

THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE  
JOHNSON PUBLISHING COMPANY

Thesis for the Degree of M. A.  
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY  
CAROLYN DENNIS  
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## ABSTRACT

### THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE JOHNSON PUBLISHING COMPANY

By

Carolyn Dennis

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the growth and development of the Johnson Publishing Company (JPC), and to explain how and why it became the largest Black magazine enterprize today. The study explained how founder and publisher, John H. Johnson, systematically built JPC into a \$17,000,000 business despite obstacles directed at a Black press. Descriptive and historical analyses were used to define JPC's role as a Black press.

Attention was given to all JPC magazines, thereby showing that the company is much more than the Ebony magazine. The successful publications, including Ebony, Jet, Tan and Black World, were discussed, as were the JPC failures, Ebony Africa, Copper Romance and Hue. Various advertising and readership statistics were offered.

Much of the data collected was the result of an in-depth interview with publisher Johnson, who described, among other factors, the plans for Black Stars, a new JPC magazine to begin in November, 1971.

The study explained why JPC has no significant Black competition today. Tuesday, Essence, Sepia and Black Sports were compared to the JPC magazines.

The JPC non-publishing interests, including the Ebony fashion fair, Ebony book and record clubs, and Supreme Beauty Products, were discussed. The importance of the diversified non-publishing interests was explained in regard to the growth and development of the JPC magazines.

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By

Carolyn Dennis

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of Arts degree.

V. M. Mishra

Director of Thesis

## DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to Leon Burke, Jr.  
Leon's faith in me made me believe I could almost walk  
water, and his love for me always saved me when I thought  
I was sinking.

What can a lady say? Thanks beaucoup, husband-  
to-be.

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I wish to thank several persons who helped me to complete this study.

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Third, I am indebted to Dr. George A. Hough, III who inspired me to investigate my interests in Johnson Publishing, and helped me to plan my trip to Chicago.

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Venson and Connie Dennis, my fiance, Leon Burke, Jr., my uncle, James Arnold, and my good friends, Adrienne Davis, Carolyn Martin, Regina Sherard, Gloria and Carter Glass, Mildred and Felix Matlock, and James and Marie Fritzgerald.

I trust that this study will be an inspiration to my younger brothers, Lamar and Cornelious, and to all children aspiring to higher educational heights.

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## CHAPTER I

### JOHNSON PUBLISHING COMPANY: A VERSATILE PUBLISHING HOUSE

#### Introduction

Contrary to the popular belief, the Johnson Publishing Company (JPC) is involved in many communications enterprises than just publishing the Ebony magazine, for the company publishes Jet, Tan, and Black World magazines. Also, JPC is planning to publish another magazine, Black Stars, in November, 1971. JPC has published numerous books which can be obtained through the Ebony book club. Additionally, it sponsors an annual high fashion travel show, the Ebony fashion fair, and manages a Black cosmetics firm, Supreme Beauty Products. Recently, it started the Ebony record club which offers a selection of records by various Black artists.

The Johnson Publishing Company has been a remarkably successful enterprise. John Harold Johnson, founder and publisher of JPC, began his first venture, Negro Digest, in 1942 with a \$500 loan. Today, the company grosses

over \$17,000,000.<sup>1</sup> It has experienced only three failures, Hue, Ebony Africa, and Copper Romance magazines.

Journalistic failures since 1900 have been numerous. The successful publications, on the other hand, are numbered. Considerable coverage has been given to the success of Time and Playboy. Although JPC has successfully launched four publications, only Ebony has attracted the attention of the White press. Ebony was not indexed in Reader's Guide until 1961 after having reached well over a half-million circulation. Mr. Johnson said that such lack of haste to index Ebony was "simple prejudice."<sup>2</sup> Citing other prejudices that JPC has faced that other White-oriented publications have not, Johnson said: "It has been about two years ago that Ebony was accepted for use by some airlines."

This writer suspected that such obstacles existed for editor and publisher Johnson and his magazines, and wished to learn about them. This writer is familiar with the fact that JPC is a communications enterprise with a remarkable history--which for many evokes the image only of Ebony. The study, it is to be hoped, may dispell that erroneous notion.

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<sup>1</sup>John Harold Johnson, In-depth Interview, Chicago, Ill., June, 1971.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

JPC has gone through three phases of development: The beginning years, 1942-1950; years of growth, 1950-1960; and the years of honors and achievements, 1960-1970. These years will be discussed.

### Purpose of the Study

Johnson's success has been hard won. He has fought many obstacles in the path of Black journalism. This study will examine these obstacles and relate how Johnson systematically made JPC a giant in the world of modern magazines. Because JPC, like most Black and minority journalistic ventures, seems to have been ignored in historical accounts of American journalism, this study will delineate the rationale for JPC's existence. It will explain why neither the white press nor the Black weeklies could meet the communication needs that JPC does. This study will examine the place the JPC magazines occupy in Black journalism history. For example, it will explain why Ebony was the first Black general magazine, and how it succeeded the Colored American (1900).

Generally, researchers have concentrated on Ebony magazine. However, the other JPC publications--Jet, Tan, and Black World--have not received such attention. This study will examine the less successful magazines also. For example, it will explain why Tan has continually lost circulation, and why other ventures such as Ebony Africa

and Copper Romance have failed. This study will show how JPC is an extended shadow of John H. Johnson, and show how he has steered the company to success.

Having interests in Black journalism history, this writer siezes this opportunity to join formerly scattered facts about JPC together, hopefully, to cast an admirable respect so deserving of JPC. This study will, for the first time, talk about JPC as being much more than Ebony magazine.

### Methods

Methods employed in the study included descriptive and historical analyses of documentary research. Additionally, the writer conducted a series of in-depth interviews with Mr. John H. Johnson, and several JPC employees. The interviews helped this writer obtain a clear understanding of past, present and future of JPC operations. The study is largely based upon the data gathered in Chicago.

The bound volumes of all JPC magazines, except for Ebony, were examined at the JPC headquarters. This was necessary as public and university libraries subscribe mainly Ebony. This writer was interested in the contents of these publications, and the goals of the magazines as enunciated in their first issues.

### Review of the Literature

The writer also consulted the following references: Roland E. Wolseley's "The Black Magazines" (Quill, May, 1969); Thelma T. Gorham's "The Negro Press: Past, Present and Future" (1967 Directory of U.S. Negro Newspapers, Magazines and Periodicals in 42 States); "John Harold Johnson" (Current Biography: Who's News and Why); "Jet Magazines Report on Hunger in the U.S." (Congressional Record, March 12, 1969); "Uncle Tom Magazine Removes the Kid Gloves" (Business Week, March 23, 1968); "Mr. Johnson Finds His Market" (Reporter, Nov., 1959); "Ebony: Making a New Market Pay Off" (Business Week, March 22, 1952); "Ebony's Nativity" (Ebony, Nov., 1965); and "New Hue, New Copper" (Newsweek, Oct. 19, 1953).

Wolseley's article offers perhaps the most recent and comprehensive account of Black magazine journalism today. Thelma Gorham's work makes reference to JPC's historical position in Black journalism. Congressman John Conyers (D-Mich.) praises Jet in the Congressional Record, Business Week and Reporter concentrate on Ebony's success, as is true of "Ebony's Nativity." Newsweek's "New Hue, New Copper" discusses the origins of two JPC failures.

Books consulted for the study include the Ayer Directory which lists the circulation of several JPC



magazines. Theodore Peterson's Magazines in the Twentieth Century merely mentions Ebony as does John Tebbel's The American Magazine: A Compact History. The Kennedy Years and the Negro by Doris E. Saunders was also helpful, as was Irving J. Sloan's The American Negro: A Chronology and Fact Book. I. Garland Penn's The Afro-American Press and Its Editors is quite informative, as is Frederick G. Detweiler's The Negro Press in the United States. Frank Luther Mott's History of American Journalism is also helpful in that it shows a need for writing Black journalism history.

## CHAPTER II

### JOHNSON: THE MAN AND HIS DREAM

#### The Man

Meticulously dressed, "the most prosperous and influential publisher in American Negro history"<sup>3</sup> glides through the aisles of what has been called the "luxurious Chicago office building" which serves as JPC headquarters. There is no mistaking his authority; there is a regal, yet hardly pompous, air about him. His bellowing and confident voice goes almost unnoticed because of his absorption in his subject matter. Talking with him one could easily make a hasty generalization that millionaires are average, everyday people.

John Harold Johnson's life story reads like a chapter from Grimm's Fairy Tales. Unbelievable! One cannot help but respect a man--a Black man at that--who in 1942 took out a \$500 loan (using his mother's furniture as collateral), and twenty-nine years later is president, editor and publisher of a \$17,000,000 company.

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<sup>3</sup>"John Harold Johnson," Current Biography: Who's New and Why (New York: The Wilson Co., 1968), p. 200.

Born in Arkansas City, Arkansas, January 19, 1918, Johnson is the only child of Gertrude Jenkins Johnson, a domestic, and Leroy Johnson, a sawmill operator who was killed in a mill accident when his son was six.

I can't say I had a very happy childhood, Johnson told Helen Dudar of the New York Post (December 7, 1962). But it wasn't an unhappy childhood. . . .

I had no contact with the world outside, and when you have nothing to compare with you aren't aware that you should be unhappy.<sup>4</sup>

Because there was no high school for Blacks in Arkansas City, Johnson was able to attend school only up to the eighth grade, which he repeated rather than drop out.

In 1933, at age 15, Johnson and his mother visited the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago. Intending to visit for only two weeks, the mother and son decided to stay because they believed Chicago offered better opportunities for Blacks.

Johnson enrolled in DuSable High School on Chicago's South Side. He was an honor student, member of the debating team, student council president, and president of his class. It was at DuSable that Johnson first became interested in journalism, and became managing editor of the school newspaper, and business manager of the yearbook.

Because of his record at DuSable, Johnson in 1936 was invited to speak at a banquet sponsored by the

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

Chicago Urban League. The featured speaker at the banquet honoring "outstanding Negro high school seniors" was the late Harry H. Pace, then president of Supreme Liberty Life Insurance Company. Impressed with Johnson, Pace offered him a job as office boy, and urged him to go on to college. Johnson studied for two years at the University of Chicago. In 1938, he began working full time for the insurance company. He continued his education, taking night classes at the Northwestern University School of Commerce.

"Johnson's first position with the insurance company was assistant to the editor of the company's employee publication, and he was later made managing editor."<sup>5</sup> One of his duties was to read various publications and select articles relevant to Blacks. Pace, then chose the articles to be reprinted for the house organ. "It occurred to Johnson that such a service deserved a wider market, and thus was born the idea of the Negro Digest."<sup>6</sup> In 1942, the Negro Digest Publishing Company, as JPC was then called, was formed.

By persistence, patience and hard work, Johnson built his empire. Ebony started in 1945, followed by Tan in 1950. Negro Digest, ailing in circulation, was stopped

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<sup>5</sup>Johnson Publishing Company, "Biographical Sketch of John Harold Johnson."

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

momentarily for the beginnings of Jet in 1951. JPC was born. The year 1953 saw the beginnings of Copper Romance and Hue, and in 1964 Ebony Africa began successful publication.

As a result of John Harold Johnson's spectacular journalistic career, he has participated in many non-publishing concerns, and has been the recipient of numerous awards. The United States Junior Chamber of Commerce selected him as one of ten outstanding young men of 1951. He was the first Black businessman chosen for this honor. Johnson was elected to the Tuskegee Institute Board of Trustees (Tuskegee, Ala.) in 1954, and has served on the board of directors of the Urban League since 1954.

He is respected by both Republican and Democratic chief executives. The late President Dwight D. Eisenhower invited Johnson and nineteen other businessmen to a stag dinner at the White House in 1955. In 1957, Johnson was a member of the press corps who accompanied then Vice President Richard M. Nixon on a goodwill trip to nine African countries. In the summer of 1959, Johnson accompanied Vice President Nixon to Poland and Russia. The late President John F. Kennedy appointed Johnson to a four-man delegation to represent the United States at the Independence Ceremonies of the Ivory Coast in 1961. Then President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed Johnson a Special Ambassador to represent the United States at the

Independence Ceremonies of Kenya in December, 1963.

President Nixon named Johnson to a sixty-three member advisory council for minority enterprise in December, 1969.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, Johnson was the 1958 recipient of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's Freedom Fund Award for "distinguished merit and achievement among American Negroes."<sup>8</sup> The American Schools and Colleges Association presented Johnson with the 1966 Horatio Alger Award, and he has received several honorary degrees. Central State College, Shaw University and North Carolina College awarded him honorary doctor of law degrees; Benedict College granted him a doctor of journalism degree; Eastern Michigan University, Lincoln University and Malcolm X College presented him with honorary doctor of humane letters degrees.

Johnson was a director of the Magazine Publisher's Association for several years (a position he has since turned over to William P. Grayson, JPC executive vice president),<sup>9</sup> and the National Newspaper Publisher's Association honored Johnson with the John Russwurm award, an award given in honor of the first Black newspaper, the Freedom's Journal (1827).

