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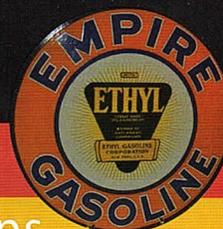
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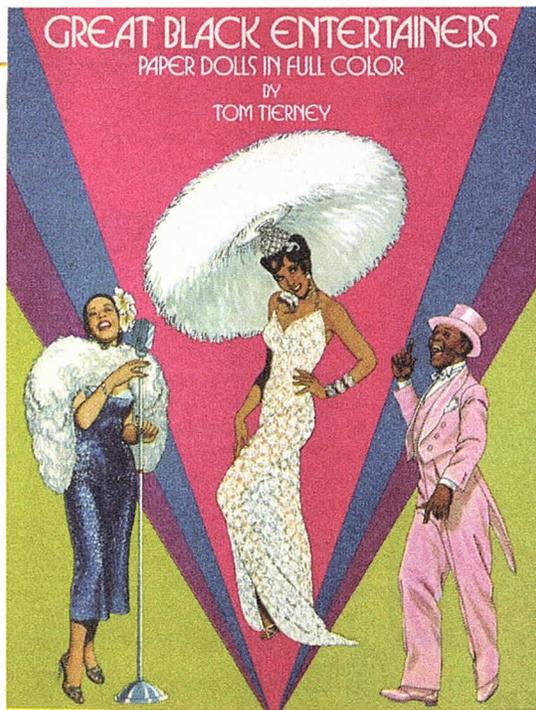
Spotlight: Black Paper Dolls - a collector's story

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Obama Paper Dolls (Collectible Campaign Edition), Dover Publications, 2008



Great Black Entertainers Paper Dolls, Dover Publications, 1994

VINTAGE spotlight



Little Caribbean Girl Paper Doll, Dover Publications, 1993

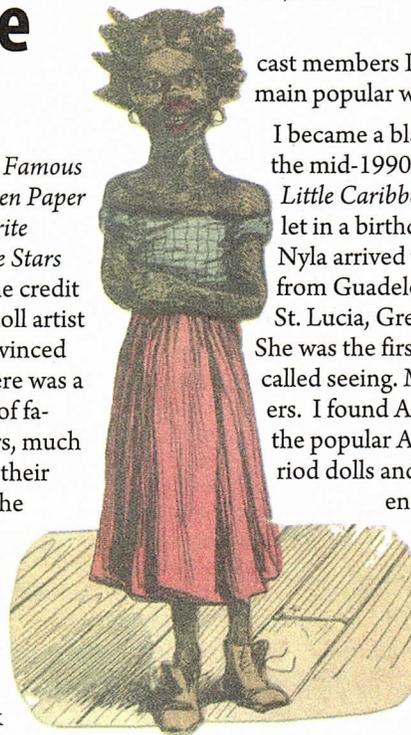
Black Paper Doll Devotee

By ARABELLA GRAYSON

As a child I played with paper dolls, sitting for hours on the living room floor carefully cutting out clothes, and creating grown-up scenarios – traveling abroad, going away to college, starting a business – while dressing them in appropriate paper attire. *Julia*, starring actress Diahann Carroll, was popular then. So popular in fact, that in 1968 there were several paper doll books and box sets based on her character in the rare television series about a widowed African American nurse and her young son Corey. I faithfully watched the show, but I don't remember seeing a *Julia* paper doll back then, nor any other black paper dolls for that matter. It would be decades later, after I started collecting that the *Julia* paper dolls came into my possession.

In the 1960s, a hundred years after the first black paper doll was published in the United States, a paper doll of a black celebrity was still a rare find. In fact, it wasn't until the 1990s that a "flurry" of black celebrity paper doll books got published: *Martin Luther King Jr. and His Family Paper Dolls* (1993), *Great Black Entertain-*

ers Paper Dolls (1994), *Famous African American Women Paper Dolls* (1994) and *Favorite African American Movie Stars Paper Dolls* (1997). The credit goes to prolific paper doll artist Tom Tierney who convinced Dover Publications there was a market for paper dolls of famous black entertainers, much like there had been for their white counterparts in the 1930s and 40s during the "golden era," when paper dolls of matinee idols like Greer Garson, Claudette Colbert, Shirley Temple, Vivian Leigh and Clark Gable were published by the millions and sold to adoring fans at five-and-dime stores. The exception: *Gone with the Wind* co-star Hattie McDaniel, the first African American to be nominated and win an Academy Award for her role as Mammy, would appear in top-selling paper doll books, along with



