Speech and Headlight* was cut short in 1892 after the paper's offices were razed by a "committee" of local whites who had been alerted to her anti-lynching editorials. Six years later this scene was repeated in Wilmington, North Carolina, where white mobs laid waste to Alexander Manly's *Daily Record* before embarking on a purge of Black residents. Southern politicians such as Arkansas governor Charles Brough blamed Black publications for instigating race riots and attempted to ban them from circulation. Writing in 1920, Herbert Seligmann mused that if the capacity of Black publications to attract white readers could be measured by the "utterances of their haters and detractors, Negro editors have been potent indeed."[25]

Despite ongoing threats of white backlash, Black publishers continued to value the educational potential their periodicals carried for white audiences and maintained that their readerships were "by no means confined to the colored race."[26] For figures such as Nahum Daniel Brascher, editor-in-chief of the Associated Negro Press, an interracial readership for Black periodicals remained an important plank in the broader pursuit of racial equality.[27] In a testimony to the Chicago Commission on Race Relations, established in the aftermath of the city's catastrophic 1919 race riots, Brascher declared that he was "proud to have [Black newspapers] seen in the hands of our white friends" and stressed that it was only through reading Black periodicals that white Americans "can really get our viewpoint."[28] This sentiment was taken up by publications such as the *Oregon Advocate,* which by the early 1930s had instigated a circulation drive to place it "in every white home." Where else, the *Advocate* mused, could white Americans "learn about the Negro, what he is doing, how he is faring and what he is thinking? Certainly not from the reading of the average white daily … intelligent whites should make it a rule to buy at least one good Negro newspaper."[29]

The United States' entry into World War II provided Black periodicals with fresh incentive "to reach out to white majority audiences in an attempt to inject African American points of view into public discourse."[30] In February 1942, the *Pittsburgh Courier* launched its "Double

V" campaign, championing victory against fascism abroad and racial discrimination at home. The campaign was quickly taken up by other Black publications such as the *New York Amsterdam News* and the *Chicago Defender,* generating widespread support within African American communities across the nation and creating a problem for a federal government that knew Black support was vital to the war effort. As Patrick Washburn notes, the Black press's combative wartime coverage prompted a backlash that led to several army and navy bases banning Black newspapers, intense surveillance by the FBI and the Office of War Information, and the threat of sedition indictments. Nevertheless, these efforts did manage to arouse the sympathies of some whites, while wartime surveillance, despite its punitive implications, provided further evidence that Black periodicals were beginning to penetrate the cultural and political mainstream. [31]

Building an Interracial Audience

As many Black newspapers more forcefully made their case for civil rights progress, one budding Black publisher sought to adopt a different strategy. John H. Johnson was born in Arkansas shortly before the end of World War I. In the early 1930s he and his mother, Gertrude Johnson, boarded a train to Chicago, joining the untold thousands of Black Americans who migrated northwards as part of the first phase of the Great Migration.[32] In Chicago, Johnson's southern mannerisms and threadbare clothes were met with ridicule by classmates. Undaunted, Johnson graduated as class president and secured a partial scholarship to the University of Chicago which he aimed to subsidize by working at Supreme Liberty Life, one of the largest Black insurance companies in the city.[33] Tasked with editing a weekly digest for company president Harry Pace, Johnson spied an opportunity to create a commercial publication that would summarize topical news about Black life and culture. Modeled on the popular general interest magazine *Reader's Digest,* the first issue of Johnson's *Negro Digest* appeared on newsstands in November 1942, presenting itself to readers as "A Magazine of Negro Comment."[34]

Adam Green contends that *Negro Digest* was "unlike any preceding it in black journalism," with its content marking a departure from the traditional *modus operandi* of Black periodicals.[35] Certainly, the magazine's tone appeared to diverge from the combative rhetoric that had earned the Black press its reputation as a "fighting press." The magazine's content also sought to chart a different path than that of "crusading" Black newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender* and the *Pittsburgh Courier,* which largely adhered to a uniform editorial line and were closely identified with a single, usually male, editor-publisher. By contrast, *Negro Digest*

adopted a more pluralistic editorial perspective that disrupted conventional Black press paradigms. However, through identifying its primary motivations as "the development of interracial understanding and the promotion of national unity," Johnson's magazine also rearticulated the belief of earlier Black publishers in the educational value of Black periodicals for an interracial audience.[36] For Johnson, the magazine's moderate tone, coupled with such appeals to interracial understanding, would allow it to "truly articulate the complexity of postmigration African America."[37]

This approach arguably positioned *Negro Digest* as both a Black *and* an interracial publication. To be sure, Black newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender* were, at least in part, driven by a desire to "awaken the conscience" of white as well as Black readers.[38] However, they were rarely presented as anything other than Black publications, with the development of a white audience seen as a positive sidenote to their primary function. Johnson's ambitions for *Negro Digest* initially appeared to maintain this tradition. In letters sent to potential subscribers prior to the magazine's release, Johnson framed the endeavor in intimate, racially specific terms. He informed would-be patrons that they were "the kind of person who will be interested in a magazine that will help you become more knowledgeable about your own people and about what they are doing to win greater recognition for you and other members of our race."[39] Yet in the first issue of *Negro Digest,* Johnson adopted a more inclusive and racially neutral tone. The magazine noted that it had been published "in response to a demand for a magazine to summarize and condense the leading articles and comment on the Negro."[40] This shift from an emphasis on "our race" to a more generalized demand for news about "the status of the Negro in America" provides an insight into Johnson's efforts to simultaneously frame *Negro Digest* as a recognizably "Black" periodical while appealing to a more racially diverse audience.

