The Charleston ADVISOR

Critical Reviews of Web Products for Information Professionals

Contents

Advisor Reviews in This Issue

ProQuest Black Studies

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Composite Score: ★ ★ ★ ★

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Abstract

ProQuest Black Studies (PQBS), launched in February 2022, is a multiformat database whose content is a curated collection of new and existing primary and secondary sources. The database covers a wide range of Black history and culture through a variety of formats, including historical Black newspapers, archival documents, government materials, videos, scholarly journals, and essays. Supplemental material includes timelines, bibliographies, topic pages, and collection pages for increased discoverability. The foundational content that constitutes PQBS is that of the existing database Black Studies Center in addition to new archival content, including historical Black newspapers, primary source collections, the Black Abolitionist Papers, American periodicals (selected titles on race and slavery), and British periodicals (selected titles on race and slavery), and forthcoming content, including streaming video, court cases, and more primary and secondary source collections. PQBS utilizes extensive keyword searching in conjunction with indexed terms to locate scholars' specified research queries within the vast collection of resources, many of which are full text. As of August 2022, this database contains more than 8 million records across 10 million pages with content spanning from 1650 to 2020. ProQuest plans to update the database on an estimated quarterly schedule.

Pricing Options

Pricing for ProQuest Black Studies (PQBS) is a custom quote with individual consideration that depends on full-time enrollment (FTE), the institution's current subscriptions to related databases, and previously purchased primary resource collections in perpetuity. Consortial discounts and custom quotes through consortia are available as well. The annual subscription fee includes unlimited user access with no simultaneous user limit.

Product Overview/Description

PQBS is an electronic database collection of primary and secondary sources pertinent to Black studies and the Black experience that launched in February 2022. The intended audience for this database consists of undergraduate and graduate researchers and students, as well as faculty members. Not only will scholars in Black studies programs benefit from the database, but so will those in the intersecting disciplines of history, literature, political science, sociology, philosophy, and religion. PQBS is built on the foundational content of the database Black Studies Center (BSC), which includes the resources *Chicago Defender, 1910–1975; Schomburg Studies on the Black Experience; Black Studies Periodicals; and the Black Literature Index.* The nine remaining historical Black newspapers, and the forthcoming addition to the newspaper collection, *Louisville Defender*, that are offered as separate

perpetual purchases in addition to BSC are included with PQBS. In addition, PQBS provides access to primary source collections that have released their archival content in one place for the first time—121 collections across 18 modules covering the years 1700–1999. PQBS also has an internal road map of forthcoming content, with an estimated quarterly update schedule. This content includes Black Studies in Video, Supreme Court cases, African diaspora primary source collections, Black Lives Matter material from the *New York Times*, texts by African American writers and intellectuals, additional journals, magazines, and more nineteenth- and twentieth-century primary source collections.

Many PQBS components are available as separate subscriptions or perpetual purchases, so institutions without a subscription to any of these resources might find PQBS a comprehensive and optimal destination for a plethora of primary and secondary sources on Black studies. Institutions with subscriptions to BSC and perpetual content might not immediately see a reason to switch their subscription, but PQBS increases access to resources from 2.5 million pages within BSC alone to 10 million pages with the additional content PQBS currently provides and has committed to growing over time.

Researchers will find a wide variety of searchable documents and formats of historical newspapers, primary source collections, journals, videos and images, essays, reference materials, and magazines and historical periodicals. The entire database covers the years 1650–2020 and includes supplementary materials that aid in discovery, research, and platform navigation. Supplements on the Featured Content page include a list of the primary source collections; featured people profiles containing basic biographic information (with a respectful image of each individual), hyperlinked related subject areas, and recommended articles and primary sources; timelines of historically significant events and eras; a dedicated section for featured essays and content from Schomburg Studies on the Black Experience organized into themes; and a dedicated section for featured subject terms from the Black Literature Index.

User Interface/Navigation/Searching

The PQBS interface follows the design and presentation of all ProQuest database products, so it will be familiar to those who have used ProQuest databases in the past. Each search option has its own landing page with specific features and informational sections. The overall searching interface utilizes a universal search bar with common limiters nearby for users to engage with before performing a search. A static banner at the top of the database's webpage lists who access is provided by and offers hyperlinks to the website's navigation menus. Patrons are never more than a few clicks away from returning to previous searches, starting anew, or getting help. Navigating the website itself is intuitive and easy.

NAVIGATION & SEARCHING

The Basic Search webpage has a backsplash image of a primary source collage, giving patrons an idea of the resources and topics they can explore. Below the universal Basic Search bar are three Featured Content sections with scrolling resources for historical newspapers, primary source collections, featured people, timelines, and videos and images. The scrolling content for each section changes when the Featured Content is updated. Basic Search utilizes a universal search bar for keyword input that can be filtered two ways before viewing the search results. First, above the search bar are the database's content types. There are four content type options and an option for All that are toggleable or visible via a drop-down menu with all content types selected by tick box. The second way to filter the basic keyword search appears below the search bar and includes options for results to return full-text and/or peer reviewed sources.

As in all ProQuest databases, Basic Search in PQBS allows users to quickly navigate to other searching and supplemental options, including Advanced Search, a list of all database publications, browsing Featured Content, the database's About webpage, and the option to change databases. When navigating to Advanced Search, users are brought to a minimalist webpage that contains parameters users have come to expect from Advanced Search along with a section they might not expect—Results Page Options. From within Advanced Search, users can add up to 10 rows to create a Boolean search within 14 of the 26 indexed field code limiters contained within a drop-down menu. This drop-down menu also includes the Anywhere option, which is a keyword search within all full-text documents. Users can also limit their search by 7 content types, 86 document types, and 25 languages using a toggleable list along with the option to limit for full-text and peer reviewed resources. The Results Page Options section allows researchers to preemptively tailor the results, including sort order, number of items per page, the option to exclude duplicate documents of materials that appear in more than one database, and the option to include or exclude spelling variants from search terms.