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Johnson, Interview.

In 1970 the University of Chicago Alumni Association presented Johnson with the Professional Achievement Award, and Sigma Delta Chi, professional journalistic society, honored him as a fellow. During the same year, Chicago Mayor Richard Daley appointed Johnson a member of the Urban Transportation Commission, and he was made a member of the President's Commission for the observance of the 25th anniversary of the United Nations.

Today, 53-year-old Johnson is president of the same insurance company for which he was once office boy. The shrewd businessman began buying stock in the company in 1955, and has been its major stockholder since 1964.<sup>10</sup> Supreme Life Insurance is reputed to be the largest Black owned business in the North.

Johnson is a director of the Marina City Bank of Chicago, Service Federal Savings and Loan Association, The Advertising Council, National Conference of Christians and Jews, and Twentieth Century Fox. Mr. J., as Johnson is fondly called by some JPC employes, is also a member of the Chicago Press Club, and the Executive Service Corps. Additionally, he serves as a trustee of the Institute of International Education and the United Negro College Fund.

Johnson, his wife Eunice, whom he married in 1941, and his mother are the sole owners of JPC. "Nobody wanted

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<sup>10</sup>"John H. Johnson," Current Biography, p. 202.

any part of it from the beginning, and I do not need them now,"<sup>11</sup> Johnson jokingly, but frankly admits. Also, the founder explains: "I'm not temperamentally suited to get a boss after all these years. There are advantages in going public, but I don't want to have to answer to a whole lot of people." Johnson attributes much of the JPC success to the fact that major JPC decisions are kept within the family. Johnson's mother serves as JPC vice president. Eunice Johnson is fashion director and responsible for the Ebony fashion fair.

Basically, I run the company by instinct. I'm not selecting articles by what Daniel Starch says, or by what Brand Rating says. I'm drawing on my twenty-five years of knowledge and experience by watching a magazine and knowing which door has increased circulation and which didn't; by watching personalities and recognizing who did a lot for us and who didn't.

So, I'm not really bound by research. I think that any editor who is bound by research or who relies completely on research is not a good editor.

There has to be something--some indefinable thing--which you can feel and which you know. . . . And I've surrounded myself with editors and with people who have this feel.<sup>12</sup>

A typical John Harold Johnson day begins with his arrival at the JPC headquarters shortly before nine o'clock. He usually begins by "making the rounds"--talking with his "key people." Included as key people are the various magazine editors and writers as well as advertising

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<sup>11</sup>Johnson, Interview.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.





personnel. He checks to see if there are any problems which he specifically should handle, though he confesses that: "We're (JPC) essentially run through departments. If I'm here, I want to be consulted about things. But if I'm not, they go ahead."

Noting that there are a number of employees who have remained with JPC over the years, Johnson explained that "any company needs certain people to grow and prosper." "We've identified these people, and I work at keeping them. I try to anticipate their needs--and needs go beyond dollars and cents." But in contrast, an unidentified former JPC employee described her experience thus:<sup>13</sup>

When you travel for Johnson, you travel first class and you live first class. . . . The disagreeable aspect is the constant insecurity. I don't think any of us would go back to work for him . . . , but I don't think any of us regrets for a moment the time we spent there. We came out of Johnson Publishing with a professional education that, as Negroes, we couldn't have gotten anywhere else in the country.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>This writer found the description offered by the "unidentified former employee" in contrast to attitudes of many present employees. During this writer's brief visit to JPC, this writer noted an intense pride on the part of employees, not only in their respective positions, but in JPC development and operations as a whole.

<sup>14</sup>"John H. Johnson," p. 203.

### Johnson's Journalistic Philosophy

Johnson's instincts and feelings led him to subscribe to a journalistic philosophy which permeates all of his magazines. "We want to write about individuals; we want to personalize things."<sup>15</sup> As an example, he offered a forthcoming article in Ebony, written by Era Bell Thompson, Ebony's international editor. Miss Bell, stricken with breast cancer some seven years ago, is "medically cured." Although her story, "I was a Cancer Coward," is essentially a biographical one, interwoven in it will be statistics and facts, says Johnson. "We try to personalize journalism, dealing with little human things that people can relate to."<sup>16</sup>

Circulation and subscription growth will attest to the fact that Johnson's "personal journalism" approach has been and is being accepted by JPC readers. As readership increased, so did the numbers of JPC employees. Today, the company employs about 150 persons at its Chicago headquarters, and has about fifty employees at its New York and Washington offices. The company formerly ran Los Angeles and Paris bureaus. Although a correspondent is still

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<sup>15</sup>Johnson, Interview.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

employed, the Los Angeles office was closed when Ebony began placing less emphasis on the Hollywood-type "glossy" articles, Johnson explained.

The Paris bureau was opened for several reasons. Because it cost less, Paris was selected as the city in which Ebony Africa was to be published (1964). Paris was known as "the capital of Europe for Black people," said Johnson explaining that many of the "old jazz artists were living there." Also, the United States maintained an army base there, which, Johnson pointed out, contained many Blacks. After Ebony Africa ceased publication and after the army pulled out, Johnson closed his Paris bureau but left a correspondent for the fast-moving Jet weekly. Even with the Paris and Los Angeles bureaus closed, the personnel of the remaining three, Chicago, New York and Washington, D.C., costs Johnson about \$2,500,000 annually.<sup>17</sup>

A large percentage of the JPC employees are college graduates. Johnson said that the company prefers hiring university graduates, but does not rule out persons with "equivalent experience on a recognized newspaper or magazine," or those persons "who prove to us in some way that they have the capacity to do the job." "What we're looking for is discipline in a writer. And some people

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

require a college education, but there are other people who can discipline themselves," Johnson explained.<sup>18</sup>

The Johnson Publications Company has gone through three phases of development, according to its president. The first lasted from 1942 to 1950, and was tagged by Johnson as "the beginning years--the years of searching." "These were the years when we were fighting for acceptance, visiting other publications and searching for answers." It was during this time that Johnson said he learned:

One of the best ways to solve problems is to call people in the same business and ask them. I found people at the other magazines very cooperative. I think I was one of the few people who could call and get Henry Luce of Time magazine on the telephone. I'd simply call him and explain that I was in business and that I was learning.<sup>19</sup>

Because of such experiences, Johnson said he "doesn't believe that you have to have influence to get things done." "I've found, for example, that the people at the top are humane and sentimental, and like to be asked to help."

By 1950, Johnson found himself asking less for help. He moved into a decade of growth. JPC began to take on a "certain amount of acceptance and advertising." There was a "concession on the part of advertisers and readers that we were here to stay," Johnson said. He explained

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

that advertisers and readers had been leery because "all other Black magazines had failed . . . and the only two being published were organs of the NAACP and the Urban League (Crisis and Opportunity, respectively). "After 1950, people began accepting Ebony as a small institution that was going to be here. Once that happened, we were able to build more of a solid foundation for growth."<sup>20</sup>

During the Sixties, Johnson said that "everyone all of a sudden seemed to have decided we were here." The decade 1960-70 represents a third phase of development dubbed by Johnson as one of "honors and achievements," Johnson said that although he was glad to get them, "a few years back, I would have given an arm and leg for some of them."

Summing up the growth process of JPC, Johnson said:

Someone asked me how do you become a millionaire. And without admitting that I am a millionaire, I think you can become one by setting small goals for yourself. Accomplish a step at a time.

With Ebony, we set one or two goals at a time. At first we printed 25,000 copies, and my goal was 50,000, At 50,000, my goal was 100,000. When we sold 100,000, my goal was 150,000 and so on. . . . And each time I was able to attain my goal, it gave me confidence, and enabled me to move on to the next goal.

My dreams were not very much for Ebony.<sup>21</sup> My dreams were that we should get 50,000 circulation.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Ebony, today, guarantees its advertisers 1,250,000 circulation.<sup>22</sup> By way of an overview, it can be asserted that the whole personality and the philosophy of one man-- John Harold Johnson--permeates the JPC's operations. In this sense, JPC is an extended shadow of John Harold Johnson.

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<sup>22</sup>Johnson Publishing Company, 1971, Ebony Advertising Rate Schedule.

## CHAPTER III

### JPC'S ROLE IN DEVELOPING THE BLACK PRESS IN AMERICA

#### Black Press in America

Everybody knows about the five Sullivan brothers who were lost on a warship in the Pacific. We have all seen their pictures, five fine-looking young white men. The navy named a destroyer after the Sullivans. Does everybody know about the five Holden brothers who died on the battleship Arizona at Pearl Harbor? They were five of nine brothers in military service. It happened fifteen months ago. I read about it last week in the Chicago Defender. The Defender picked up and headlined a brief Associated Press story by John Moroso. The details were obscure and it took an AP reporter stationed with the Atlantic fleet to dig up a story that happened in the Pacific. The navy doesn't make heroes out of Negroes, nor do white newspapers.<sup>23</sup>

This account of how the news media ignored the Holden brothers offers an example of why there was and is a need for a Black press, such as the one that JPC is developing. Thomas Scranton, author of "The Negro Press" from which the above anecdote was extracted, wrote: "A Negro buys a Negro paper to find out what happens to Negroes."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Thomas Scranton, "The Negro Press," New Republic, April 26, 1943, p. 557.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.



The Black press has a long history of crusading for the advancement of the Black race, and reporting information relevant to Blacks. The first publication was the Freedom's Journal founded by John B. Russwurm, the first Black college graduate. Volume one, number one was issued in New York on March 30, 1827.<sup>25</sup> I. Garland Penn points out in The Afro-American Press and Its Editors:

Of course, any paper established by Afro-Americans at that time and for the succeeding forty years, would have fought absolutely in the interest of abolition of slavery. As a matter of fact, this publication by Mr. Russwurm met with more and greater obstacles than did any other paper ever published upon the continent. Besides having to fight for a cause which then had but a few advocates, it could see in the popular mind no indication of support.<sup>26</sup>

Russwurm's Freedom Journal became more outspoken with its March 21, 1828, name change to Rights of All.<sup>27</sup> The weekly was so effective that it angered and aroused many whites to the point that Mr. Russwurm was later captured by the Colonization Society and sent to Africa.<sup>28</sup>

Russwurm's efforts were not left unattended. After his publication, a variety of Black publications of all sizes and formats were printed. Many lasted only a few

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<sup>25</sup>I. Garland Penn, The Afro-American Press and Its Editors (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times), p. 26.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 26-27.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

weeks, some less than a year; others managed to hold on for five or six years.<sup>29</sup>

A complete history of the Black press is yet to be written. From what has been written, one can readily see that there was scarcely a time in Black American history, from 1827 on, that Blacks did not have some kind of news medium. A Black press was at that time, and remains to a degree today, imperative. A review of the names of some of the nineteenth century publications offers some indication of the publications contents. There was one common theme, a desire for freedom and human equality for Blacks.

Table 1 shows that Black publications in the nineteenth century were numerous. It also shows that many of the newspapers or magazines published were organs of religious organizations. Many of the Black publishers of that time were ministers.

The table is by no means complete. As there was no emphasis on Black history in the 1800's, many newspapers and magazines have gone unrecorded in historical accounts. Many newspapers, like the Daily Gazette, were destroyed when their buildings were burned to prevent publication.<sup>30</sup> The Daily Gazette was fortunate in that it lasted six months.

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<sup>29</sup>One must remember that during such times Blacks were enslaved, and a publication lasting five or six years was doing very well.

<sup>30</sup>Penn, Afro-American Press, p. 128.

TABLE 1  
SOME BLACK PUBLICATIONS OF THE  
NINETEENTH CENTURY

Year of Publication	Name and kind of publication (n = newspaper; m = magazine; p = pamphlet)	Publisher
1827	Freedom's Journal (n) <sup>a</sup>	John B. Russwurm
1829	Walker's Appeal (p)	David Walker
1831	Liberator (n)	William L. Garrison
1831	National Reformer (m) <sup>b</sup>	William Whipper
1837	Weekly Advocate (n) <sup>c</sup>	Samuel E. Cornish
1837	Mirror of Liberty (m) <sup>d</sup>	David Ruggles
1842	The Elevator (n)	Stephen Myers
1842	A. M. E. Church (m) <sup>e</sup>	A. M. E. Church
1842	National Watchman (n)	William G. Allen
1843	People's Press (n)	Thomas Hamilton
1843	The Mystery (n)	Martin R. Delaney
1845	The Genius of Freedom (m)	David Tuggles
1846	Ram's Horn (n)	Thomas Van Rensselaer
1847	North Star (n)	Frederick Douglass
1848	Impartial Citizen (n)	Samuel Ward

<sup>a</sup>Later changed name to Rights of All March 21, 1828.

<sup>b</sup>Although edited by a Black, this publication is not considered to be the first Black magazine because it was white owned.

<sup>c</sup>Changed name to Colored American March 4, 1837.

<sup>d</sup>First Black magazine.

<sup>e</sup>African Methodist Episcopal Church publication.