This intent to cultivate an interracial readership can also be argued to have shaped the magazine's pluralistic and deeply interracial composition. By means of its digest format, Johnson's periodical offered a compendium of material taken from "the press of the nation"—an approach that, particularly during its early years, led to the reprinting of material from white-owned publications just as much as Black outlets. Of course, the publication of work by white writers in Black newspapers and magazines was not a new phenomenon—as previously noted, many early Black periodicals relied on white contributors, and twentieth century Black publications were not averse to hiring non-Black writers who they believed could effectively contribute to "uplifting the race." This included the *Chicago Defender,* which employed white Jewish editor Ben Burns and ran a popular weekly column by Japanese American journalist S.I. Hayakawa.[41] However, the preponderance of white contributors who appeared on the

pages of *Negro Digest*—led by Burns, who was hired by Johnson as a managing editor—coupled with its reprinting of stories taken from white-owned publications, helped to position it as an interracial publication and distinguish its content and character from that of other Black periodicals.

As Jonathan Scott Holloway notes, an often implicit but always visible "white presence" hovered over practically every issue of *Negro Digest*, speaking to the ways in which the magazine marketed itself as an interracial publication and sought to attract white readers.[42] One manifestation of this "white presence" can be found in *Negro Digest*'s regular reader polls, which often separated responses by racial identity and noted differences and similarities between Black and white Americans with regards to questions such as "Will Negro Achievement Curb Race Discrimination?" The results to this poll, published in the May 1943 issue of *Negro Digest,* detailed racist comments made by white respondents related to Black attitudes and "personal habits," but also noted that "a growing concern in the solution of the race problem in America is reflected in the more intent interest shown by whites in the Negro question."[43] In his autobiography *Nitty Gritty,* Burns suggests that the results of such polls were often fabricated or based on a tiny sample of responses from close acquaintances.[44] Regardless of whether the magazine's polls were fabricated or genuine, their suggestion of a significant white audience was indicative of the magazine's efforts to develop an interracial readership.

It is also important to note that the visibility of white contributors on *Negro Digest*'s pages did not necessarily decline as it began publishing more original content. One of its most popular features was a column titled "If I Were a Negro," which solicited contributions from prominent white liberals. The series originated from an article of the same name published in the *Chicago Daily News* by Royal Munger, which was reprinted in the second issue of *Negro Digest* in December 1942.[45] Over the following four years, "If I Were a Negro" appeared in practically every issue of *Negro Digest,* with its diverse cast of white contributors including First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, noted author George Seldes, and journalist Oswald Garrison Villard.[46] This white presence expanded further in June 1945, when *Negro Digest* announced an enlarged roster of predominantly white contributing editors. Among them were Milton Mayer, an occasional faculty member at the University of Chicago, *New York Post* columnists John Beecher and Albert Deutsch, and journalist Ted Le Berthon, who also contributed a column to the *Pittsburgh Courier* during the 1940s titled "White Man's Views." Through its announcement, *Negro Digest* articulated that its ambitions to "publish more and more original material on Negro life," and its hiring of more white contributors, were both parts of the magazine's efforts "to reach a broad interracial

audience." To emphasize the point, its editors reiterated that "a good percentage of readers on our subscription lists are white."[47]

A New Medium for Celebrating Black Achievements

Emboldened by the success of *Negro Digest*, Johnson made plans for a glossy photo-editorial magazine that would help to further reset Black press paradigms and the traditional role of Black periodicals as a "fighting press." While Johnson acknowledged that "Black newspapers were doing a good job of reporting discrimination and segregation," he believed that Black people "needed a new medium" that would celebrate Black achievements and provide an upbeat, positive image of Black life.[48] This sentiment was clear from the first issue of *Ebony,* which arrived on newsstands in November 1945. An opening editorial declared: "Sure, you can get all hot and bothered about the race question … but not enough is said about all the swell things we Negroes can do and will accomplish." In this spirit, its editors promised "to mirror the happier side of Negro life – the positive, everyday achievements from Harlem to Hollywood."[49] This carefree demeanor would be a recurrent bugbear for Black critics, with E. Franklin Frazier famously describing *Ebony* as part of "the make-believe world of the black bourgeoisie."[50] Nevertheless, it proved an immediate hit with readers. Based on advance orders for its second issue, *Ebony*'s editors declared it to be "the biggest Negro magazine in the world in both size and circulation."[51]

Ebony's first issue suggested that it would attempt to present itself as an interracial magazine in a similar way to *Negro Digest.* The November 1945 cover featured a photograph by Hungarian American photographer Marion Palfi taken at the Henry Street Settlement in New York City. The photograph depicted seven boys, the majority of whom were white. By its second issue *Ebony* had reverted to cover images of Black models or personalities, and it would be nearly three years before another white person featured on the front of the magazine. That *Ebony* almost immediately changed strategy is not necessarily surprising. As Maren Stange notes, Ebony's photo editorial format worked to produce images of "iconic blackness articulated to equally naturalized and sanctioned symbols of class respectability, achievement, and American national identity."[52] With mainstream periodicals largely confining their engagement with Blackness to the crime blotter or a handful of "acceptable" Black sports stars and entertainers, prevalent (and, more importantly, positively coded) cover images of Black people were an essential part of *Ebony*'s efforts to "mirror the happier side of Negro life." However, this approach arguably made it more difficult for Johnson to cast *Ebony* as an interracial publication, with its cover images of Black personalities and achievements making it inevitable that many observers would categorize *Ebony* as a "Black" magazine.

