



Black Heritage Highlights in Special Collections

Rare Books

Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral (1773) reflects on themes of freedom and was published by its author, Phillis Wheatley, during a time she was enslaved by the Wheatley family in Boston. It is considered to be the first published book of poetry by an African American author. ***The Negro Pamphlets Collection (1861-1912)*** is assembled in two bound volumes of publications that address social and economic issues amongst African Americans by a number of authors, including Booker T. Washington. ***The Negro Trail Blazers of California (1919)*** by Delilah L. Beasley chronicles the lives of Black pioneers, and serves as a reminder that the state of California was built by people with diverse backgrounds. Deeply researched in rural as well as urban areas, it was the first book to tell the story of the contribution of African Americans to 19th century California. ***The Negro Motorist Green Book*** guided African Americans all over a segregated United States and provided them with a sense of safety and places they were welcomed. It was published by Victor Hugo Green, a letter carrier for the U.S. Post Office, during a time when African Americans could not be serviced in many places of business due to laws that enforced racial segregation. Special Collections holds volumes from 1952-1964.

Los Angeles History

Black Angelenos: The Afro-American in Los Angeles 1850-1950 (1988) is an exhibition catalog created by the California Afro-American Museum about notable and prominent African American figures who made their home in Los Angeles. ***The Liberator***, established by Jefferson Lewis Edmonds in 1900, is a rare early 20th century Los Angeles news periodical that chronicled issues and events in the African American community. While speaking out against racism and injustice in Los Angeles, the paper promoted the city as a haven compared to the South's discrimination and violence. ***The Black Music History of Los Angeles—Its Roots: A Classical Pictorial History of Black Music in L.A. from 1920-1970 (1992)*** is an immersive chronicle of 50 years of the Black music scene in Los Angeles and the community centered around Central Avenue. It begins with an acknowledgment of the African Americans who originally settled Los Angeles in 1781. Los Angeles Public Library is included in the acknowledgments, as the author researched the book at the Library. The ***Rolland J. Curtis Collection*** (tessa.lap.org) features photographs of many important moments in city history, as well as community life. In 1964, shortly after Tom Bradley was elected to the City Council, Curtis joined his staff, giving him unique access. ***Brockman Gallery Archive*** documents the artspace and community hub founded by artists and brothers Alonzo Davis and Dale Brockman Davis. The Gallery was located in a storefront in the Leimert Park neighborhood of Los Angeles, and was at the heart of a community of Black and other marginalized artists from 1967 to 1990. Local social justice newspapers from the late 1960s, ***Los Angeles Black Voice***, published by the Los Angeles Black Congress, and ***Uprising***, covered the Civil Rights movement locally and nationally.

Luminaries

Forty Years: Memoirs from the Pages of a Newspaper (1960) by Charlotta A. Bass is a memoir and a history of Black Los Angeles written by the publisher and editor of the California Eagle and one of the most important, yet unrecognized, journalists in the City of Angels. The matters closest to her heart, which she called the "two-headed monster," were segregation and discrimination. Bass' activism would lead to many victories for African Americans in the Los Angeles community in the form of jobs and housing. ***Obsequies: Martin Luther King, Jr. (1968)*** is Dr. King's funeral program for the event held on the campus of Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. ***Interview with Miriam Matthews (1981)*** is an interview transcript from 1977 with the first African American librarian to be hired at Los Angeles Public Library; she was also known as a prominent art collector and historian. The limited edition ***Greatest of All Time: A Tribute to Muhammad Ali (2004)*** is fittingly our heaviest book at 75 pounds - it features 3,000 photographs, 792 pages, and five decades worth of interviews and personal accounts.

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Art & Culture

Prints by American Negro Artists (1965) was published by the Cultural Exchange Center of Los Angeles to promote awareness of African American artists from all over the United States and their achievements in creativity and craftsmanship. It was published in close collaboration with Ruth G. Waddy, who contributed an introduction in which she reflects on printmaking culture in Los Angeles. ***I Have a Dream: Portfolio (1969)*** by Charles White, signed by the iconic Los Angeles artist, comprises six lithographs, including *Seed of Heritage*, *I Have Seen Black Hands*, and *Vision*. In ***For My People (1992)***, Elizabeth Catlett created six vibrantly colored lithographs to illustrate Margaret Walker's best-known poem, "For My People," about the joy and heartbreak of the African American experience. ***Betye Saar: Colored: Consider the Rainbow (2002)*** is a catalog rich with photographs of collages and assemblages from a New York exhibition. The book begins with an artist statement by Saar, "It is my goal as an artist to create works that expose injustice and reveal beauty. The rainbow is literally a spectrum of color while spiritually a symbol of hope and promise."

In ***Transforming Hate: An Artist's Book (2016)***, Clarissa Sligh turns the hateful words of white supremacist books into beautiful art objects by folding them into origami cranes. ***African American: A Handbook (2020)*** and ***Black: A Handbook (2022)*** are part of a series of books written and handcrafted by Tia Blassingame. Poems on topics such as nature and race are grounded in the unique texture of the materials, paste papers housed in wood containers treated with natural dyes, such as persimmon juice and indigo. ***FOREWORD: Black & Brown Hands in Book Arts/Histories & Print Making/Cultures (2024)*** includes prints by three artists that consider the history of erasure of Black and Brown artistry and craftsmanship in printmaking, bookmaking, and papermaking.

The Negro Mother and Other Dramatic Recitations (1932) by Langston Hughes was written to be a dramatic recitation of poems showcasing voices within the African American community and their fight for freedom and equality. The Special Collections copy is signed by the author with an inscription, "To the Los Angeles Public Library." ***A Street In Bronzeville (1945)*** by Gwendolyn Brooks is her successful first book, a small collection of poems inspired by the urban African American community Bronzeville in South Side, Chicago, highlighting themes of abuse, racism, poverty, oppression, struggle, and survival. ***Watts Poets: A Book of New Poetry & Essays (1968)*** transports the reader back to the late 1960s with poems that tell stories of Black life with banter doused in the slang of the time and intellectual discussions about the economic and political climate.

Cookbooks

What Mrs. Fisher Knows About Old Southern Cooking, Soups, Pickles, Preserves, etc. (1881) was the first full-length cookbook to be published by a formerly enslaved cook. Mrs. Fisher lived in South Carolina and Alabama and moved West with her family to San Francisco after the Civil War. ***Good Things to Eat, as Suggested by Rufus (1911)*** by Rufus Estes is the first cookbook published by an African American chef. The self-published cookbook features over 590 recipes of Southern cuisine with its African roots and adds a serving of French influence. ***Eliza's Cook Book (1936)*** was compiled by the Negro Culinary Art Club of Los Angeles and includes upscale recipes of the black middle class, as well as pages of local advertising. ***West Oakland Soul Food Cook Book (1969)*** chronicles the Peter Maurin Neighborhood House, which opened in 1963, offering daily activities and a co-op nursery to the mainly African American residents of West Oakland. Their community involvement preceded the Black Panthers, who took on a prominent role in the neighborhood a couple years later.

Content warning: These materials and the language that describes them may be harmful. Read about the Library's work on ethical and inclusive description at tessa.lapl.org.

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