

Authors' Names in Negro Collections

THE MANY PHASES of Negro life and history have been the subject of an increasing body of university research in recent years.¹ At the same time, racial problems brought into focus by world conditions have directed the attention of many laymen to the problems of minority groups. In consequence, all types of libraries have become more keenly aware of materials for the study of Negro life and problems. To aid student and lay readers, articles have appeared which describe available sources of Negroana.² This field continues to expand through the discovery of hitherto unknown privately printed or suppressed items, largely of the slavery period, as well as through the publications of current authors. As this expansion continues and new emphases broaden the scope of interest in Negro subjects, libraries are called upon to furnish satisfactory reference service on more and more questions involving the Negro.

Obviously, adequate cataloging is one of the bases of satisfactory reference service. Proper entry of authors' names for all authors is a factor contributing to an adequate catalog. Establishing correct entries for Negro authors presents an increasingly troublesome problem for the cataloger, and the study here reported is the outgrowth of difficulties encountered in accomplishing this

in libraries of all sizes where Negro materials are handled.

A survey of literature disclosed that almost nothing had been written on Negro collections from the point of view of the cataloger. Inquiries further revealed that the general policy has been to establish entries and identify authors as to race and national origin as adequately as the sources at hand permitted. Using Library of Congress cards as a primary source, the cataloger must attempt to provide proper entry information for authors whose works are not in the Library of Congress or for whom only analytics are required, and full information for entries in incomplete form at the Library of Congress.

To consider for study a cross section of all types of libraries handling Negro materials proved impractical because so many of them contain relatively small numbers of Negro titles and therefore do not require the independent organization which results in the distinctive policies and procedures developed in the special Negro collection, with its separate staff and catalog. The work was to be done with New York City as a headquarters, and, since some of the representative libraries of Negro literature are located at considerable distance from that city, the best plan seemed that of drawing mainly upon the several large Negro collections located in New York City and Washington, D.C., where inquiry could be conducted by interview and personal investigation. The Schomburg Collection of Negro Literature and the private library of Arthur B. Spingarn in New York City,

¹ Knox, Ellis O. "The Negro as a Subject of University Research in 1943." *Journal of Negro Education* 13:181, April 1944.

² Cf. Bontemps, Arna. "Special Collections of Negroana." *Library Quarterly* 14:187-206, July 1944.

Dunlap, Mollie E. "Special Collections of Negro Literature in the United States." *Journal of Negro Education* 4:482-89, October 1935.

Porter, Dorothy B. "Library Sources for the Study of Negro Life and History." *Journal of Negro Education* 5:232-44, April 1936.

the Moorland Foundation at Howard University, and the Library of Congress in Washington, were chosen.³ The Union Catalog at the Library of Congress was considered to serve as a check upon work done elsewhere and represented most of the collections which could not be visited. Some data were obtained from the special catalogs of the Fisk University and Hampton Institute libraries.

Authors' Names in the Collections

The visits revealed no unusual methods of cataloging employed in establishing authors' names for Negro works. The policies and methods recorded here are not considered unique by those using them. Rather, they are an indication of progress in the establishment of uniform entries and in clarifying the picture of the cataloging of Negro materials. Reference facilities within a library proved its greatest asset in the location of information about authors' names. But no set of tools has been assembled to bridge the gap caused by the dearth of known authoritative biographical, bibliographical, and historical sources such as exist for the checking of names in the literature of races other than the Negro.⁴ To illustrate, there exist no tools for the Negro race to approximate the scope of *The Dictionary of American Biography* or *The Dictionary of National Biography*. Because so much information is gleaned outside of these regular channels, the cooperation of the reference librarian is invaluable. This fact also makes it essential that libraries limit the time spent in searching this type of entry and underlies the policy of establishing entries with the most complete information at hand and making changes as necessary. Identity of Negro

authors is indicated variously. The Moorland Foundation simply adds the note "Negro author" to its main entry cards. Since the cards of the Schomburg Collection of Negro Literature are printed by the New York Public Library, race and nationality are given in a fuller note, e.g., "The author is an American Negro."