Despite the magazine's "iconic blackness," it is clear that Johnson still harbored ambitions for *Ebony* to develop a significant interracial audience. One trend supporting this assertion was *Ebony*'s continued publication of stories by white authors and/or that focused on interracial themes or experiences. Indeed, the opening article in its very first issue was written by A. Ritchie Low, a white minister who catalogued his ongoing efforts to transport Black children from Harlem to lodge with white families in Vermont over the summer.[53] Another was the composition of its early workforce. Following the magazine's introduction, white editor Ben Burns became its managing editor, replicating his existing role at *Negro Digest*. Other prominent white contributors during the magazine's early years included Kay Cremin, who served as *Ebony*'s associate editor, and Irwin Stein, who was brought on as its advertising manager.[54] It is possible that this presence contributed to a preoccupation with stories about mixed marriages, interracial romance, and other tales of the color line that proved popular among white readers. Although this would shift as the magazine expanded and more Black contributors were brought into the fold, *Ebony*'s early masthead, like much of its content, was avowedly multiracial.[55]

While not as frequent or as effusive as the appeals in *Negro Digest, Ebony*'s self-promotion also reflected a desire to be consumed by white audiences. Johnson's first magazine often ran features boasting of "our white folks" and cajoling readers to help expand its white audience.[56] In April 1944, its editors announced a new campaign to get "A *Negro Digest* in Every Library," with a particular emphasis on white schools and colleges. Appealing to its readers for financial support, the magazine announced the creation of a Southern College Library Fund "for which we will be glad to receive donations small and large to place *Negro Digest* on the shelves of white universities south of the Mason and Dixon line."[57] This was accompanied by other initiatives such as "A Good Neighbor Policy," which encouraged Black readers to introduce white friends and colleagues to the magazine.[58] In *Ebony,* such appeals continued, although they were largely limited to its "Backstage" section, a popular "in-house" feature that provided readers with an insight into the magazine's editorial politics and day-to-day operations. Here, readers could often find reflections on Johnson's desire "to get wider distribution and circulation for *Ebony* in white areas."[59]

The tremendous response to *Ebony,* coupled with *Negro Digest*'s continued success, provided Johnson with the financial means to develop these ambitions further. In 1946, *Ebony* announced a new advertising campaign designed "to spread *Ebony* among as many white readers as possible." In possibly the first such campaign instigated by a Black owned

publishing enterprise, Johnson Publishing paid for a series of advertisements in the *Chicago Tribune, New York Times,* and other mainstream newspapers, encouraging their predominantly white audiences to "place your subscription now!"[60] Reflecting the company's still relatively modest financial position, the size of the first advertisements in this campaign were one-third of a single column. However, Johnson's success in securing advertising contracts with blue-chip companies meant that they quickly grew to full-page features. By the beginning of the 1950s, white readers of major national publications could regularly open their newspapers to find advertisements informing them that "Negro and white [subscribers] both rely on *Ebony* as the national authority on Negro life."[61]

Perhaps the most consistent aspect of *Negro Digest* and *Ebony*'s appeals to and acknowledgement of an interracial audience was their publication of letters from readers who identified as white. Again, it is important to note that this was not a new phenomenon. Over previous decades many Black periodicals had printed letters from readers who claimed to be white. Without definitive evidence, it would be unwise to assume that all (or even most) of the letters published in *Negro Digest* and *Ebony* from readers who identified themselves as white were genuine, particularly given the alleged propensity of key contributors to embellish or invent editorial material. However, the frequency with which such letters appeared is significant. When letters from "white" readers appeared in earlier Black newspapers, they were relatively rare and usually printed in isolation—a reminder as to the existence of an enduring, albeit marginal, white audience. By contrast, it was rare to find an early issue of *Negro Digest* or *Ebony* which *did not* include such correspondence. On multiple occasions, the "Comments" section of *Negro Digest* featured a majority of white authors.[62] Similarly, every edition of "Letters to the Editor" published in *Ebony*'s first year featured at least one letter from a "white" reader, and oftentimes considerably more.[63]

A Vehicle for 'Interracial Understanding'

Through promotional campaigns and editorial content, it is clear that *Negro Digest* and *Ebony* consistently emphasized their appeal to white readers and looked to expand their white audience. The question of why Johnson would so aggressively pursue white readers is less immediately obvious. What did Johnson hope to achieve by cultivating "a broad interracial audience"? What did he stand to gain by situating his magazines as a "national authority on Negro life" for white as well as Black readers?[64] The answers to these questions are linked to the emergence of a new era of racial liberalism during and following World War II. While historians and social scientists have defined the concept of "racial liberalism" in

various ways, at its core was a belief that "the modernization inevitably wrought by an ever-expanding corporate capitalism would be a rational and color-blind process that would lead to the peaceful assimilation of all minorities into the American mainstream." This worldview prompted a move away from interwar civil rights strategies that had focused on labor and structural economics, and toward arguments that emphasized the moral and psychological ramifications of racial discrimination.[65] Instead of addressing the underlying connections between racial injustice and American democratic capitalism, liberals believed that they could "solve" the race problem according to their "elite and activist social-engineering vision."[66]