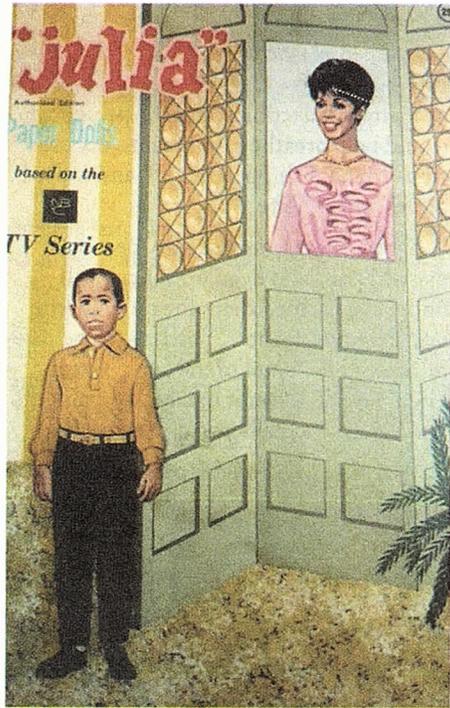
Topsey, McLoughlin Brothers, 1863

cast members Leigh and Gable, that remain popular with collectors today.

I became a black paper doll devotee in the mid-1990s after a friend enclosed a *Little Caribbean Girl Paper Doll* booklet in a birthday card. Adorable little Nyla arrived with her paper outfits from Guadeloupe, Trinidad, Tobago, St. Lucia, Grenada and the Bahamas. She was the first black paper doll I recalled seeing. My search began for others. I found Addy, a paper doll based on the popular American Girl Series of period dolls and books. Portrayed as an enslaved child who escaped in 1864, I wondered why the publisher chose the unfathomable storyline and what message this pretty, well-dressed and coiffed African American child was meant to convey to consumers – parents and their young children. In the accompanying literature, I read the first black paper doll was printed in 1863. Uncovering the identity of that figure started my obsession with collecting and researching the history of black paper dolls.

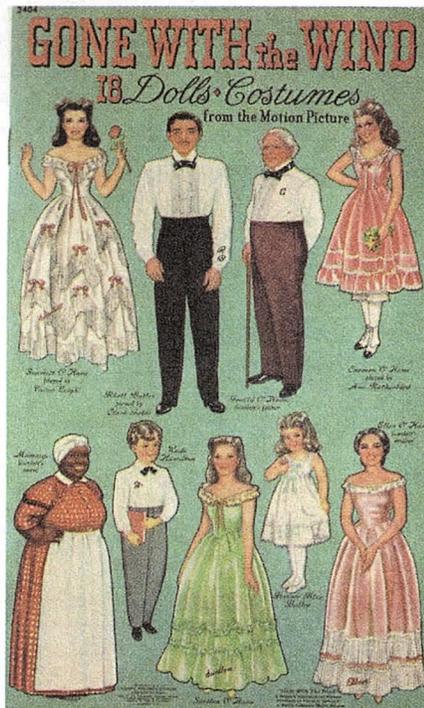
VINTAGE spotlight

“These fragile paper playthings accurately record social changes, illustrate attitudes and societal perceptions, and in the case of African Americans often depict the caricatures and racial stereotypes that defined their place, role and status in popular culture.”



"Julia" Paper Dolls, The Saalfield Publishing Company, 1968, 1970

In the "best-selling novel of all time" her name was Topsy, but when she was printed as a paper doll McLoughlin Brothers added an "e," making this young fictional character not only the first mass-produced African American paper doll, but one of the first to promote a book. Based on another enslaved fictional child, she isn't cute, nor well-coiffed or fashionably attired like Addy, or her white counterpart in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* – Eva St. Clair, who also appeared as a paper doll in 1863. Printed from woodblocks and hand water colored, each doll came with three outfits in an illustrated envelope and sold for 10 cents.



Gone With the Wind 18 Dolls & Costumes from the Motion Picture, Merrill Publishing Company, 1940

Since their invention in Europe in the 1700s, paper dolls have chronicled fashion trends; and illustration, graphic design and printing techniques. These fragile paper playthings accurately record social changes, illustrate attitudes and societal perceptions, and in the case of African Americans often depict the caricatures and racial stereotypes that defined their place, role and status in popular culture. Paper dolls in comic strips, political cartoons, greeting cards, magazines, books and box sets, and as advertising premiums, particularly those produced by white illustrators and publishers in the mid-1800s through the mid-1900s, commonly depict people of African ancestry in subservient or comedic roles. It wasn't until the 1960s with changes in legislation and public policies, and the sustained campaign for civil rights and social justice that paper dolls began reflecting more realistic and varied images of African Americans.

Arabella Grayson's collection, "Two Hundred Years of Black Paper Dolls," has been exhibited at the Smithsonian and other museums, and featured in numerous publications. For additional information, visit www.arabellagrayson.com.

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