TABLE 1--Continued

Year of Publication	Name and kind of publication (n = newspaper; m = magazine; p = pamphlet)	Publisher
1851	Colored Man's Journal (m)	Louis H. Putnam
1852	Alienated American (m)	W. H. H. Day
1855	Mirror of Times (n) <sup>f</sup>	Mifflin W. Gibbs
1856	Herald of Freedom (n)	Peter H. Clark
1859	Anglo-African (n) <sup>g</sup>	Thomas Hamilton
1861	Progressive American (n)	John J. Freeman
1864	New Orleans Tribune (n) <sup>h</sup>	
1862	Colored Citizen (n) <sup>i</sup>	John P. Sampson
1866	The Sunbeam (n)	Rufus L. Perry
1866	Zion Standard (n)	S. T. Jones
1866	Weekly Review (n)	S. T. Jones
1866	New Orleans Louisanan (n)	P. B. S. Pinchback
1866	Our National Progress (n)	W. H. Day
1868	Charlston Leader (n) <sup>j</sup>	R. H. Cain
1870	The Commoner (n) <sup>k</sup>	

<sup>f</sup>Lasted seven years before it merged with the  
Pacific Appeal.

<sup>g</sup>First published in the interest of Black Civil War  
soldiers.

<sup>h</sup>First Black daily newspaper; published in French  
and English.

<sup>i</sup>First Black newspaper published in the South.

<sup>j</sup>Later became the Missionary Record.

<sup>k</sup>Publisher unknown.

TABLE 1--Continued

Year of Publication	Name and kind of publication (n = newspaper; m = magazine; p = pamphlet)	Publisher
1870	National Monitor (n)	L. L. Perry
1879	Rumor (n)	T. T. Fortune
1879	Washington Bee (n) <sup>1</sup>	
1882	St. Louis Advance (n)	P. H. Murray
1884	Philadelphia Tribune (n) <sup>m</sup>	
1884	Cairo Gazette (n)	W. S. Scott
1884	A. M. E. Church Review (m)	A. M. E. Church
1884	Cleveland Gazette (n) <sup>n</sup>	
1884	Our Women and Children (m)	William J. Simms
1885	Svannah Tribune (n) <sup>o</sup>	
1885	Richmond Planet (n)	John Mitchell
1887	Columbus Messenger (n) <sup>p</sup>	
1887	New York Age (n) <sup>q</sup>	
1889	Howard's Negro American (m)	James H. Howard
1889	Afro-American Budget (m)	J. S. Woods
1889	Freeman (n) <sup>r</sup>	
1890	Southland (m)	J. C. Price
1892	Baltimore Afro-American (n)	John H. Murphy
1894	Red Record (p)	Ida B. Bell
1897	Topeka Plaindealer (n)	Nick Chiles
1899	Hot Springs Echo (n) <sup>s</sup>	

1, m, n, o, p, q, r, s Publishers unknown.

Sources: Roland E. Wolseley, "The Black Magazine;" I. Garland Penn, The Afro-American Press and Its Editors; Thelma Gorham, 1967 Directory of U.S. Negro Newspapers, and Periodicals in 42 States; Frederick Detweiler, The Negro Press in the United States.

Some Black publications lasted for as short a period as two weeks. About the later half of the century when Blacks supposedly received freedom, Black newspapers were being found in almost every state.

By 1900, more Blacks could read, for the illiteracy rate for Blacks was down to 44.5 percent.<sup>31</sup> This was a remarkable improvement in comparison to 1880 and 1890 when the percentages were 70 and 57.1 per cent respectively. By 1910, only 30.4 per cent of Blacks were illiterate. Black publishers took advantage of this development and began a number of publications during the first half of the twentieth century. Most of these publications carried the same theme as their predecessors--seeking the advancement of Blacks.

The year 1900 saw the beginnings of the Colored American, a general magazine. However, no Black general magazine succeeded until Ebony began in 1945. William M. Trotter began a "radical newspaper," the Guardian in 1901. Trotter's efforts were followed in 1905 by Robert S. Abbot's The Chicago Defender. Today, the Defender is a Black daily. A racial disturbance in Springfield, Ill. in 1908 resulted in the founding of the NAACP in 1910, which started the Crisis.

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<sup>31</sup> Frederick G. Detweiler, The Negro Press in the United States (College Park, Maryland: McGrath Publishing Co., 1968), p. 61.

In 1917, A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen began publishing the Messenger, "a magazine of scientific radicalism." Thelma Gorham included the publishers' description in her "Negro Press" article. According to Miss Gorham, Randolph and Owen wanted a magazine which would "appeal to reason, to lift our pens above the cringing demagoguery of the times, and above cheap peanut politics. . . ." The publishers further explained that

. . . patriotism has no appeal to us; justice has. Party has no weight with us; prejudice has. Loyalty is meaningless; it depends on what one is loyal to. Prayer is not one of our remedies; it depends on what one is praying for.<sup>32</sup>

Because of such a stance, the magazine was denied second-class mailing privileges. When it failed to receive needed financial aid from Socialist groups, it became the organ of the Pullman Porter's Union.

The Associated Negro Press (ANP) was founded in Chicago in 1919 with Claude Barnett as director and Nahum D. Brascher as editor-in-chief. The founding of ANP was followed by the addition of several Black groups and wire services, including the National Negro Press Association (based in Nashville, Tenn.). Negro Press Syndicate (Washington, D.C.), the NAACP and Exchange News

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<sup>32</sup>Thelma T. Gorham, "The Negro Press: Past, Present and Future," 1967 Directory of U.S. Negro Newspapers, Magazines and Periodicals in 42 States, (New York: U.S. Negro World, 1967), p. 3.

Service (New York and Boston), and the Tuskegee Institute Press Service soon followed.<sup>33</sup>

In 1918, on behalf of the War Department and the Committee on Information, E. J. Scott called together a group of Black leaders, including thirty Black newspapermen, to draw up a Bill of Particulars. The bill was mainly concerned with equality for Blacks in military service in World War I. It requested the continuance of Black officer training camps, and sought greater Black participation in the war. The Bill of Particulars also denounced mob violence, and demanded and received a Black correspondent to report from the western front in France.<sup>34</sup>

There were at least sixty-five Black newspapers in 1922. Thelma Gorham did a content analysis of sixty-five newspapers in that year. Detweiler reported that there were 492 during the preceeding year. He said that these newspapers dealt with (1) racial wrongs and race clashes; (2) race progress and individual achievements; and (3) the race movement as a whole.<sup>35</sup> Detweiler said that by 1922 there were nearly 500 periodicals published by Blacks in the United States.

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<sup>33</sup>Detweiler, Negro Press, p. 28.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 1.



More important, however, is that these Black publications--whatever the number--were being read. The Bureau of Census reported that some 6,211,062 Blacks were literate in 1920. An account of the importance of Black publications in the New York Negro World suggests the following:

When Mrs. Williams, a white woman of this city, imported Rebecca Hall, a 16-year-old Jamaica [sic] girl from Panama, she had no idea that she would bring to the Negroes of Key West such an able orator and splendid fighter for the right of self determination among Negroes. But she learnt [sic] what she was up against last Friday when she ordered her domestic to throw away a copy of the Negro World, which she happened to be reading. "Throw away the darned paper, and never let me see you reading it again!" "Throw away this paper? You make me laugh ma'am," replied the young lady from Jamaica. "This paper is worth more to me than all the jobs you can give me. If I am to go, I shall go with this paper, and if I am to stay, I'll stay with it."<sup>36</sup>

A letter to the New York Age reiterated the importance of the Black press for Blacks:

Find enclosed post office money order for \$2. Please enter my subscription for one year. I feel that this is the only source for which we can learn of what good Negroes are doing. The white press just will not publish anything good of us. All we can see from their papers is the bad side.<sup>37</sup>

Thelma Gorham calls 1923 the beginning of a "new era" for Black journalism. The NAACP organ, the Crisis, soared to a circulation of 106,000; the Urban League started publishing Opportunity during that year. Charles S. Johnson,

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

editor of Opportunity, regarded the publication as a "medium of cultural expression among Negroes in the North and South."<sup>38</sup> This was the first time such a publication for Blacks would exist. During its last years, Opportunity became the mouthpiece of the Urban League. It ceased publication in 1948.

By 1926, there were only about 150 Black publications according to Miss Gorham. Her estimated figure is some 342 publications less than Detweiler's. Even so, between World War I and World War II, the circulation of Black newspapers seems to have increased.

When young, ambitious John H. Johnson made his 1942 debut into the magazine publication business, his competition was, for the most part, Black weekly newspapers. Of 164 Black newspapers in 1943, fifty-eight were published in cities of 50,000 or more Blacks. The Pittsburgh Courier lead circulation with 270,812; followed by the Baltimore Afro-American's 229,812; and the Defender had a circulation of 161,009.<sup>39</sup>

Johnson, however, managed to break through this strong newspaper hold and begin his first magazine, Negro Digest.

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<sup>38</sup>Gorham, Negro Press, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

### JPC's Role as a Black Press

Johnson believes that his publications succeeded during a time when Black newspapers were flourishing because he patterned his magazines after successful models. Negro Digest was originally patterned after Reader's Digest; Ebony was a Black Life; Tan, a Black True Confessions; and Hue was a Black Quick.

"Whenever anyone goes into any field, very often they build upon the knowledge that is available," Johnson said.<sup>40</sup> With this philosophy, Johnson maneuvered his publications so well that he succeeded in outlasting "several noble efforts," including Our World and Bronze World.

About the same time that JPC began, a Fort Worth, Texas, publishing company started operations. The publisher of Good Publishing Co., George Levitan, is white. His company's four publications are Sepia, Jive, Hep, and Bronze Thrills. The monthly, Sepia, attempts to rival Ebony, but has far less advertising and one-twentieth of its circulation.

In response to a question why JPC succeeded during the forties, fifties, and sixties when other Black publications, such as those of Good Publishing did not, Johnson said:

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<sup>40</sup>Johnson, Interview.

I really think we tried harder. I think we reflected what people wanted, and what they were thinking. And, we were willing to change with the changing times. . . . We have a saying around here: "But that was yesterday." Anything we say today is subject to change tomorrow if we find out that we made a mistake today.<sup>41</sup>

While Johnson was receiving his "honors and achievements" in the sixties, many new Black publications were just beginning. One of the more successful is Tuesday, a magazine supplement to white newspapers circulating in Black neighborhoods. W. Leonard Evans began Tuesday in 1965. In 1969, the magazine had a weekly distribution of 2,000,000.<sup>42</sup> Johnson does not consider Tuesday or Essence, a Black woman's magazine which is white owned and began in 1970, as competition. A 1971 publication, Black Sports, which is backed by the Chase-Manhattan Bank is also not considered to be a JPC rival.

Johnson pointed out that one reason why there has recently been an increase in the number of Black periodicals is that more financiers are now willing to invest in such ventures. Probably, such backers realize, as Tuesday's Evans says, that Blacks in America are collectively wealthy. Evans said that the income of Blacks in the United States was \$32,000,000,000 in 1969.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Roland E. Wolseley, "The Black Magazines," Quill, May, 1969, p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

The 1967 Directory of Little Magazines, Small Presses and Underground Newspapers lists some forty-three Black publications; while the 1970 Ayer's Directory lists 158. This writer ventures to say that both figures are inadequate, and believes that a correct figure will not be known until a complete, up-to-date history of the Black press is written.

Since John B. Russwurm's Freedom Journal, a Black press of varying kinds has existed. For the most part, the duration of Black publications has been relatively short. The Johnson Publications Company is changing such history. In longevity, wealth, and import, the twenty-nine-year-old JPC has reached a high point unequaled by any of the hundreds of Black publications which preceeded it.

#### JPC: Beginning on a Shoestring Budget

Negro Digest, and subsequently the Johnson Publishing Company, might never have begun if a printer had questioned John H. Johnson's request for printing 5,000 copies of the publication on credit. Clever Johnson, then working as managing editor of Supreme Life Insurance Company's house organ, was fortunate in that Supreme Life's printer assumed Negro Digest was an insurance company publication.<sup>44</sup> Believing that a Black Reader's Digest

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<sup>44</sup>"Ebony's Johnson," Newsweek, November 7, 1949, p. 60.

would be accepted by Blacks, Johnson took out a \$500 loan using his mother's furniture as collateral. "With the money, he mailed out to Supreme Life customers 20,000 letters offering charter subscriptions to the Negro Digest at two dollars each. Three thousand people responded and the Negro Digest was launched in November, 1942. Time wrote: "Johnson gave his Digest a sober, conscientious tone that was new to the generally sensational, often irresponsible Negro press."<sup>45</sup>

Volume one, number one of Negro Digest: A Magazine of Negro Comment came out in digest format and contained some twenty-two articles. The red, white and blue cover listed the reprints included in the Digest which were written by both white and Black persons. All of the articles dealt with some aspect of Black life. For example, such articles as "Dignity: White and Black" by Carl Sandburg, Julian Lewis' "Biology of a Negro," and Walter White's "This is the Army as Negroes See It," were published. Aside from a book section, and a "Negroes in Washington" section, Negro Digest had one major article in its first issue: "Should Negroes Demand Equality Now." The answer to this question was written in two articles, one in the affirmative by Louis E. Martin, and another in the negative by John Temple Graves.