At the heart of this vision was a belief that the nation could read itself out of racial discrimination—helped in no small part by a new wave of social science research that popularized the connections between education, interracial understanding, and regional reconciliation.[67] Undoubtedly the most influential work in this canon was Gunnar Myrdal's landmark 1944 study *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*. Giving voice to some of the key tenets of racial liberalism, Myrdal merged appeals to morality and the nation's better nature with demands for "educational campaigns to reduce prejudice, and social engineering to repair the 'damage' of racial discrimination and to enable blacks to assimilate to white culture." As Walter Jackson notes, Myrdal's tome reified a liberal orthodoxy on race relations and remained arguably the most significant study of the "Negro problem" into the mid-1960s.[68] More immediately, Jodi Melamed suggests that it helped concretize the notion that a "formally anti-racist, liberal-capitalist modernity" was predicated on "the massive production and dissemination of representations of black experience."[69]

Accordingly, racial liberalism's ascendancy can be traced through a turn toward literary and scholarly representations of Black life by white audiences during the 1940s. This trend was catalyzed by the extraordinary success of Richard Wright's *Native Son,* published in 1940, and consolidated by the reception to Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man,* released a dozen years later. The selection of *Native Son* by the Book-of-the-Month Club—the first Black-authored work so honored—ensured Wright "sales of a magnitude no writer of his race had enjoyed before."[70] Similarly, Ellison's bildungsroman won widespread critical acclaim and "expanded the consciousness of many white readers."[71] The success of these and other "race novels" was predicated on the potent blend of anxiety and fascination that characterized white responses to the so-called "Negro problem," providing an intimate opportunity for "white liberal friends of the race to see behind the veil."[72] This interest was stimulated further by a revival of civil rights activism and outbreaks of urban rioting in cities such as New

York, Detroit, and Los Angeles during WWII. As *Negro Digest* noted in its first issue, these events had "focused new attention on the status of the Negro in America."[73] From this perspective, Johnson's efforts to market his magazines to whites were strategically astute. If he was able to do so in a way that avoided alienating Black readers, the publisher could effectively tap into a growing white audience eager to learn more about the Black experience.

Johnson's efforts to present his magazines as a vehicle for "interracial understanding," and the importance of developing a white readership to help substantiate this endeavor, also had clear financial and political incentives. As previously noted, the tone of *Negro Digest* appeared to diverge from the traditional role of the Black press as a "fighting press," something that was reinforced by the impact of the "Double V" campaign during WWII. While this campaign helped many Black newspapers reach new circulation highs, it also led to federal surveillance, the policing of wartime paper allowances, and the constant threat of sedition charges. Johnson gambled, correctly, that *Negro Digest*'s moderate tone would help to at least partially insulate it from the type of surveillance levied against more militant Black periodicals, particularly by the FBI.[74] Furthermore, when the magazine's circulation increases took its paper usage above his allocated wartime allowance, Johnson leaned on its interracial audience to avoid being penalized. After being served a cease-and-desist letter due to exceeding his prescribed paper allowance, Johnson attended an appeals meeting in Washington, DC in June 1945. There, he successfully played up *Negro Digest*'s cross-racial appeal and noted that "we have attracted a number of liberal persons – Negroes and Whites – who have contributed articles which we believe have improved racial relations."[75]

In the case of *Ebony,* Johnson's efforts to expand its white audience arguably complemented his attempts to crack the Madison Avenue color line. The magazine's photo editorial format was incredibly expensive, making it vital for Johnson to secure regular advertising from mainstream American corporations. Accordingly, his decision to advertise in major newspapers such as the *New York Times* aimed "to sell white readers the idea that a Negro magazine is worth buying."[76] This was partly a question of quality. If Johnson was able to get the right white readers looking at his publications, this could open doors to the offices of corporate executive and advertising agents that continued to remain closed. This approach helped secure Johnson one of his first major contracts, with the publisher securing the patronage of Zenith Radio after convincing company executive Eugene McDonald to browse a copy of *Ebony*.[77] It was also a question of quantity. If Johnson could significantly boost his company's white audience without alienating Black readers, he would be able to raise circulation guarantees, thus making *Ebony* more appealing to

corporate advertisers. While it is unclear to what extent Johnson's appeals to white readers directly helped him to secure major advertising contracts, the notion that *Ebony* maintained a significant white audience may well have calmed the nerves of white-owned companies taking their first steps into the "Negro market."[78] In turn, advertisements from iconic companies such as Pepsi-Cola and Lucky Strike may also have appealed to white readers, confirming *Ebony*'s dual personality as both racially distinct and reassuringly familiar.

