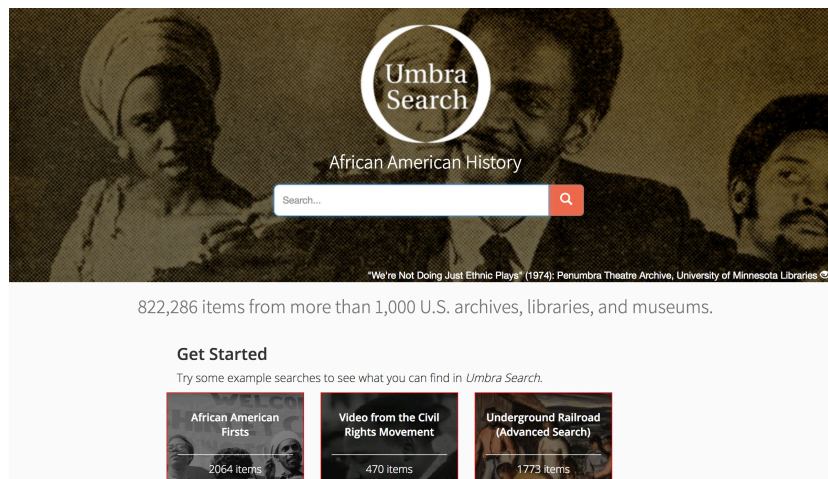


Umbra Search

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Umbra Search is a research portal of primary source material about African American life and culture, which was created by staff at the Givens Collection of African American Literature at the University of Minnesota. Much like the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA), from which more than half their records are harvested, Umbra Search provides

access to materials from a wide range of institutions. It is also home to digitized items from the University of Minnesota's collections. At present count, there are over 800,000 items accessible through the portal. The research portal is free to use and provides access to digital collections that are freely accessible to all users.

For anyone familiar with DPLA, Europeana, or World Digital Library, Umbra Search's user interface will make intuitive sense. In addition to a small number of faceted search examples provided on the landing page, you can start with your own keyword search. Once you initiate a search, you can decide to limit by subject, media type, date, as well as a number of other ways. For each record, a thumbnail image is provided, but to view the full text or image, you are redirected to the library, archive, or museum collection where the item is housed.

Umbr Search is an excellent resource for students and researchers who want a wide-angle lens on digitized African American collections. For advanced researchers, however, there are some notable limitations. A sample search for materials related to Alvin Ailey American Dance

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Exploring African American stories through digital projects by students, artists, and archivists.

Theater (one of the curated search options provided by Umbr), for example, yielded a fairly modest 67 items. All of these items came from one of two institutions: Los Angeles Public Library and Black Archives of Mid-America. By contrast, DPLA had Alvin Ailey-related material from 21 institutions. Notably, DPLA did not include the Black Archives of Mid-America items captured by Umbr. Based on this search and

several others, it seems Umbr is best used in conjunction with other search portals for research that requires a deep understanding of what digital collections are available on a particular topic. For novice and casual researchers who just want to filter out results not relevant to African American culture, on the other hand, the portal is an exciting new resource.

One growing component of Umbr Search is a social media feature that links researchers to sample projects from University of Minnesota students who are using the portal for research in their courses. These projects are visually rich and offer insight into the ways in which having unfettered access to digital collections on African American history enhances the kinds of stories we can tell about black life in America. One project, for example, is called “Black Women Workers in the Twentieth Century” and features a series of blog posts that use images and text from Umbr Search to enhance a study of black women in the workforce. The primary images add a richness to the text while also leading you back to the source material. As these projects continue to grow, they will provide more visibility to digital collections.

[Black Women Workers in the Twentieth Century](#)



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