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<sup>45</sup>"Passion With A Purpose," Time, October 23, 1950.

Johnson delineated the objectives of his publication in the following words:

Negro Digest is published in response to a demand for a magazine to summarize and condense the leading articles and comments on the Negro now current in the press of the nation in ever increasing volume.

The impact of the war and discussion of what we are fighting for has focused new attention on the status of the Negro in America. There is widespread interest in what the Negro thinks of the war, democracy and the South.

In a single, easy-to-read issue, Negro Digest gives you a complete survey of current Negro life and thought.]

The editors read hundreds of magazines, newspapers, periodicals, books and reports in order to bring you a choice selection of articles and features each month.

Negro Digest is dedicated to the development of interracial understanding and the promotion of national unity. It stands unqualifiedly for the winning of the war with the integration of all citizens into the democratic process.<sup>46</sup>

Subscriptions to Negro Digest were offered at \$3 in the first issue, with a \$1 discount for servicemen.

In the second issue, Johnson talked about the success of the initial publication. He said:

The response to the initial issue of the Negro Digest has been gratifying. . . .

Sellout is the only word to describe the manner in which anxious readers have cleaned the newsstands of our vol. 1, no. 1. Our second printing will be tripled as a result. We should like to offer our sincerest thanks to all our well wishers in addition to urging those anxious to secure Negro Digest each month to subscribe rather than depending on newsstands where the odds may be hazardous.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> John H. Johnson, "Introducing," Negro Digest, November 1942, p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> John H. Johnson, "Publisher's Comment," Negro Digest, December, 1942, p. 2.

"Particularly because of the interest in the Negro and the effective role he was then playing in helping to win the war for the democracies,"<sup>48</sup> Negro Digest continued to grow. In addition to reprinted material, such regular features as "My Most Humiliating Jim Crow Experience," and "If I Were A Negro" were run. When Eleanor Roosevelt wrote one of the "If I Were A Negro" articles, the circulation of Negro Digest jumped to 150,000.<sup>49</sup>

Negro Digest made enough money for Johnson to begin Ebony in 1945. By 1951, Ebony with a circulation of 350,000 had three times more circulation than Negro Digest which sold 115,025. In 1950, Johnson started Tan Confessions which was doing as well as Negro Digest in 1951. The same year, Johnson discontinued the publication of Negro Digest in order to begin Jet. Negro Digest did not resume publication until almost ten years later.

During the period the Negro Digest was not published, Ebony began to flourish. Ebony presented what Johnson called the "brighter side" of Black news. Being ] more somber, with far less art, and articles of a more serious nature than its sister publications, when Negro Digest returned, it became known as the "militant" JPC

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<sup>48</sup>John H. Johnson, Current Biography, p. 201.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.



publication. Time reported that "Negroes who are dissatisfied with Ebony's money-making non-militancy need only to turn to Johnson's money losing Negro Digest--a strenuous voice of Black power."<sup>50</sup> Roland E. Wolseley reiterated the same kind of description of Negro Digest saying it is the "money-losing maverick of the Johnson family because } it is militant in behalf of the Negro . . . ." <sup>51</sup>

Johnson described Negro Digest:

In many ways the original Negro Digest was very similar to Reader's Digest. But over the years, we've carved out our own image, and our own special personality. I think Negro Digest is a distinctly different kind of magazine. As a matter of fact, Negro Digest today is essentially a literary magazine, running all original material and dealing primarily with subjects of intellectual interest. And this certainly is not descriptive of what the Reader's Digest is today.<sup>52</sup>

Because the word "Negro" received a lot of criticism from Negro Digest readers, the name of the magazine was changed to Black World in May, 1970. Johnson said:

I was sentimental about Negro Digest simply because it was a name to me, and was not representing any kind of race. . . . But a lot of Blacks felt that Negro was a bad word, and particularly the kinds of people who were reading Negro Digest. These are people like LeRoi Jones and Don Lee--many writers and thinkers in the Black intellectual community. . . . And since we

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50 "Color Success Black," Time, August 2, 1968, p. 32.

51 Wolseley, "Black Magazines," p. 8.

52 Johnson, Interview.

were catering to them, and trying to appeal to them, it seemed reasonable to change the name if they weren't happy with it.<sup>53</sup>

Hoyt W. Fuller, Black World managing editor,

described the hopes of the publication in its first issue.

After the name change, Fuller wrote:

In it's premiere issue, Black World magazine focuses, appropriately, on the two principal centers of Black population in the world, the African continent and the United States of America. . . . It is the hope of the editors of Black World that Black people everywhere . . . have reached a level of political maturity where they understand that the empowerment of Black people of Harlem is not possible until Black people in the Congo are in full control of the vast mineral wealth of that country; that the millions of Black people who grovel under the boot of the white minority in Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) will remain debased until Nigeria evolves into the economic and military giant which is her potential; and that the favelas of Rio will continue to house a disproportionate number of Blacks until Black men control the governments of Angola and Mozambique. Black World will routinely publish articles which will probe and report conditions of the peoples and their struggles throughout the Black world.

At the same time, the magazine will continue in the tradition of Negro Digest publishing thoughtful essays, the fiction and the poetry of both known and unknown writers, report on the arts, educational movements and innovations, and guarding against opportunists and Charlatans who exploit Black art and literature for their own gains, and for spiritual and artistic colonization of Black people. . . .<sup>54</sup>

Black World today loses about \$25,000 annually.

By comparison, three years ago it was losing from \$80,000 to \$1000,000 annually.<sup>55</sup> Johnson believes the magazine

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Hoyt W. Fuller, "Editor's Statement," Black World, May 1970, p. 85.

<sup>55</sup> Johnson, Interview.

will be profitable in another year because the magazine is developing a big audience. This increase is due partially to the recent acceptance and interest in Black studies, Johnson said.

JPC is also trying harder to sell Black World through subscription. Johnson said: "I don't ever intend to get ads for Black World." He offered reasons for this fact, saying (1) the circulation is too low to get a substantial amount of money for advertising, and (2) JPC would have to set up a new staff, print new literature, and do research on the publication--which, as Johnson pointed out, costs. "It's just as easy to sell an ad for \$10,000 in Ebony as it is to sell one for \$200 to \$300 in Black World," Johnson said.

Johnson's only money loser has a circulation between 50,000 and 60,000 monthly.<sup>56</sup> Aside from the expected circulation increase, Johnson said he believed other factors will help to make Black World profitable. For example, he explained, because Black World is not printed in four colors, is not in a large size, is not on slick paper, does not have the high costs of photographers, and uses mostly contributed articles, the magazine is "economical to produce."

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

In comparing the contents of his first born to that of Ebony, Johnson said that the difference is not in subject matter. It is just that "Ebony tries to deal with its subjects on a more popular basis," he said. Ebony's reknowned historian, Lerone Bennett, Jr., writes for both Ebony and Black World. Johnson said that Bennett often said the same thing for the publications, but wrote for their respective audiences.

Black World has half the circulation it had almost thirty years ago. However, if Johnson's predictions hold true, the magazine may again join the family of JPC profit-making magazines.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE JOHNSON PUBLISHING COMPANY'S BRIGHT STAR

#### AND LUMINARIES: EBONY, JET, TAN, HUE, COPPER ROMANCE, AND EBONY AFRICA

##### Ebony: JPC's Bright Star

We're off! Like a thoroughbred stallion, we've been straining at the starting gate for months now waiting for the gun from the almighty, omnipotent, super-duper War Production Board. We've brain-trusted and blue-printed, rehearsed and dummied over and over again anxiously keeping a weather eye peeled on Washington for the go signal. And sure enough, when the V-J whistle did blow, we were caught with our plans down.

Here's your paper and scram, the WPB boys suddenly said. And there were tons of slick, shiny stock, a shelf of dummies, but no magazine. But this story having a happy ending as do all good tales, we can confide that we pulled a reconversion act out of an ancient hat with slick style that would put magician Houdini to shame. And so here we are.

As you can gather, we're rather jolly folks, we Ebony editors. We like to look at the zesty side of Life. Sure, you can get all hot and bothered about the race question (and don't think we don't) but not enough is said about all the swell things we Negroes can do and will accomplish. Ebony will try to mirror the happier side of Negro life--the positive everyday achievements from Harlem to Hollywood. But when we talk about race as the number one problem in America, we'll talk turkey.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> John H. Johnson, "Backstage," Ebony, November, 1945, p. 2.

Thus began John H. Johnson's first issue of Ebony magazine in November, 1945. Spurred by the interest Blacks had shown in his first publication, Negro Digest, Johnson planned his Black Life. The restriction on newsprint during World War II prevented the earlier appearance of Ebony. However, when the war was over, 25,000 copies of Ebony's first issue consisting of fifty-two pages came out.

Mrs. Eunice Johnson, the publisher's wife, was the one to give the publication the name Ebony. It means Black. Back in 1945, JPC received a lot of nasty letters about the name because Black was then "a bad word." Johnson prides himself in the fact that Ebony was ahead of its time in selecting and accepting such a name.

The first issue of the magazine had six sections: race, youth, personalities, culture, entertainment, and humor. "Jam Session in Movieland," "African Art for Americans," and "Catholics and Color" were among the articles included in the first issue of Ebony. The addressless issue also had a photo-editorial, "Sixty Million Jobs or Else . . ."

The Ebony staff, which then consisted of Johnson, executive editor Ben Burns, and art editor Jay Jackson, filled the subsequent issues with numerous pictures and spicy articles such as "Two Decades With the Duke," "Can Colleges Conquer Color," and "How Joe Louis Spent \$2,000,000." The Ebony covers were usually filled with

an attractive "high-yellow" Black entertainer.<sup>58</sup> For example, Hilda Sims, then star of Anna Lucasta, was on the cover of the December, 1945 issue, and Lena Horne was featured on the March, 1946 cover.

In the December, 1945 issue of Ebony, several letters to the editor acclaimed the beginning of the magazine. Some of the letters expressed hopes for the continuance of the magazine. Black author and poet Langston Hughes wrote: "Ebony is terrific! I like it very much, and hope it goes places." Twenty years later, Hughes wrote "Ebony's Nativity" for the magazine's twentieth anniversary issue.

Not until the seventh issue of Ebony did the magazine carry any advertisements. Supreme Liberty Life Insurance Co., the corporation for which Johnson was once office boy, ran a full page ad in the May, 1946 issue. Murray's Pomade was also one of Ebony's first advertisers (see Chapter V). Ebony's first national advertisers came a few months later when Chesterfield cigarettes, Zenith Radio Corp., and International Cellucotton signed advertising contracts.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>During this time, and for several following years, a dark-complexioned Black was not beautiful. The fair-skinned" or white-looking Black was considered the more attractive.

<sup>59</sup>"John H. Johnson," Current Biography, p. 201.

"Ebony missed no tricks. It mulled over miscegenation, profiled the ten richest Negroes, and ran 'My Secret Talk With F. D. R.' by Mary McLeod Bethune, the First Lady of Black America. Its tone was usually calm, almost always practical."<sup>60</sup>

Ebony did so well that it enabled Johnson to move his offices into a remodeled South Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill., art gallery. Purchasing the building in April, 1949, was one of the obstacles which JPC and Ebony had to face in its beginning years. D. M. Cartwright of the Amsterdam News reported Johnson's problems:

. . . the landlord refused to sell [the building] to me at any price. It wasn't very hard to see why. I didn't take him to court. There's no law in this country that forces a landlord to sell to a man. . . . I didn't punch him in the mouth. What for? One of my white friends bought the building and sold it to me, and there was no law either that could have stopped him. . . .<sup>61</sup>

Today, JPC is housed in that same 1820 S. Michigan Ave. building--due primarily to Ebony's success. Come October, 1971, JPC will move into a new eleven-story building located at 820 S. Michigan Ave. Cost of the new building is estimated at \$4,500,000.

But, there is much more to Ebony than its beginning and its being the major reason why JPC has purchased two buildings. For example, the fact that Ebony was banned in South Africa in 1951 appeared as an obstacle that JPC had

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<sup>60</sup>"Ebony's Johnson," p. 60.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.



to face and that most white-oriented magazines did not.<sup>62</sup> Despite the obstacles, Ebony grew, and so did JPC. Ebony published its tenth anniversary issue in November, 1955. The magazine's cover exclaimed: "Ten Years That Rocked the World." Ebony used the occasion to reflect on what had happened since it began. Johnson wrote:

We believe that Ebony has helped the Negro gain a new respect and dignity by showing him as a fellow human being with the same qualities and capacities as other members of his species.

We believe that Ebony has increased the Negro's pride in himself and his heritage.

We believe Ebony has promoted interracial understanding by emphasizing the positive and minimizing the negative aspects of race relations.<sup>63</sup>

Johnson's magazine designed to "mirror the brighter side" of Black life, told of how in its first ten years it frequently got bawled out for having a "too-light" (complexioned) woman on the cover, or for having that "too-dark" woman on Ebony. Johnson said that such criticisms are still leveled against the magazine.