Johnson's perceived success in attracting white readers was so widespread that it quickly became a bone of contention for other Black publishers. Criticisms of Johnson's white audience can be understood as an effort to undermine his standing within the Black press and an outlet for dissatisfaction with his confrontational business methods. By the late 1940s, Johnson's efforts to lure talented Black journalists away from Black newspapers were a source of regular friction. This situation was exacerbated further by Johnson's willingness to criticize Black newspapers in interviews with high-profile outlets such as *Time* and his publication of market reports suggesting that Black readers were shifting away from newspapers and toward magazines.[79] In response to one such report, published in 1952, Black newspapermen wrote to *Advertising Age* to complain about its findings and suggest that Johnson's circulation claims should not be taken seriously by advertisers seeking to tap into the "Negro market." Critically, they argued that the circulation of Johnson's magazines was tainted by a "hidden factor"—his white audience. For figures such as D. Arnett Murphy, the advertising manager of the *Afro-American,* the interracial appeal of Johnson's magazines meant that any direct circulation comparison was unreliable without accounting for their "substantial sale[s] among white people."[80]

A Self-proclaimed 'Special Ambassador to American Whites'

Such complaints provide further evidence of Johnson's success in cultivating a white readership—or, at very least, the perception of a white readership—and suggest that his company's appeals to white readers were part of a larger corporate strategy to solidify his dominance over the Black press. Beyond the financial and logistical incentives that a larger white audience offered, however, it seems that Johnson truly believed in the role *Negro Digest* and *Ebony* could play in promoting "interracial understanding" and a greater awareness of Black life and culture within white America. This chimes with Johnson's own understanding of his role as a Black cultural producer and public spokesman, with the publisher later proclaiming himself to be a "special ambassador to American Whites."[81] As Brenna Wynn Greer asserts, these sentiments positioned Johnson

within a select group of "Black imagemakers" who shaped postwar notions of Black identity, culture, and citizenship for Black and non-Black audiences alike.[82] Similarly, while the memoirs and archival collections of early Johnson Publishing editors such as Ben Burns, Era Bell Thompson, and Allan Morrison reflect frustrations over Johnson's leadership and editorial policies, they indicate that these contributors also believed in the value of the company's missionary role.[83]

Editorial features and commentary consistently reinforced this sentiment. From the outset, *Negro Digest* emphasized its educational function and its efforts to address "the bulky question of the American Negro;" a question that the magazine contended was "in need of thorough airing before both black and white Americans." As its circulation expanded, *Negro Digest* framed its growth as both evidence for and a justification of this role, presenting its popularity as "a barometer of healthy American racial unity."[84] Similarly, the magazine was quick to highlight whenever its original material was reproduced by mainstream periodicals, helping to disseminate its content among an even larger pool of white readers. One notable example of such success can be seen through the public response to an October 1943 edition of "If I Were a Negro" authored by Eleanor Roosevelt. The author's contention that, if she were Black, she would struggle "to sustain my faith in democracy" sparked headlines across the country.[85] With no little sense of satisfaction, Johnson noted that the article had been reprinted or comprehensively quoted by wire services such as the Associated Press as well as white-owned newspapers "from coast to coast."[86]

Ebony's coverage also spoke to this deeply-rooted desire to attract white readers, with "Backstage" becoming the major outlet for promoting these ambitions to its audience. Through reprinting stories— such as that of an irate Texan reader who had been repeatedly beaten to the newsstands by enthusiastic whites— *Ebony* did more than provide its audience with humorous anecdotes. It offered an insight into its imagined, multiracial audience, its support for expanding its circulation among whites, and the perceived value of the magazine's content in the hands of white readers. Beyond simply acknowledging such anecdotes or stories, *Ebony* made a point of informing its audience that "perhaps the most gratifying part of our work has been the tremendous response from white readers." By suggesting that its content "will do more good in the hands of white[s] … than our Negro friends," *Ebony* explicitly argued for its own value as a vehicle for racial liberalism and a tool for interracial understanding.[87] From this perspective, the magazine's photo editorial format, while arguably a factor in its more ready identification as a Black magazine than *Negro Digest,* simultaneously became a central part of its efforts to disseminate positive images of Black life to white readers: "because *Ebony* gives a picture of Negro life of which most whites are ignorant, the editors of

this magazine have endeavored as part of its campaign for better race relations to expand its white readership."[88]

So much as it is possible to judge through the magazine's "Letters to the Editor" section, this message appears to have been taken to heart by many of *Ebony*'s Black readers. Building on earlier *Negro Digest* campaigns such as its "Good Neighbor" plan, *Ebony* readers regularly informed its editors of their own efforts to use it as a tool for interracial education. In many cases, the magazine's visual format helped to advance this project, with New Yorker Annie Derricotte notifying *Ebony*'s editors that "it makes me feel good to read it on the busses [sic] and subways … and hold it wide open so my travelling companions of other races can see too."[89] Andy Razaf, another New York reader, informed *Ebony* in May 1946 that he had bought more than one hundred copies of the magazine since its introduction the previous year with an eye to circulating it "among white people with whom [he had] come into contact." Razaf declared that "as a force for changing the false opinions that most whites have of us … your magazine tops all others." Accordingly, he encouraged other Black readers to help improve racial literacy in white America by "leaving a few copies of *Ebony* around."[90] Black students wrote to tell of recommending the magazine to white readers, Black cleaners left copies in the offices of their white employees, Black office staff introduced it to their colleagues, Black soldiers recommended it to white commanding officers, Black sanitorium dwellers shared it with fellow patients—in every area of the country, Black readers endeavored to advance Johnson Publishing's aim of "winning more and more whites."[91]