In the course of the investigation a group of typical problems about authors' names was gathered and careful attention was given to variant forms of entry and the reasons behind them. An example of this sort is the slave narrative *Fifty Years in Chains; or, The Life of an American Slave*. The difficulty of establishing authorship in this case is augmented inasmuch as the slave narrative was often used by Negro and white writers wishing to create sympathy for the slave. Others merely exploited it as a popular literary form. The specific work mentioned was originally published in 1836 with the title, *Slavery in the United States: A Narrative of Charles Ball, a Black Man*. Prefatory notes to the New York edition say that the narrative was prepared by one Fisher, from Ball's verbal narrative. "Mr. Fisher" remains an unidentified figure, a fact which has caused the work to be labeled spurious by some authorities. Whoever wrote down the story, Ball is its originator and should be credited with authorship of the narrative.⁵ Authority quoted for the accepted form is the card of the catalog using it, in this case the Library of Congress, which gives the entry, Ball, Charles.

Examination and Evaluation of Sources of Information

As has been stated, no adequate or established sources for obtaining biographical and bibliographical information for Negro authors were reported in the collections

² For an up-to-date description of these collections see Bontemps, Arna, *op. cit.*

⁴ For a summary of the scarcity of such materials see Spingarn, Arthur B. "Collecting a Library of Negro Literature." *Journal of Negro Education* 7:13, January 1938.

⁵ Loggins, Vernon. *The Negro Author*. Columbia University Press, 1931, p. 99.

visited. Accordingly, a list of such sources as gave some of the desired information was gathered under the headings:

1. Collective and individual biographies
2. General encyclopedias
3. General works on Negro literature and history
4. Histories of special Negro groups, as the Negro church
5. Trade catalogs
6. Bibliographies
7. Dictionaries of anonymous and pseudonymous literature
8. Card catalogs of a selected list of libraries
9. Periodicals and periodical indexes
10. Sources for locating the names of Negro societies and institutions.

The tools listed above were tested for general value and in connection with a list of personal names, in order to appraise them with regard to their usefulness as sources of information about authors' names in Negro collections.

Checklists of personal names and anonymous and pseudonymous literature were compiled for use in testing these tools. For the period 1760-1900, a list of 209 names of Negro authors was drawn from *The Negro Author* by Vernon Loggins, conceded by reference librarians and authorities to be the most authentic work for the period. In the absence of a similar authoritative work for the period since 1900, attempts were made to compile a checklist from logical combinations of printed sources. Results were so repetitious that the plan was abandoned. Finally, a list of authors writing during this century, and not listed by Loggins, was compiled from the catalog of the Schomburg Collection of Negro Literature. This list of 386 names was checked by the catalogs of the Moorland Foundation, Fisk University, and Hampton Institute, and the 208 names found in as many as three of the catalogs were used. Thus the checklists of personal names were composed of (1) 209

names for the period prior to 1900 and (2) 208 names for the period 1900-37. One hundred twenty samples of anonymous and pseudonymous literature were chosen from current catalogs of booksellers, *The Classified Catalogue of the Collection of Anti-Slavery Propaganda in the Oberlin College Library* compiled by Geraldine H. Hubbard, and items examined in the Moorland Foundation and the New York Public Library. From these groups, ninety-one titles available for consideration during the course of the study constituted the final checklist.

In the investigation of the individual titles, every type of tool that might provide usable data for establishing entries for authors' names was sought for examination. Many were excluded because they yielded no information, though others similar in scope proved valuable. Lack of authenticity ruled out some. Evaluations of one hundred thirty-five were made. Descriptive notes and a distribution table were drawn up to provide an index to the completeness of the information given and the period for which each tool is useful.