With a sense of optimism, Johnson summarized the treatment of Blacks from 1945 to 1955 by saying: "On the whole, the Negro has had a good life."<sup>64</sup> Little wonder why Johnson would make such a generalization about Blacks

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<sup>62</sup>"Ebony Banned in South Africa," Time, November 12, 1951, pp. 44-45.

<sup>63</sup>"Ten Years That Rocked the World," Ebony, November, 1955, p. 121.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

in 1955. For, Ebony was helping to make JPC a wealthy enterprize. By 1955, Ebony had almost quadrupled its number of pages. The tenth anniversary issue had 180 pages, and carried \$186,000 worth of advertising.<sup>65</sup> However, Time pointed out that Ebony was not always as it was in its tenth anniversary issue. Time wrote:

Ebony, flourishing at first on a spicy diet of sex and sensation, dropped 100,000 circulation last year. Publisher Johnson countered with a drive for home subscribers, dropped cheesecake and gossip for more serious reporting of Negroes in the news, and won back its readers. Johnson learned the hard way that the new-style Ebony is more in tune with its readers' interests. Says he: "The Negro press has depended too much on emotion and racial pride, Negroes have grown out of that."<sup>66</sup>

Today, Johnson probably would not make such a statement. One of the things that the Black press is trying to do is to promote a sense of history and pride among the Blacks by Blacks. A 1959 article by Alfred Balk in the Reporter gave Ebony's "raison d'etre." Balk said:

For one thing, it is an expensive looking package--well produced, on quality paper, with attractive layouts and four-color printing. Then too, although it is clearly a popular magazine in its approach, it is self-consciously respectable, with no more cheesecake than, say Life, and generally moderate in its approach to public issues. . . .

Ebony almost never gives a critical evaluation of significance of a successful individual organization in a context any broader than that of the Negro community itself.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>"The Negro Press," Time, November 7, 1955, p. 64.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Alfred Balk, "Mr. Johnson Finds His Market," Reporter, November 12, 1944, pp. 34-35.

Johnson said that although Ebony in the beginning had many of the characteristics of Life, this is not true today because Ebony has "moved in a different kind of direction." Johnson said his money-maker is essentially a feature-fiction magazine which "has gone into the use of a great amount of text material." The publisher explained that although Ebony has always emphasized success and achievement among Blacks, today the magazine has redefined success and achievement. Johnson said: "In the early days success meant essentially material things--good jobs, cadillacs, fine homes and so forth." Today, Johnson explained, success in Ebony means "the completion of any job a man sets out to do." For example, Johnson said a poor, uneducated man who puts five or six children through college has made a tremendous achievement. Ebony would not have thought so twenty-five years ago, Johnson said.<sup>68</sup>

Since approximately 95 per cent of Ebony's readers are Black,<sup>69</sup> the magazine has been forced to change with the changes in the feelings of Black Americans. Current Biography summarized Ebony's special group problems by saying that: (1) some Black militants refuse to forgive Ebony for the caution with which the magazine approached civil rights in the past; (2) some Blacks disliked its

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<sup>68</sup>Johnson, Interview.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

"sanitary aspect," Ebony's slanting to please certain groups; while, (3) some Black intellectuals claim the quality of Ebony's research and editing is what they consider to be a "limited perspective."<sup>70</sup>

Along the same line, JPC was picketed by a group of Black artists in 1969 "to protest . . . the company's failure to exercise editorial policy that is truly representative of the Black community." Johnson met with the group spokesman, Don Lee, who often contributes articles to Black World. Lee's group recommended to Johnson (1) the immediate establishment of apprenticeship and internship programs in all phases of publication; (2) the use of Black models recruited through Black agencies; (3) publishing the works by Black writers; (4) active support of Black institutions in its home community; and (5) promotional change in the distribution of Negro Digest equal to that of Ebony and Jet.<sup>71</sup>

Johnson emphatically refutes the charge that Ebony is not representative of Blacks. The magazine has "always mirrored and reflected the attitude of Black people," Johnson said. The publisher explained:

When Black people became more militant, Ebony was more militant. And we had to have support. You can lead, but you can't be too far ahead of the people

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<sup>70</sup>"John H. Johnson," Current Biography, p. 202.

<sup>71</sup>"Black Artists Picket Ebony," Chicago Defender, December 31, 1969, p. 3.

you're leading, otherwise you'll find that there's no one there but you. In the case of a magazine, you have to have readers, to have supporters, or you have nothing.

Since the Supreme Court decision of 1954, the whole Black community has been on the move as far as militancy is concerned, and I think Ebony has been ahead of them. A whole two years before the Kerner Commission, we put out a special issue on the "White Problem in America." We were the first major institution, Black or white, to say that the problem in America was a white problem, and we said it in a full issue that was severely criticized by whites. . . .

Anyone who would say that Ebony is not militant is not reading Ebony. We believe in doing everything to achieve complete equality, except we don't believe you ought to kill people.<sup>72</sup>

Johnson cites several examples to contradict the charge by Don Lee and other militants that Ebony has not taken strong editorial stands. Ebony prides itself on the fact that it has contributed a great deal to the promoting of Black history:

Back in 1960, there was no one publishing any stories about Black history. . . . You didn't see any Black histories in Life or Time. There were no Black history books coming out. . . . And so we decided that the time had come when Blacks wanted to know more about themselves.<sup>73</sup>

In 1958, JPC gave Ebony senior editor, Lerone Bennett, Jr., a fourteen-month sabbatical to research and write articles on Black history. At the end of fourteen months, Bennett wrote a series of articles entitled "Before the Mayflower," which resulted in a book of the same name.

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<sup>72</sup>Johnson, Interview.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

From that time on, Bennett has continued to write articles on Black history for Ebony.

Perhaps the most widely praised and criticized of Bennett's articles was one entitled "Was Abe Lincoln a White Supremacist?" Johnson said of the article, "Hell, you can't be any more militant than that. That's like attacking motherhood and apple pie, and all the other things in this country."<sup>74</sup>

The New York Times described Bennett's article:

The article asserted that Lincoln regretted issuing the Emancipation Proclamation, and said he never opposed slavery as such, but merely opposed extended slavery out of devotion to the interest of white people.<sup>75</sup>

Of the many points of view Ebony has taken, Johnson said that JPC prides itself most in the stance the magazine has taken toward Black leaders. "Ebony has always tried to give a hearing to any new voices that are rising in the community," Johnson said. For example, Johnson said that Ebony gave more attention to Martin Luther King, Jr. in King's early days than any other publication. Johnson explained that King and JPC established such a relationship that King would frequently telephone and request the company to send someone to help him expose various kinds

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>"Lincoln Termed Opportune Racist," New York Times, January 26, 1968, p. 19.

of mistreatment against Blacks. Johnson said King often requested that certain stories be run so that the public would know what King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference was doing. "It reached a point where we were almost a part of his organization," Johnson said. Ebony and JPC came to recognize King as a national leader, even when he was a local leader, Johnson said.

Stokley Carmichael was another Black "first" who Ebony reported. Although Johnson himself does not agree with Carmichael's philosophy, the publisher helped communicate his thoughts:

We were the first really to do a story on Stokley Carmichael when he was beginning to talk about Black power.

We were never afraid to give a hearing to new voices whether we agreed with them or not.<sup>76</sup>

The twentieth anniversary issue in November, 1965, of Ebony reviewed the growth and development of the magazine. Langston Hughes revealed in "Ebony's Nativity" that 143,000,000 copies of Ebony had rolled off the presses since the magazine's beginning. Hughes reported that Ebony's then 169-page thickness required a million-and-a-half tons of paper for each press run. Additionally, Hughes reported about Ebony's acquisition of two \$1,000,000 high speed presses, and the use of computers to handle

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<sup>76</sup>Johnson, Interview.

subscriptions. And in 1965, JPC offices were using instantaneous two way communication, Telex, a Western Union service.

It is interesting to note that in 1964 Ebony grossed \$5,500,000.<sup>77</sup> Being the heart of JPC, it is safe to say that Ebony's gross sales has more than doubled today.

Moreover, Hughes pointed out that "Ebony is an institution." He explained that without Ebony Blacks would not have such an abundance of photographs "piled on newsstands throughout the country for our fellow white citizens to see the new roles Negroes play in today's world." Hughes said that the careless charge that some Blacks make accusing Ebony of presenting articles only of successful Blacks and pretty fashion models is not true. "To accent the positive as Ebony has done is to give Negro America a sorely needed psychic lift,"<sup>78</sup> Hughes said.

Johnson, too, believes that Ebony is an institution. "We've influenced so many other areas of human life beyond reporting," the publisher stated. These other areas include (1) influencing companies of their need for Black salesmen for merchandising; (2) getting companies to use

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<sup>77</sup>"Ten Years That Rocked the World," p. 121.

<sup>78</sup>Langston Hughes, "Ebony's Nativity," Ebony, November, 1965, p. 40.



famous Black entertainers and Black athletes to endorse their products; and (3) beginning a "whole new movement of Black history in modern times." Jet magazine carried a story in its September 14, 1967, issue which told of a Florida prison inmate, Henry Jackson, Jr., who charged prison officials with "unlawful discrimination" because he was not allowed to read, among other Black publications, Ebony.<sup>79</sup> Although Jackson lost his legal suit, the fact that he felt strong enough need and like for Ebony, and the other publications, is evident in that he carried the matter to court.

Further explaining the importance of Ebony to its readers, Johnson wrote in the twentieth anniversary issue:

At one time, the bulk of Ebony's circulation was in newsstand sales with less than twenty percent going into homes on mail subscription.

Today, we have more than seventy percent dependable mail subscription, and we still sell as many magazines on the newsstands as we did ten year ago.<sup>80</sup>

To sum up, one can say that Ebony is and has been the major JPC publication. It has faced many obstacles because it has been a Black general magazine with difficulties in obtaining advertising, in satisfying Blacks, in getting included in the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, in getting accepted in certain regions of

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<sup>79</sup>"Unlawful Discrimination," Jet, September 14, 1967.

<sup>80</sup>John H. Johnson, "Publisher's Statement," Ebony, November, 1965, p. 27.

the world, in purchasing a building to house the publication and so on.

Ebony has also been forced to change with the change in the Black mood in America. It has been transformed from a publication which mirrored the brighter side of financially successful Blacks to one which has been "de-sexed." Additionally, it has redefined success and served as a crusader for civil rights and Black history.]

Although its life expectancy was once in doubt, Ebony has become a leader and pioneer among Black magazines, and has opened several doors for Black slick } publications. The magazine's long list of awards includes } a 1969 Pulitzer Prize for feature photography, awarded to Ebony staff photographer, Moneta Sleet, Jr., and a 1966 National Education Association School Bell Award.

JPC is proud of Ebony, as it frequently boasts in full page ads in the New York Times. Ebony readers, too, are proud of the publication. In Black neighborhoods, Ebony outsells top white publications 15 to 1.<sup>81</sup>

Indeed, Ebony with its 1,250,000 circulation has been the stronghold of JPC. It is not exactly true to say that without Ebony there would be no JPC because the company does have other publications. However, without Ebony there would be a great void in Black American journalism today.

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<sup>81</sup>Johnson, Biographical Sketch.

JPC's Luminaries: Tan, Jet, Hue,  
Copper Romance, and Ebony Africa

To any man who has found one, a publication must by its very nature be like his own children. From the time of the conception of the idea to the birth of the first issue, he is as nervous as an expectant father. And when the first issue is in his hands, he cradles it like a baby, examines it carefully to make sure that it is sound, well formed and reasonably good to look upon.<sup>82</sup>

Johnson has fathered, cradled, and examined seven of JPC's children at varying times of the JPC's history. Apart from the eldest, Negro Digest, and the most successful, Ebony, Johnson has also reared Jet, Tan, Hue, Copper Romance, and Ebony Africa. Although less known than Ebony and Black World, these JPC magazines have made significant contributions to the growth and development of the publishing house.

Eight years after Negro Digest was started, and five years after Ebony began, Johnson began Tan Confessions magazine. In November, 1950, the first issue of Tan Confessions was issued, Johnson said, "We polled the Negroes and found that they read more confession magazines than anything else."<sup>83</sup> Johnson was aware of the fact that as Time reported, Tan Confessions "was a big cut below the other two magazines," but "argued that the magazine's

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<sup>82</sup>Johnson, "Publisher's Statement," p. 27.

<sup>83</sup>"Passion With A Purpose," pp. 56-57.

home-service section . . . compensated for the sex and sensation."<sup>84</sup> Johnson said that Tan Confessions used the "sex idea" to get into readers' homes, and then JPC used the opportunity to give the homemaker some "good advice."

In the first issue of Tan Confessions, Johnson said that his "unique new venture" would "reflect a side of Negro life that is virtually ignored in most publications." Johnson's Tan Confessions would, in effect, be a Black True Confessions with pictures of Blacks. As in most confession publications, love, romance, and marriage happiness and sorrow were the subjects. Prior to Tan Confessions, Johnson said that such subject matter concerning Blacks had been discussed in most Black publications only "in terms of tension and violence."<sup>85</sup>

The first Tan Confessions included (1) "seven stories from true life" ("Love in the Choir Loft," "I Took My Mother's Man"), (2) special features ("Is the Chaste Girl Chased"), (3) a book length serial ("Lena Horne's Own Story"), and (4) the home-service section. A picture of Billy and June Eckstine was on the cover of the slim, twenty-five cent copy of Tan Confessions.