In turn, scores of letters from readers claiming to be white applauded the magazine's role as an educational tool and a vehicle for promoting racial liberalism. Many of the letters published in *Ebony* reportedly came from white teachers, who wrote to inform its editors of the magazine's value as a reference guide and textbook in their classrooms. Through perusing *Ebony*'s content, readers such as New Jersey resident Mattie Colvin believed that they and their students could develop "a better understanding and appreciation of the Negro, and the role he plays in American life."[92] Other white readers reported that exposure to Johnson Publishing's magazines had galvanized their support for civil rights. Mary Hunt, identifying herself as a "young farm wife" from a rural white community in Illinois, contended that "I enjoy your magazine very much … tell me just what I can do to help in the fight for racial equality."[93] A young white soldier stationed in Kentucky expressed similar sentiments, boasting that he "wouldn't miss a copy for anything" and applauding *Ebony* for its role in "publicizing our racial problem in this country."[94] Another white GI stationed overseas reiterated these remarks, suggesting that if more white soldiers were exposed to

Ebony "it would do much to eliminate prejudice in the Army."[95] Through such statements and correspondence, *Ebony*'s readers provided further evidence of Johnson Publishing's success and fresh impetus for its efforts to develop a white audience.

Conclusions

In the 1950s, as the content and composition of Johnson's magazines continued to evolve, the publisher appeared to move away from his enthusiastic early pursuit of an interracial audience. *Negro Digest* was placed on hiatus in 1951 and replaced by *Jet,* a weekly newsmagazine that seemed far less concerned with attracting white readers. Johnson's continued efforts to lure talented journalists away from other Black periodicals meant that the multiracial composition of the company's editorial staff during its early years continued to shift towards an African American base. Growing criticisms of *Ebony*'s content during the first half of the 1950s, coupled with a desire to shift from a newsstand audience to a more stable subscription model, contributed to the firing of Ben Burns—the white editor who had quarterbacked much of the company's early development—and a retreat from stories about mixed marriages, passing, and other interracial content. In later years, Johnson would downplay his early efforts to cultivate a white audience, describing his advertising campaigns in mainstream publications as a mistake and contending that "we're glad to have [white] readers, but we don't aggressively seek them."[96]

As this article demonstrates, such statements contrast with the company's explicit, persistent, and enthusiastic efforts to expand its white audience during its formative years. Through the regular publication of letters from "white" readers, consistent references to its influence among whites, fundraising and subscription drives designed to expand its circulation among white readers and within white institutions, advertising campaigns in major national publications, and other projects and editorial content, Johnson Publishing aggressively sought "to sell white readers the idea that a Negro magazine is worth buying."[97] Johnson was certainly not the first Black publisher to harbor such aspirations. As this article elucidates, his efforts can be situated within a longer history of white readership of Black periodicals. However, Johnson's apparent success in cultivating a white audience appears to have far outstripped the efforts of contemporary Black publishers. While it is difficult for us to know just how successful his efforts were, the available evidence supports Johnson's early claims that "a surprising percentage" of his magazines' readers were white.[98]

Johnson's search for a white audience was, like most of his early professional decisions, shaped by his efforts to secure the future of his publishing enterprise. Johnson correctly surmised that in an era of growing public interest

in the "Negro problem" and the ascent of racial liberalism as a dominant political ideology, white readers—and advertisers—were primed for greater exposure to and support for Black literature. Similarly, Johnson's efforts to position *Negro Digest* and *Ebony* as moderate, interracial outlets—to escape what Burns describes as "the negative 'radical' stigma of the Negro press" —were shaped by his belief that this approach would prove more palatable to white patrons.[99] Yet it also seems likely that Johnson and his early editors truly believed in the power of the company's magazines as a tool for "interracial understanding" and the significance of their role as "a good will ambassador for Negroes with white people everywhere."[100] Judging by the responses of the company's readers, it would appear that this belief was well founded. Regardless of race, background, occupation or location, readers championed the company's efforts and contended that its periodicals were the type of "interracial magazine[s] that America needs."[101]

Endnotes

1. While internal circulation estimates were often inflated, external numbers confirmed the magazine's status as the most popular Black publication in the country. In 1947, the Audit Bureau of Circulation registered *Ebony*'s circulation as 309,715. "Backstage," *Ebony,* December 1945; "Backstage," *Ebony,* October 1946.
2. In 1946, Johnson Publishing was still known as the Negro Digest Publishing Company. This name was changed in the late 1940s, around the time that the company moved into a new headquarters at 1820 South Michigan Avenue in Chicago. Nicholas Grant, "The *Negro Digest:* Race, Exceptionalism, and the Second World War," *Journal of American Studies* 52, no. 2 (2018): 362; John H. Johnson and Lerone Bennett Jr., *Succeeding Against the Odds* (New York: Amistad, 1989), 199; E. James West, *A House for the Struggle: The Black Press and the Built Environment in Chicago* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2022), 105.
3. "Backstage," *Ebony,* July 1946.
4. "Black Magazines, Born of Necessity, Now Flourishing," *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA), July 25, 1971.
5. "An Insight into the Black Community, 1972," box 1, Lerone Bennett Jr. Papers, Emory University; "Simmons Market Research Bureau, 1979," box 24, Doris Saunders Papers, Chicago Public Library.
6. "Ebony Formula the Same," box 2, Ben Burns Papers, Chicago Public Library.
7. "Racial Turnabout," box 2, Ben Burns Papers.
8. "John H. Johnson," *Washington Post* (Washington, DC), September 14, 1980.
9. In its 1991 statement of ownership, *Ebony*'s total circulation (paid circulation plus free distribution) averaged 1,832,000 over the preceding twelve months. Johnson and Bennett, *Succeeding Against the Odds,* 184; "Statement of Ownership," *Ebony,* December 1991.
10. Jonathan Scott Holloway, *Jim Crow Wisdom: Memory and Identity in Black America since 1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press,

