

**The Answer Man, the Lawyer, and the Informant:  
Private Policing and Publicity in Black America, 1920-1960**

Brian Carroll, Berry College

If little is known about the industry that became domestic private investigations, even less is known about the nation's first Black private detectives. Living and working in the segregated margins of society, and taking on Black and white clients whose reputations depended on absolute confidentiality, these law enforcement pioneers have been all but forgotten by history, relegated to the footnotes of other, larger histories. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to shine a light into this most dark and secretive of aspects of the Black experience in America, the life and legacy of the Black detective, a look made possible only because of their eagerness to appear in their local Black newspapers. In particular, this paper reveals the reliance of these early investigators upon the Black press, investigators and businessmen who engaged in what later would be called public relations, brand management, marketing, and spin.