In 1952, when Tan Confessions reportedly had a circulation of 300,000, Johnson dropped the Confessions

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<sup>84</sup>Ibid.

<sup>85</sup>John H. Johnson, "Why Tan," Tan, November, 1950, p. 2.

portion of the name. The publisher told Time: "Our magazines help the Negro to have a greater dignity and pride in his accomplishments. I found I had to apologize for Tan Confessions. I thought we could dignify even confessions magazines."<sup>86</sup> With the name change, Tan became a women's service magazine. The September, 1952 issue included such articles as "How Club Women Should Dress," and "Teach Your Children to Value Money."

Today, Tan is on its way out of the JPC family. A review of its statistics as listed in the Ayer Directory will show that it has continually lost circulation [see Chapter 5]. Johnson explained Tan's downfall:

I think all confession magazines have come upon hard times, mostly because they presented a dream world kind of existence which people are no longer willing to accept. In other words, I think people want reality now. No one wants to live in a world of fantasy--which essentially is what the Tan audience was living in.<sup>87</sup>

Although no official announcement has been made, Tan will be replaced by Black Stars in late 1971. "We've known for some time that it should be discontinued, but we didn't want to discontinue it until we had some other magazine that we could replace it with," Johnson said.

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<sup>86</sup>"Purpose With A Passion," Time, September 22, 1952, p. 107.

<sup>87</sup>Johnson, Interview.

It must be remembered, however, that Tan has survived eleven years with the JPC family. It has always been a JPC profit-maker, and even today guarantees advertisers 200,000 circulation.<sup>88</sup>

Johnson's second largest publication, Jet, a news weekly, began in November, 1951. The first issue contained the following message from the publisher:

In the world today everything is moving along at a faster clip. There is more news and far less time to read it. That's why we are introducing our new magazine, Jet: to give Negroes everywhere a weekly news magazine in handy, pocket size form. Each week, we will bring to you complete news coverage on happenings among Negroes all over the U.S.--in entertainment, politics, sports, social events as well as features on unusual personalities, places and events. For quick reading and orderly organization of the news, you'll find everything you want each week in Jet. . . .<sup>89</sup>

Modeled after Quick, the first issue of Jet, like those which followed, was packed with news nuggets. The small fifteen cent magazine contained the following sections: national report, books, business, census, crime, education, entertainment, farm, forecast, foreign, medicine, modern living, Mr. and Mrs., journalism, people, press digest, religion, society, sports, weekly almanac, week's best photo, and words of the week. Jet has traditionally included center photographs of various Black female beauties.

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<sup>88</sup>Johnson, Interview.

<sup>89</sup>John H. Johnson, "Why Jet," Jet, November, 1951, p. 67.

Concerning Jet's impact, Alfred Balk wrote: "Jet, despite its sensationalized titles and photos, did succeed in bringing the Emmett Till and Montgomery bus-boycott stories to national attention, and it probably saved Jimmy Wilson's life by publicizing the now famous \$1.95 theft case."<sup>90</sup> Langston Hughes and Milton Meltzer wrote in A Pictorial History of the Negro in America that "the news weekly, Jet and the picture magazine, Ebony, kept thousands of readers informed of Negro participation in all aspects of American life."<sup>91</sup>

Congressman John Conyers (D-Mich.) spoke highly of a March 13, 1969, Jet article about hunger in the United States. Congressman Conyers read the entire article on the House floor. He used it to point out the need for legislation to combat hunger. Conyers said:

Mr. Speaker. I would like to share with my colleagues an article by Simeon Booker on hunger in the United States which appeared in Jet magazine. Although I am aware that all of you have read about hunger before, I hope you will read this article by a distinguished journalist who has often been able to pinpoint social problems in America long before many others took note of them. Mr. Booker and Johnson Publications have through the years made a great contribution through their incisive reporting on critical issues.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>Balk, "Johnson Finds Market," p. 35.

<sup>91</sup>Langston Hughes and Milton Meltzer, A Pictorial History of the Negro in America (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1963), p. 325.

<sup>92</sup>John Conyers, Jr., "Jet Magazine's Report on Hunger," Congressional Record, March 13, 1967, p. E1941.

Jet, the first Black news weekly magazine,<sup>93</sup> has been the only JPC magazine tried for libel. Johnson said: "Jet is a fast moving magazine. And about the only question I really have to ask [before it goes to press] is if there are any stories in Jet that I have to worry about in terms of lawsuits."

Johnson recalled one libel lawsuit against Jet which JPC lost in Alabama during the fifties. The suit arose when a Black man gave Jet a story, and later changed his mind and said he did not say what the story reported. The suit was originally won by the man for \$60,000, but an appeal reduced the amount to \$49,000. Johnson said that JPC did not take the case to the Supreme Court because a new trial probably would have been ordered--and Johnson did not think it was worth facing "the same all-white jury again."<sup>94</sup>

A few years ago, Johnson said that Jet lost a libel suit in Los Angeles. Jet reported the charges which a prominent Los Angeles physician made against his wife in a divorce suit. The Jet story was based on court records. One day before Jet's press day, the physician withdrew the suit and notified the JPC California office of this fact. The Los Angeles JPC branch "somehow forgot" to notify JPC

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<sup>93</sup>Johnson, Biographical Sketch.

<sup>94</sup>Johnson, Interview.



headquarters in Chicago. Jet went to press carrying news of the doctor's scandalous charges against his wife. The court ruled that JPC was negligent in that it had sufficient time to stop the article and ruled in favor of the physician. Johnson settled for about \$15,000.

At least two other lawsuits were started against JPC in the company's twenty-nine-year history. In 1953, a drugstore owner sued Jet and JPC for \$100,000 claiming libel. The owner of Hut Incorp., then a pharmacy located at 15th and U Streets in Washington, D.C., said that a Jet article in which his drugstore was mentioned was "libelous, defamatory, malicious and false."<sup>95</sup> The article in part stated:

One of the owners of Washington's new drugstore, the Hut, is Alex Underdown, who used to own a U Street jazz spot there. He's hiring a teenage band for the malted-milk crowd who make it their hang-out.<sup>96</sup>

A second libel suit filed against JPC is one in which writer Louis Lomax was a codefendant. According to the Chicago Tribune,

. . . the suit charged that Lomax degraded twenty-seven members of the Boogalusa police department by depicting them as adulterers and advocates of miscegenation. The suit was spurred by a quotation attributed to Lomax in the July, 1965 issue of Jet.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>"\$100,000 Suit Filed Against Johnson Publications," Pittsburgh Courier, June 27, 1953.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

<sup>97</sup>"Negro Author Sued By Police," Chicago Tribune, August 14, 1966.

Johnson said that Jet and JPC has not faced so many libel suits recently because (1) JPC has been more careful and (2) has more lawyers looking into what is written, and (3) courts are now more liberal in what they identify as libel.

Last October 1, 1970, Jet changed to a digest format. The change was made to accomodate advertising. The magazine added four color pages, larger type, and attractive use of color in the text.

A Jamaican newspaper, the Gleaner, gave a summary of Jet several years ago which is applicable in many respects today. The Gleaner reported:

Jet is by no means limited to sepia charms. While there is a tendency to load pages with personal information, this is doubtless all interesting to United States readers. . . .

Jet editorials which handle in serious vein whatever is the week's question of import to coloured people; an effort at interesting racism is made here. Also, the feature devoted to history will probably broaden out along like lines.

One debatable article per issue is a Jet attraction to serious readers, whatever their race; informative and provocative contributions on the status of test tube babies, the penalties of shotgun marriage are indicative of subjects dealt with.

Jet is a newcomer and these early issues show its policy to be courageous as well as entertaining--two characteristics coloured journalism has long needed.<sup>98</sup>

Johnson, above all, has been a shrewd businessman. This fact helps one understand the Johnson rationale for for beginning Copper Romance, despite the fact that both

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<sup>98</sup>"Jet Magazine Toasts Our Gals." Gleaner.

Ebony and Jet were doing well. Furthermore, JPC already had a two-year-old confession magazine, Tan, when Copper Romance was first issued in November, 1953. Johnson explained:

We were the first Black publications to come into the field, and in the early years we had a lot of competition. So in order to protect our main property, we created our own competition so that our competition would help ward off the real competition.

We felt that if we flooded the field with confessions magazines we'd dominate it. . . . It was our theory that if someone didn't like Tan Confessions and liked Copper better, they'd still be sending the money to Johnson Publications.<sup>99</sup>

Thus Copper began, very much resembling Tan Confessions. Copper contained essentially three sections (1) seven stories from true life ("Why I Tried to Commit Suicide," "Love Without Honor," "Second-Hand Wife"); and (2) special features ("Copper's Marriage Clinic); and (3) the home-service section ("Hair Magic at Home," "Warm Clothes for Cold Nights").

Copper contained very little advertising. This is one reason why Johnson ended the magazine in May, 1954, less than a year after it began. The most important reason was that Copper, like Hue, had served its purpose of warding off competition. There was no longer a need to continue publishing it.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>Johnson, Interview.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

Copper Romance's demise left JPC with yet four other publications--Ebony, Jet, Tan and Hue.

Hue was a small, four by six inch pocket magazine which started at the same time as Copper Romance. Johnson boasted that Hue was not an imitation of other magazines as its sister publications had been: "We passed the stage of following patterns established by other magazines. There's nothing like this one [Hue]." The sixty-six page picture magazine began as a monthly. Just before Copper Romance was discontinued, Hue became a bi-weekly, although it later returned to a monthly.

Picture-filled Hue contained brief articles on varying subjects. The first issue contained such articles as "Ike's New Black Cabinet," "New One-Legged Dancer," "Africa's Presidential Yacht," and "New Housing Slums." Like Jet, Hue contained pictures of attractive Black women.

Johnson explained why Hue was started:

Because of America's increasing awareness of the Negro and the accelerated interest generally in what Negroes are doing, we are introducing our pocket-size feature magazine, Hue. Each month Hue will present interesting stories and pictures concerning Negroes everywhere. We have decided to do this in a compact, handy-sized magazine because in today's swift paced atomic age many readers have indicated a desire for a publication which can be quickly read during leisure moments. I am confident you will enjoy Hue as much as you have its sister publications. . . .<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> John H. Johnson, "Why Hue," Hue, November, 1953, p. 66.

Hue was reported to have 200,000 circulation in 1955, and continued to do well until JPC discontinued it in July, 1959.

Certainly, one of JPC's most colorful and neatly packaged publications was Ebony Africa. Ebony Africa began in March, 1964, and was the first JPC magazine which did not begin publication in the month of November, Johnson's lucky month. Designed for English-speaking Africans, Ebony Africa was distributed to several African countries including Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, Nyasland, Sierra Leone, Tanganyika, Uganda, Zanzibar, and the Rhodesias. The sixty-six page magazine reported on various subjects considered relevant to African countries. Early articles included: "Independence Comes to Kenya," "Youngest U.S. Ambassador," "Wedding of Uganda Prime Minister, Dr. Milton Obote," and "Scholarships for African Students."

Johnson wrote in the first issue of Ebony Africa:

The popularity of Ebony in Africa has always been a source of pride to its publishers, but heretofore we have not been able to meet the increasing demand. To overcome the problems involved in producing and shipping a domestic edition overseas, we have found an international company for the publication of Ebony Africa, a magazine especially for African readers. Beginning with this issue, we can now efficiently serve Africa with a magazine containing more local stories at a much lower price, yet maintain the same high qualities of content and appearance that have made Ebony a leader in the select field of photo-journalism.

Ebony Africa does not presume to take the place of any African publication. Nor does it pretend to

speaking for the African people. Its purpose is to foster a better understanding between the peoples of America and those of Africa by providing a media for direct dialogue, to exchange ideas and techniques; to share mutual achievements, common problems and objectives; to advance the cause of freedom and equality among all men everywhere. . . .<sup>102</sup>

Unlike Hue and Copper Romance, Ebony Africa was filled with advertisements. Financially, it was a successful publication. However, it did not last a year. Ebony Africa ceased publication in September, 1964, some seven months after it began. Why was this? Johnson explained that despite successful circulation and advertising, JPC "ran into a lot of problems with the African countries." He elaborated:

We were trying to put out an inter-country, neutral magazine, and the African countries in their early stages of development didn't believe in neutrality. Their theory was: either you're with us, or you're against us.

We ran into all kinds of problems about whether we were running more stories about one country than another.<sup>103</sup>

Johnson said that the most persistent problem was that the African countries complained that Ebony Africa was too "pro-American." The publisher said that the African countries expected Ebony Africa to take an African point of view, and there were some issues, such as the Congo airlift, that JPC felt it could not take an African stance.

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<sup>102</sup>John H. Johnson, "Why Ebony Africa, Ebony Africa, March, 1964, p. 3.