2013), 56; Johnson and Bennett, *Succeeding Against the Odds,* 184; "Our White Folks," *Negro Digest,* December 1944.

11. Frederick Detweiler, "The Negro Press Today," *American Journal of Sociology* 44, no. 3 (1938): 398.
12. Patrick Washburn and Mary Alice Sentman, "How Excess Profits Tax Brought Ads to Black Newspapers in World War II," *Journalism Quarterly* 64, no. 4 (1987): 769-74.
13. Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 2.
14. "Backstage," *Ebony,* July 1946; "Letters," *Ebony,* March 1946.
15. For an overview of recent Black press scholarship see Thomas Aiello, *The Grapevine of the Black South: The Scott Newspaper Syndicate in the Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018); Fred Carroll, *Race News: Black Journalists and the Fight for Racial Justice in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017); Benjamin Fagan, *The Black Newspaper and the Chosen Nation* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2016); Kim Gallon, *Pleasure in the News: African American Readership and Sexuality in the Black Press* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020); Eric Gardner, *Black Print Unbound: the* Christian Recorder, *African American Literature, and Periodical Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Kerri Greenidge, *Black Radical: The Life and Times of William Monroe Trotter* (New York: Liveright, 2020); D'Weston Haywood, *Let Us Make Men: The Twentieth Century Black Press and a Manly Vision for Racial Advancement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018); Gerald Horne, *The Rise and Fall of the Associated Negro Press* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017); Ethan Michaeli, *The Defender* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016); Derrick Spires, *The Practice of Citizenship: Black Politics and Print Culture in the Early United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019); Todd Vogel ed., *The Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001); E. James West, Ebony *Magazine and Lerone Bennett Jr.: Popular Black History in Postwar America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020).
16. "To Our Patrons," *Freedom's Journal,* March 16, 1827.
17. Roland Wolseley, *The Black Press, U.S.A* (Ames: University of Iowa Press, 1990); Armistead Scott Pride and Clint C. Wilson, *A History of the Black Press* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1997).
18. John Ernest, *Liberation Historiography: African American Writers and the Challenge of History, 1794-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 185.
19. Ronald Jacobs, *Race, Media, and the Crisis of Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 37.
20. Frankie Hutton, *The Early Black Press in America, 1827 to 1860* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 39; Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).
21. "The Afro-American Press of Today and Yesterday," *Indianapolis Freedman* (Indianapolis, IN), December 25, 1897.
22. William Jordan, *Black Newspapers and America's War for Democracy, 1914-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 2-4.

23. Brian Carroll, "The Bubbling Motor of Money: Calvin Jacox, the *Norfolk Journal & Guide* and the Integration of Tidewater Baseball," *Black Ball: A Negro Leagues Journal,* 8 (2015): 27.
24. Frederick Detweiler, *The Negro Press in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922), 2.
25. Herbert Seligmann, *The Negro Faces America* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1920), 288.
26. "It Pays to Advertise," *Washington Bee* (Washington, DC), December 29, 1917.
27. Gerald Horne, *The Rise and Fall of the Associated Negro Press* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 5–6.
28. Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922), 563.
29. "The *Advocate* in Every White Home," *Oregon Advocate* (Portland, OR), January 26, 1933.
30. Michael Huspek, "Transgressive Rhetoric in Deliberative Democracy: The Black Press," in Michael Lacy and Kent Ono ed., *Critical Rhetorics of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 162.
31. Patrick Washburn, *A Question of Sedition: The Federal Government's Investigation of the Black Press during World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 5, 23, 65.
32. There is a rich body of scholarship on the great migrations of African Americans out of the South. For Chicago-specific literature see Davarian Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Timuel Black, *Bridges of Memory: Chicago's First Wave of Black Migration* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2005); Marcia Chatelain, *South Side Girls: Growing Up in the Great Migration* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015); James Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Brian McCammack, *Landscapes of Hope: Nature and the Great Migration in Chicago* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017); Christopher Reed, *Knock at the Door of Opportunity: Black Migration to Chicago, 1900–1919* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2014).
33. Johnson and Bennett, *Succeeding Against the Odds,* 87
34. "Cover," *Negro Digest,* November 1945.
35. Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940-1955* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 137.
36. "Introducing…," *Negro Digest,* November 1945.
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38. Jordan, *Black Newspapers,* 2.
39. Johnson and Bennett, *Succeeding Against the Odds,* 119.
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42. Holloway, *Jim Crow Wisdom,* 56.
43. "Negro Digest Poll," *Negro Digest,* May 1945.
44. Burns, *Nitty Gritty,* 32.
45. "If I Were a Negro," *Negro Digest,* December 1942.