As illustrative of these tests a complete sample is provided for a title likely to be considered for first purchase.

Who's who in colored America: a biographical dictionary of notable living persons of African descent in America. 4th ed. 1937. 640p. illus.

Contains lists of authors' works which vary in completeness.

The first edition of this work, issued in 1927, contained 1,000 biographical sketches and 333 pages. The later edition has more than 2,700 sketches and 640 pages. In this, nothing has been added to many articles which appeared in the first edition save perhaps an additional published work. For example, *God's Trombones*, 1927, has been inserted in the article on James Weldon Johnson. On the other hand, Carter G. Woodson and George F. Bragg are given briefer treatment in the 1937 edition. Woodson's works are brought through 1928, but Bragg is credited

with none. Necrologies are incomplete and often say "Deceased" instead of giving dates. Alphabetization is faulty and some pictures are included with no accompanying articles.⁶

Total names listed: 89

Distribution:	List I	List II
Complete entries	12	68
Complete name, one date	0	0
Complete name only	0	5
Partial information	1	3

Summary and Conclusions

Investigation of the practices employed in cataloging the special Negro collections studied showed that catalogers working with the names of Negro authors experience more than usual difficulty in establishing main entries, as compared with that entailed in such entries for authors generally. The problem is augmented by the necessity for discovering the racial identity of the author, which, though actually not main entry information, is most logically searched in connection with complete name entries. Although every type of usable material has been resorted to by catalogers handling names of Negro authors, there remains the gap caused by the dearth of known authoritative biographical, bibliographical, and historical sources such as exist for the checking of races other than the Negro. Excluding the results from the checking of the Union Catalog of the Library of Congress, the names located in any single group of tools is not encouraging. The two most useful tools evaluated are Work's *Bibliography of the Negro in Africa and America* and *The United States Catalog*. Of the 417 names comprising the checklist of personal names used in testing, the two yielded an average of 230, only 55 per cent of the total. All collective biographies listed 209 names, approximately 50 per cent of the total. As would be expected, bibliographical and biographical tools gave the highest

⁶ The 1941-44 (6th) ed., 1942, does not correct these faults.

returns. In neither case is the figure impressive, although complete and incomplete entries were included in computing the percentages. The high percentage of the total number of entries of anonymous and pseudonymous titles (96.4 per cent) located in the Union Catalog of the Library of Congress, is a tribute to the cooperation existing among American libraries.

Special Negro collections are contributing great service in the rapidly developing fields of research on subjects pertaining to the Negro. Much of this service is dependent on the library catalog. Since correct main entries influence the efficiency of the service rendered by the catalog, it is requisite that more adequate aids be provided the cataloger for main entry work with Negro authors.⁷ The cataloger of Negro materials, along with the cataloger of serials, will always be engaged in what has been called a "gay science;" and "however exasperated we may be . . . yet there is always the lure of discovery, the hope of finding the ultimate solution."⁸

In the light of this study, the following recommendations seem pertinent:

1. Use of the research facilities of the Union Catalog of the Library of Congress is urged as an important means of insuring for Negro collections, regardless of size, main entries uniform with those used in other libraries.⁹ This expert service is much less expensive than the searching of sources for obscure information which the collections in individual libraries usually cannot supply.

2. In addition to supplying the Union Catalog with a record of unusual titles, librarians discovering significant main entry information,

⁷ Appendices give the most adequate sources for establishing main entries, according to evaluations made; a list of the more than 600 names of Negroes considered; and a checklist of the samples of anonymous and pseudonymous literature used. Included among the tools evaluated are a list of *Bibliographies Identifying Negro Authors and Sources for Locating the Names of Negro Societies and Institutions*.

⁸ Pierson, H. W. "The Gay Science." *A.L.A. Bulletin (Proceedings)* 23:P-144, 1929.

⁹ Kletch, Ernest. *The Union Catalog of the Library of Congress*, p. 7-8. Directions for using the catalog.

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