<sup>103</sup>Johnson, Interview.

In addition to the above-mentioned problems, Johnson said that there were two others: (1) there were many countries where there was a lot of poverty, and these countries objected to the kinds of affluence that was shown in Ebony Africa; (2) JPC had a Black woman editor, Era Bell Thompson, and many of the African leaders were insulted that Ebony Africa would send a woman to interview them. Johnson's company, on the other hand, felt that if a woman deserved being editor, she deserved to interview whomever JPC wanted to have interviewed.

As a result of these problems, Johnson said he found he was constantly going to Africa to explain to various officials why Ebony Africa was or was not printing certain articles. Also, JPC was using many of the executive staff employes from the domestic Ebony to try to get Ebony Africa on its feet. Because of these difficulties, JPC decided to cease publication of Ebony Africa "even though it was doing well in circulation and advertising." Johnson said he believed that eventually the political problems would have affected Ebony Africa's circulation and advertising.

And so ended the short life of a successful JPC magazine, forced to stop for political and ideological complications.

Yes, JPC has been and is, much more than Ebony magazine. Although three publications, Hue, Copper Romance,

and Ebony Africa have died, and a fourth publication, Tan, is on its way out, these publications have made significant contributions to the growth and development of JPC

All of these magazines were begun for specific reasons other than to make money. Hue and Copper Romance began to help ward off competition; Ebony Africa began to defray shipping and printing costs, as well as to serve Africans; Tan began to fill a void made by the lack of Black confession magazines; and Jet was meant to be a pocket size magazine to summarize important Black news.

With the exception of Ebony Africa, the other JPC failures were planned, Johnson said.

When we reached a level where we felt we were strong and impregnable and not likely to be attacked successfully by any competition, then we discontinued them because we felt it was extra work, extra money, and extra effort to put out magazines that were both in the same field.

Few, if any magazine companies can say that their publications "failed" so systematically.



## CHAPTER V

### JPC'S SUCCESS BAROMETERS: CIRCULATION, READERSHIP, ADVERTISING

#### Circulation

Circulation, advertising and readership are significant barometers of success for any publishing house. Circulation through dependable subscription and newsstand sale is what publishers constantly strive for. For the most part, advertising pays for the cost of publishing a magazine, and helps amass profit. However, most national advertisers are not willing to invest in a publication unless it has a reasonably large circulation. The publishing company must therefore keep in tune with its readers, recognizing their expectations. The readers, in turn, continue to purchase the publication, occasionally recommending it to friends, and thereby helping the company maintain and increase the circulation it needs for advertising.

The Johnson Publishing Co., too, is such a publishing house. JPC examines its publications' circulation figures closely, is always concerned with advertising, and



conducts readership studies to see what kind of people are reading JPC publications.

Table 2 shows the circulation figures for JPC magazines from 1948 to 1970. The table begins with 1948 because that was the year Ayer began carrying official JPC circulation figures. Circulation figures for Ebony Africa and Copper Romance were not available.

Noticeable in Table 2 is Tan's circulation which is now less than half of what it was in 1952. With the exception of a few years, Tan's circulation has mainly moved downward. 1971 circulation figures for Tan were put at 117,423 although it guarantees advertisers 200,000.

Black World's circulation (formerly Negro Digest) is about half of what it was in 1949. Ayer does not list circulation figures for Black World, but Johnson estimated it between 50,000 and 60,000 monthly.

Of the six years that Hue existed, official Audit Bureau Circulation (ABC) figures were available for only two years, 1958 and 1959. Circulation figures for those years were listed identically at 122,656.

Jet, on the other hand, has not lost circulation like Tan and Black World have. Nor has it constantly gained as Ebony has. Jet's circulation has gone up and down, having reached a high point in 1957 when its circulation was 559,737. 1970 figures for Jet were reported as 414,555, guaranteeing advertisers 450,000.

TABLE 2

CIRCULATION OF JOHNSON PUBLISHING COMPANY MAGAZINES  
AS REPORTED IN THE AYER DIRECTORY

Year	Hue <sup>a</sup>	Ebony <sup>b</sup>	Negro Digest <sup>c</sup>	Jet <sup>d</sup>	Tan <sup>e</sup>
1948		324,930			
1949		338,650	100,000		
1950		317,574	100,000		
1951		395,343	100,000		
1952		395,343	4,924		256,246
1953		479,408		202,681	241,716
1954		492,544		312,831	233,813
1955		434,380		404,429	175,235
1956		427,444		405,861	168,297
1957		448,452		559,737	154,335
1958	122,656	441,430		454,021	134,056
1959	122,656	424,276		436,478	135,731
1961		628,782		396,928	143,743
1962		639,930		370,968	135,232
1963		720,337		335,101	126,105
1964		763,389		326,971	127,175
1965		751,782		321,194	122,426
1966		769,288		371,343	123,133
1967		919,189		355,722	129,112

TABLE 2--Continued

Year	Hue <sup>a</sup>	Ebony <sup>b</sup>	Negro Digest <sup>c</sup>	Jet <sup>d</sup>	Tan <sup>e</sup>
1968		996,247		352,640	121,837
1969		1,054,117		453,095	121,392
1970		1,176,375		414,555	111,641
1971		1,239,796		399,360	117,423

<sup>a</sup>Published from 1953 to 1959.

<sup>b</sup>Published from 1945 to present.

<sup>c</sup>Published from 1942 to 1952. Began again in 1961.

<sup>d</sup>Published from 1951 to present.

<sup>e</sup>Published from 1950 to present.

Source: Ayer Directory of Newspapers, Magazines and Trade Publications, 1948-1971.



The real circulation success of the JPC family is that of Ebony. Since 1948, Ebony has more than tripled its circulation. Official ABC figures listed Ebony's circulation at 1,239,796. Ebony guarantees its advertisers 1,250,000 monthly copies.

Today, JPC has several methods of increasing its circulation. One of the most popular ways is the Ebony fashion fair which began in 1958. Each year, Mrs. Eunice Johnson, the publisher's wife, travels to Rome, Paris and London and purchases famous designer fashions. These fashions are then modeled in some eighty U.S. cities before an audience which pays about \$6 each for a ticket. In addition to seeing the fashion show, the audience has the option of a free subscription to a JPC magazine for a limited time. The result is that Ebony usually picks up about 100,000 subscriptions in this manner.

A second method used by JPC to increase its circulation is a community-relations program. The program is essentially carried out by Black churches, and adds about 100,000 subscriptions to JPC annually. A JPC representative goes to a selected church and tells the church members that JPC would like to help them raise money for a particular program. Over a six week period, the church conducts an "Ebony Drive" in which members sell Ebony subscriptions at a reduced rate. The church gives JPC all of the monies collected, and JPC in turn gives the church back a check

for a specified percentage of the total collected. "Miss Ebony," the churchwoman who sells the most subscriptions, is crowned and given a prize. Additional prizes are awarded to other high subscription sellers.

A third way that Ebony and the other JPC magazines help to maintain circulation is through subscription renewal program. JPC has various kinds of offers for subscribers who wish to continue their subscriptions.

About once a year, JPC does a direct mailing through which it adds new subscribers. In addition, JPC magazines are listed with various field and catalog services which also help to improve circulation. JPC also increases its circulation by obtaining mailing lists from organizations or groups which have received coverage in a JPC magazine.

### Readership

Who reads a Johnson Publications magazine? Johnson said that about 95 per cent of JPC readers are Black. "We're edited primarily for Black people, and if white people read it, we're very happy--but we're not going after them," Johnson said. He further explained:

I think the race problem in America is such that no one publication can be completely loyal to Black and white readers. So you have in effect, magazines primarily oriented toward Blacks, like Ebony, which occasionally will run stories about whites; and you have magazines like Life or Look, that are primarily



oriented toward whites--which occasionally will run stories about Blacks. But in the end their audience is a white audience, and even when they write about Blacks, they're telling the things about Blacks that that they feel white people will want to know [and the opposite is applicable to JPC].<sup>104</sup>

What kind of Blacks read a JPC publication?

According to a 1970 study of Ebony magazine, most of its readers (31 per cent) are thirty-five to forty-nine years old. The smallest percentage, 4 per cent, are sixty-five years old or older. Although the median age of the Ebony reader is thirty-four, the second-highest percentage (29 percent) is shared among readers between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four years old. Twenty-two per cent of Ebony readers are twenty-five to thirty-four years old, and 14 per cent are between the ages of fifty and sixty-four years.<sup>105</sup>

Most of the Ebony readers (31 per cent) are high school graduates, while only 14 per cent did not receive formal high school education. About 30 per cent attended college, of which some 15 per cent were graduated. Twenty-five per cent of Ebony readers attended high school but did not complete it.

Ebony readers have a variety of occupations. Fourteen per cent have clerical or sales position;

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid.

<sup>105</sup>Johnson Publishing Company, General Demographic Characteristics of Ebony Readers.

12 per cent have professional or technical jobs; 8 per cent are craftsmen or foremen, and only 4 per cent are managers, officials or proprietors. An additional 32 per cent are categorized as "other employed."

Ebony is a family magazine. Fifty-four per cent of Ebony readers are married, as compared with 28 per cent who are not. Some 12 per cent are divorced or separated, and 6 per cent are widowed.

Most JPC readers are women, and most readers own their own homes. Fifty-eight per cent of Ebony's readers are women over 18 years old, as compared to 42 per cent of the readers who are men. Some 54 per cent of Ebony's readers own their own homes, while 46 per cent do not.

The majority of Ebony readers live in the South. In comparison, 14 per cent live in the Western portion of the United States. Twenty-five per cent of these readers reside in the Central region of the United States and 24 per cent make the Northeastern States their home.

Ebony readers are not wealthy. Over 52 per cent have a household income of \$7,999 or less. Of this 52 per cent, 22 per cent have incomes of less than \$5,000, while 30 per cent are in the \$5,000 to \$7,999 bracket. Although only 4 per cent of Ebony's readers earn over \$25,000, 12 per cent earn \$15,000 to \$24,999, and 19 per cent earn between \$10,000 and \$14,999. An additional 14 per cent earn between \$8,000 and \$9,000.

Most Ebony readers have no children under 18 years since 36 per cent fall into this category. The next largest percentage (18 per cent) of Ebony readers have two children under 18. Seventeen per cent have one child. Nine per cent have three children, and 12 per cent have five or more children.

To sum up, Ebony readers are Blacks who are between the ages of 35 to 49. Most of them are married and are high school graduates. They earn between \$5,000 and \$7,999. Most of them own homes, and do not have any children under 18 years of age.

In terms of circulation and readership studies, of course, JPC has given Ebony more attention than the other JPC publications. Tables 3, 4, and 5 show where the major JPC publication goes. Table 3 offers a summary of Ebony's circulation, Table 4 gives the data on use of Ebony in foreign countries, and Table 5 lists the ten largest cities with a Black population and the number of those Blacks who read Ebony.

### Advertising

Just as Ebony has tripled its circulation, so too has it tripled its advertising lineage. In 1948, Ebony carried 312 pages of advertising. But it increased to

TABLE 3  
SUMMARY OF EBONY CIRCULATION

Destination	Circulation
U.S. Possessions	940
Canada	2,515
Foreign	12,808
Military (destination unknown)	31,263
United States	1,160,396
Total	1,207,922

Source: Johnson Publishing Company, "Ebony Foreign Circulation," 1969.

TABLE 4  
EBONY FOREIGN CIRCULATION

Destination	Circulation
New Zealand	8
Other <sup>a</sup>	87
Australia	150
Asia	240
Central America	902
South America	1,363
West Indies	2,783
Europe	3,388
Africa	3,887

<sup>a</sup>JPC included the Ascension Island, Cuba, Mexico, Antilles, Okinawa, Papua, Philippines, Solomon Islands, and Western Somoa in this category.

Source: Johnson Publishing Company, "Ebony Foreign Circulation," 1969.

TABLE 5  
EBONY CIRCULATION IN TEN CITIES WITH  
 CONSIDERABLE BLACK POPULATION

City	Black Population	Ebony Circulation
Baltimore, Md.	432,000	16,015
Chicago, Ill.	1,150,000	80,002
Cleveland, Ohio	305,000	23,098
Detroit, Mich.	800,000	41,347
Houston, Texas	310,000	9,016
Los Angeles-Long Beach, Calif.	728,000	41,250
New York, N. Y.	1,500,000	127,033
Philadelphia, Pa.	700,000	54,468
St. Louis, Mo.	320,000	15,254
Washington, D.C.	574,000	48,905

Source: Johnson Publishing Company, "100 City  
Ebony Family Coverage," January, 1970.

850 pages in 1958, 1,031 in 1968 and 1,015 pages in 1969.<sup>106</sup> But Ebony has not always been as prosperous. Unlike the new Black slick publications which begin with national advertisers, JPC had to sell its advertisers on the need to identify with Blacks, and convince them that Blacks had buying power. Business Week explained:

Many advertisers and their agencies felt that the standard general magazines and newspapers carried their sales messages capably enough to the more prosperous Negroes, and that no special selling effort was needed. Johnson's reply: The Negro trend toward the cities has created a new, concentrated, easily reached market with fairly uniform tastes and a receptive ear for specially pitched advertising. Negroes, he pointed out, are a minority group who want recognition as people and customers. For that reason, they'll be loyal to products advertised in their own magazines.<sup>107</sup>

Business Week also pointed out that "advertising agencies were leery of risking their clients' money in so unproven a field."<sup>108</sup> Johnson fought this problem by going directly to the company president, something he could do as his company's executive.