46. "If I Were a Negro," *Negro Digest,* March 1943; "If I Were a Negro," *Negro Digest,* October 1943; "If I Were a Negro," *Negro Digest,* November 1943.
47. "White Man's Views," *Pittsburgh Courier,* February 26, 1944; "An Announcement," *Negro Digest,* June 1945.
48. Johnson with Bennett, *Succeeding Against the Odds,* 157.
49. "Backstage," *Ebony,* November 1945.
50. E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 179.
51. "Backstage," *Ebony,* December 1945.
52. Maren Stange, "'Photographs Taken in Everyday Life": *Ebony*'s Photojournalistic Discourse," in Vogel ed., *The Black Press,* 208.
53. "Children's Crusade," *Ebony,* November 1945; "Successful Visit," *Time,* August 28, 1944.
54. "Masthead," *Ebony,* April 1947.
55. Burns, *Nitty Gritty,* 100.
56. "Our White Folks," *Negro Digest,* December 1944.
57. "A *Negro Digest* in Every Library!" *Negro Digest,* April 1944.
58. This campaign was accompanied by illustrations of a Black woman holding a copy of the magazine and conversing with a white woman over a picket fence. "A Good Neighbor Policy," *Negro Digest,* May 1944.
59. "Backstage," *Ebony,* July 1946.
60. "Advert," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), January 20, 1946.
61. "Advert," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), October 16, 1950.
62. This included responses to its very first issue, "Comment," *Negro Digest,* December 1942.
63. "Letters," *Ebony,* May 1946.
64. "Advert," *Chicago Tribune,* October 16, 1950.
65. Daryl Michael Scott, *Contempt and Pity: Social Policy and the Image of the Damaged Black Psyche, 1880–1996* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).
66. Karen Ferguson, *Top Down: The Ford Foundation, Black Power, and the Reinvention of Racial Liberalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 40.
67. Nikhil Singh, "Racial Formation in an Age of Permanent War," in *Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century,* ed. Daniel HoSang et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 278.
68. Walter Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938-1987* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944).
69. Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*, 2.
70. Hazel Rowley, *Richard Wright: The Life and Times* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 180.
71. Eugenia Kaledin, *Daily Life in the United States, 1940-1959* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 158.
72. Holloway, *Jim Crow Wisdom,* 1–2.
73. "Introducing …," *Negro Digest,* November 1945.
74. Johnson was not completely successful in this endeavor, with the FBI keeping open files on *Negro Digest* and *Ebony* during the 1940s. However, whereas the bureau's surveillance of Black newspapers was primarily punitive, it seemed more interested in capitalizing on Johnson's success by running

promotional articles about Black FBI agents in his magazines. William Maxwell, *F. B. Eyes: How J. Edgar Hoover's Ghostreaders Framed African American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 95.
75. Johnson with Bennett, *Succeeding Against the Odds,* 149.
76. "Backstage," *Ebony,* December 1946.
77. Johnson with Bennett, *Succeeding Against the Odds,* 187.
78. "Backstage," *Ebony,* June 1948; Jason Chambers, *Madison Avenue and the Color Line: African Americans in the Advertising Industry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 48.
79. "Passion with a Purpose," *Time,* October 23, 1950.
80. "The Voice of the Advertiser," *Advertising Age,* September 22, 1952.
81. Johnson with Bennett, *Succeeding Against the Odds,* 277.
82. Brenna Wynn Greer, *Represented: The Black Imagemakers Who Reimagined African American Citizenship* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).
83. Ben Burns Papers; CPL; Era Bell Thompson Papers, CPL; Allan Morrison Papers, NYPL.
84. "From the Editor," *Negro Digest,* July 1943.
85. "If I Were a Negro," *Negro Digest,* October 1943.
86. "Mrs. Roosevelt Says … ," *Negro Digest,* December 1943.
87. "Backstage," *Ebony,* July 1946
88. "Backstage," *Ebony,* December 1946.
89. "Letters," *Ebony,* April 1946.
90. "Letters," *Ebony,* May 1946.
91. "Letters," *Ebony,* December 1945; "Letters," *Ebony,* August 1946; "Letters," *Ebony,* September 1946; "Backstage," *Ebony,* December 1946; "Letters," *Ebony,* May 1947;
"Letters," *Ebony,* February 1949.
92. "Letters," *Ebony,* September 1946.
93. "Letters," *Ebony,* February 1950.
94. "Letters," *Ebony,* July 1950.
95. "Letters," *Ebony,* April 1951.
96. Johnson with Bennett, *Succeeding Against the Odds,* 184.
97. "Backstage," *Ebony,* December 1946.
98. "Report to Our Readers," *Negro Digest,* August 1944.
99. Burns, *Nitty Gritty,* 94.
100. "Backstage," *Ebony,* July 1946.
101. "Letters," *Ebony,* March 1946.

Notes on Contributor

E. James West is a lecturer in US history in the History Department at the University of York, UK. He is the author of *Ebony Magazine and Lerone Bennett Jr.: Popular Black History in Postwar America* (Illinois, 2020), *A House for the Struggle: The Black Press and the Built Environment in Chicago* (Illinois, 2022), and *Our Kind of Historian: The Work and Activism of Lerone Bennett Jr.* (Massachusetts, 2022).