After successfully getting his first national advertiser, Chesterfield cigarettes, Ebony and JPC began to receive more and more advertising lineage. But getting

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<sup>106</sup>Philip H. Dougherty, "Ebony, Near 25th Birthday, Is Fat On Ads." New York Times, April 26, 1970, p. 24.

<sup>107</sup>"Ebony: Making a New Market Pay Off," Business Week, March 22, 1952, p. 41.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid.

advertising even after Chesterfield was not an easy task for JPC. Johnson recalled his company's sending a representative to Detroit every week for ten years before JPC sold one automobile account. The JPC executive vice-president, William P. Grayson, worked for seventeen years on the Campbell soup account before it was sold. Grayson made two presentations a year for seventeen years. The publisher explained:

In those days you couldn't call people up and march and picket and threaten them. You just simply had to make presentations. You had no power, no force as we have now.

People are sensitive now. If you accuse them of being prejudice, they try to prove to you that they're not.

If you accused them of being prejudiced in those days, sometimes it was complimentary to some white people.

You had no power except the power of persuasion.<sup>109</sup>

In order to persuade advertisers, JPC did several things. In 1951, it dropped some \$50,000 worth of mail-order advertising in order to attract national advertisers. Second, in the same year, JPC began a merchandising program to provide whatever services necessary for Ebony's national advertisers. The cities selected for the program were New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Detroit, New Orleans, Memphis, Birmingham, St. Louis, Atlanta, Houston, Cleveland and Los Angeles.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup>Johnson, Interview.

<sup>110</sup>"Ebony Merchandising Program in 14 Cities," Sales Management, November, 1951, p. 104.



Third, Johnson developed several advertising approaches. For example, films such as "Selling the Negro Market" were made, and data concerning Blacks was collected and compiled into neat graphs, maps, charts and tables. Fourth, Ebony offered the same message to all of its advertisers: "identify."<sup>111</sup> To repeat the message, all of JPC's twenty-five salesmen are today, as others have been in the past, Black. Fifth, JPC began to spend sizeable amounts of money in trade advertising; today, JPC spends between \$100,000 and \$150,000 annually in advertisements directed at advertising agencies and their clients in such publications as the New York Times, Editor and Publisher, and Advertising Age.

Johnson's innovativeness, however, is the most important reason why he has stayed in business and attracted advertising. For example, getting advertisers for Ebony in 1946 was difficult; the magazine had not then "proven" itself. So Johnson decided he would advertise in Ebony. He went to a laboratory and had it produce some cosmetics for Blacks. Johnson advertised the products in Ebony, and offered them on a mail-order basis "as a means to defray the costs of producing a magazine." The Supreme Beauty Products, as the company is called, not only helped pay for Ebony, but it began to earn a profit. It did so

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

well that after a few years Johnson decided to sell the products on a retail basis. Johnson said of his profit making cosmetics firm: "Frankly, we may sell it sometime in the future because I don't have that much interest in it. It was just a way of survival, a way to beat the system."<sup>112</sup>

As a calculating businessman, Johnson began the Ebony book club and the Ebony record club. These clubs were formed primarily for advertising. Johnson explained the rationale behind the opening of the two clubs:

Both the record club and the book club were started in 1970, and this was a very bad year for magazine advertising. Many magazines went out of business; and Time and Look and other magazines went down as much as 14 to 15 per cent.

One of the reasons they went down was that nobody got any automobile advertising [due to the auto strike], and that's a very substantial part of their business--much more theirs than mine.

We maintained our own by these extra things [beauty products, record and book clubs]. And the goal was not to build a separate business, but to strengthen Ebony.<sup>113</sup>

Philip H. Dougherty of the New York Times summarized Johnson's way of adapting to the situation:

"Johnson, you see, already knows what some other publishers are just learning--diversity is the mother of salvation."<sup>114</sup>

JPC is diversified. Aside from the fashion fair, record and book clubs, and the beauty products, JPC has a

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<sup>112</sup>Johnson, Interview.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid.

<sup>114</sup>Dougherty, "Ebony, Fat on Ads," p.

book division which specializes in Black books. It began in 1962. The book division publishes the books offered by the book club. JPC was the first Black firm to enter into general book publishing. In 1965, the book division had published fifteen books. Five years later, the number had more than doubled.<sup>115</sup>

Because of its diversified methods in obtaining advertising its persistence and hard work, JPC has less difficulty in obtaining ads. Johnson said about JPC advertising today:

Now its difficult. I think we have a fair chance. There are times when I don't get it [an account], but I don't think it's because of race. I think it's because we haven't been able to present our case--as happens to all magazines. You just can't sell everybody.<sup>116</sup>

In 1970, Ebony had eighty of the top 100 magazine advertisers. The magazine's strongest advertising products were: drugs, toiletries, food, soft drinks, alcoholic beverages and business.<sup>117</sup>

Tables 6 and 7 show the present advertising rates for the two leading JPC magazines. The tables also indicate that advertising rates for Ebony and Jet are costly. JPC has come a long way--from a publishing company which

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<sup>115</sup>Johnson Publishing, Book Division Listing.

<sup>116</sup>Johnson, Interview.

<sup>117</sup>Dougherty, "Ebony, Fat on Ads," p. 24.

TABLE 6  
EBONY GENERAL ADVERTISING RATES

Space	1-Time Contract	6-Time Contract	12-Time Contract
<b>BLACK AND WHITE</b>			
1 page	\$ 7,644.00	\$ 7,261.80	\$ 6,879.60
3 columns	7,644.00	7,261.80	6,879.60
1/2 page	3,971.00	3,772.45	3,573.90
1/4 page	2,012.00	1,911.40	1,810.80
1/8 page	1,074.00	1,020.30	966.60
1 inch	182.00	172.90	163.80
<b>COLOR</b>			
2nd or 3rd cover in four colors	\$12,955.00	\$12,307.25	\$11,659.50
4th cover in four colors	15,754.00	14,966.30	14,178.60
inside in four four colors	11,816.00	11,225.20	10,634.40
1/2 page in four colors	7,441.00	7,068.95	6,696.90
1/4 page in four colors	4,687.00	4,452.65	4,218.30
inside in two colors	9,928.00	9,431.60	8,935.20
1/2 page in two colors	6,009.00	5,708.55	5,408.10
1/4 page in two colors	3,105.00	2,949.75	2,794.50

Source: Johnson Publishing Company, Ebony  
Advertising Rate Schedule.

TABLE 7  
JET GENERAL ADVERTISING RATES

Space	1-Time	26-Times	52-Times
BLACK AND WHITE			
1 page	\$1,525.00	\$1,433.50	\$1,372.50
1/2 page	875.00	822.50	787.50
horizontal half page	875.00	822.50	787.50
COVERS			
2nd or 3rd cover	2,700.00	2,538.00	2,430.00
4th cover	3,300.00	3,102.00	2,970.00
INSIDE COLOR			
1 page in two colors	2,250.00	2,115.00	2,025.00
1/2 page in two colors	1,400.00	1,316.00	1,260.00
1 page in four colors	2,550.00	2,397.00	2,295.00
1/2 page in four colors	1,675.00	1,574.50	1,507.50

Source: Johnson Publishing Company, Jet Advertising Rate Schedule.

invented its own ads for attracting advertisers to one which now charges \$15,754 for a one appearance, four color cover in Ebony.

Milton Moskowitz of the New York Times summed up the growth of JPC's and Ebony's advertising:

Why, after ignoring it for years, are advertisers suddenly discovering Ebony? The official reason is that it makes good business. Negroes are buyers--so why not advertise directly to them.

Ebony itself appeals for advertisers on this level: "You don't have to love us," says the magazine's current promotion. "Just give us your business. Not for love, but for money. . . ."

So the word is out. "Add Ebony to the schedule."<sup>118</sup>

The Johnson Publishing Co. has overwhelmingly increased its circulation, readership, and advertising since it began in 1942. Today, the JPC has a specified Black audience, as shown in the Ebony readership study. According to Ebony research some 10,064,000 adults see twelve consecutive issues of Ebony,<sup>119</sup> a phenomenal number considering that some few years ago people were wondering if the magazine would last.

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<sup>118</sup>Milton Moskowitz, "Ebony is Benefiting From Racial Discord," New York Times, May 24, 1968, p.

<sup>119</sup>Johnson Publishing, General Demographics.

## CHAPTER VI

### JPC: A PERSPECTIVE

This study has shown that the Johnson Publishing Co. is much more than Ebony magazine. This study has discussed the beginnings of the JPC magazines and explained their successes or failures. It has reviewed various circulation, readership and advertising statistics. It is to be hoped that this study has explained why JPC is the extended shadow of one man, John Harold Johnson. Johnson, the publisher of Johnson Publishing Co., has almost single-handedly steered the growth and development of his company from a business which started with a \$500 loan to one which today grosses \$17,000,000.

Johnson's company has produced seven publications--Negro Digest (now Black World), Ebony, Tan, Jet, Copper Romance, Hue, and Ebony Africa. Today, Ebony, Jet and Tan still thrive and are profit-makers. The exception is Black World which is expected to make a profit within the next year. ✓

JPC plans on beginning a new magazine, Black Stars, in November, 1971 when it will discontinue Tan due to circulation costs. "Black Stars will be a magazine about

the Black entertainment world," said Johnson. Articles on Black television, radio, movie and stage stars will be included.

Johnson Publishing Co. has scored several "firsts" in Black journalism history. It had the first Black general magazine to succeed the Colored American; the first Black news weekly, Jet; the first Black book publishing firm; and the first Black book and record clubs.

Because of JPC's success, the company has made it easier for new slick Black publications to obtain national advertising. JPC has also opened doors for advertisers' use of Black models and entertainment personalities. Johnson's company has spurred a whole new movement in Black journalism history, as well as Black American history.

Despite the fact that more and more Black publications are being produced, JPC has no real competition. Some people say that W. Leonard Evans' Tuesday is a competitor, but Johnson does not think so. "Nobody knows whether anybody wants Tuesday or not," Johnson said discussing the Black Sunday supplement that is distributed with metropolitan newspapers. Certainly, Good Publishing's Sepia with about 100,000 circulation is not competition for JPC, and neither is Essence, the new Black woman's magazine that has a good chance to survive. On Essence's potential, Johnson observed:



I think it all depends on whether the investors, who've already put \$1,000,000 into it, are willing to put another million into it. If they're willing to put another million into it, I think they'll make it; if they withdraw it, they won't.<sup>120</sup>

Essence, according to Johnson, is financed primarily by John Hancock Insurance. A chief investor in John Hancock is Playboy magazine. Recently, Essence, which was originally Black staffed, accused Playboy of "trying to take over Essence."<sup>121</sup> Anyone who has followed Essence knows that within the past two months, the magazine has acquired a completely new staff, including a new editor-in-chief. This writer believes that because of Essence's internal strife, and because Black readers may come to resent a white run publication, Essence may not last.

One other magazine has the potential of giving JPC some competition. Black Sports which began last year is backed by the Chase-Manhattan Bank. Johnson believes that Black Sports will fail. The JPC president said:

I think Black Sports is a mistake. They [the publishers] feel that they have some sort of missing duty to perform, in the sense that Black sports people can express their true feelings [through the magazine]. I don't happen to believe that people who buy the magazine will necessarily want to know the sports personalities' true feelings.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup>Johnson, Interview.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid.

Johnson said that he believed it would take about \$2,000,000 to "put a magazine on its feet now." He said that it would take about \$3,000,000 to \$4,000,000 to begin a magazine similar to Ebony. Because of such costs, Johnson said, "I don't really think we have any competition although we act like we do."

Being the big magazine business that it is, what more could JPC hope for? Johnson answered:

As I say to people in a joking way, we're doing pretty good now. I'd just like to keep on doing what we're doing.

I don't know if I really have a goal now. I can't think of any particular thing we want to do.

The new building was a goal which will be achieved pretty much in October. I have a feeling that once I get into the new building and relax and enjoy, I'll set a new goal, but I don't know what it is now.

Our constant goal, of course, is to improve the general quality of our magazines.<sup>123</sup>

John Harold Johnson, young at 53, refuses to think about Johnson Publishing Co. without him. Certainly, he is not about to retire. "Maybe when I'm 73 or 83 I'll think in terms of it," he said. Although he refused to name them, Johnson said that there were "at least three fellows" who he believes could continue to successfully run JPC. Not to be forgotten, Mrs. Eunice Johnson, the publisher's wife, could certainly handle JPC operations, Johnson said. The Johnson children, Linda, 13, and John Jr., 15, express some interest in the JPC, but the publisher said he is not

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<sup>123</sup>Ibid.

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