Advanced Search also includes its own navigation bar, which takes the user to Command Line Search, recent searches, and two supplemental links listing the field codes and search tips. Command Line Search is an optional, more efficient way for researchers familiar with the database and its field codes to build precise searches using operators. This subset of Advanced Search includes a Search Tools section with supplemental links to help researchers utilize the resource via the pop-up browser manual. It also contains the full-text, peer reviewed, and result page limiters.

Once users have formatted their searches, the initial results page separates results by content types with the most results. Researchers can export all the results of their search, up to 10,000 records, into three file types: RIS, CSV, and TSV. Users can choose whether to include abstracts and must agree to the terms and conditions relating to the use of the exported data before the download begins. The terms seem standard and nonrestrictive. From the initial results screen, researchers can use the Facet toolbar to further limit the results by the indexed terms or view all the results from the Featured Content types prominently displayed in the middle of the page. Users can also modify their search, view recent searches, save their search, and create alerts and RSS feeds. Users who wish to save searches, bookmark documents, and create a bookshelf must create a ProQuest My Research account.

Once results are filtered down past the initial results screen, they will appear in the familiar listed order telling users whether full text is available; providing bibliographic information; and offering the option to do all the modifications, limiting, and saving of searches and results described above. Quick Looks allows for an overlaid summary of a single result and gives the cursory details necessary to determine if the user would like to see the material in full detail. Users also have an array of other saving and exporting options, such as cloud-saving PDFs to Google Drive, Microsoft OneDrive, and Google Classroom; exporting citations to RefWorks, EndNote, Mendeley, Citavi, NoodleTools, and EasyBib; and downloading documents in PDF, XLS, RTF, or TXT format.

Once inside a document, the top left-hand corner allows the user to scroll through and browse the search results in order. Below that, the content type and whether the document is full text are indicated. If the document is a PDF, an internal PDF viewer allows researchers to manipulate the scanned material. Users can toggle between viewing the document as a single archival entity or viewing the context of the content type it is found within, such as an advertisement within a newspaper or an affidavit within a government document. Page View allows users to browse the complete document their chosen search results are found within. If a patron happens to be looking at archival material and they wish to browse the entire content of the collection, they will be brought to a digital representation of the archival collection in its original arrangement, displayed in its intended organizational structure. This gives students an introduction to how archives are arranged, so that if they visit one in person they will have some background knowledge and familiarity. Finally, users are able to create URLs for their saved searches and copy the permanent URLs for specific documents, content types, and collections to easily navigate back to them and cite them within their research.

ACCESSIBILITY

ProQuest has an Accessibility hyperlink at the bottom of every webpage. It takes the user to the article on its Support page titled "ProQuest Platform Accessibility Statement" (ProQuest 2020). This webpage includes ProQuest's commitment to providing all users with a fully accessible experience, along with details on accessibility features for all ProQuest platforms; gaps in their accessibility functions; recommendations for resources to make devices more accessible for users with a disability; information on how to support accessibility efforts and offer feedback; and information on how ProQuest checks for accessibility, which includes dates on when the website and statement were last updated. At the time of writing, the accessibility statement was listed as prepared on June 22, 2020 and last reviewed on March 24, 2021. The website was last tested on March 24, 2021 by an internal test. The article links to ProQuest's Accessibility Conformance Report (VPAT 2.3 and WCAG 2.1). It lists its compliance level as "partially compliant with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines v2.1 AA standard" and states that areas of noncompliance are listed following the currently discussed section.

The Library Accessibility Alliance (see <https://libraryaccessibility.org/testing>) has tested three other ProQuest products. Each test has a reply from ProQuest responding to each point of improvement, if it is listed on the noncompliance or known issues list, and stating when the issue is planned to be addressed by the quarter and year.

Critical Evaluation

ProQuest has a long history of providing access to Black studies resources going back to the 1980s with microfilm collections. That curated content has now grown to a unique digital collection of primary and secondary resources not found anywhere else. PQBS is in essence a subscribed content upgrade to an existing database of collections; however, tiered access models and pricing allow for purchasing flexibility and options for institutions' varying budgets and the desire to meet the resource needs of patrons.

The ProQuest user experience and user interface are highly intuitive and easy to use. If any questions arise, the Help section available in the static navigation bar offers a pop-up browser manual for the section of the website the user is in. Clearly, much thought has gone into the navigation, searching, discovery, and citation of the documents found in the database. While using PQBS, I was left wanting only for small navigation quality-of-life updates, which would be efficiency improvements that might not be noticed by most users. The varied searching functionalities accommodate researchers at all levels. The layered results pages with filtering availability at each step make discovering resources straightforward while also helping researchers learn what types of primary and secondary resources comprise their research materials and what patterns and information may emerge when filtering broad searches with many results. In conjunction with the supplementary materials available to professors and students, it does feel as though ProQuest has implemented the feedback of the four members of the advisory board to the database on how people use it in the classroom and for research. I think this product is an excellent resource for researchers ranging from undergraduates to PhD scholars, faculty, and historians.

Competitive Products

Four established vendors come to mind when considering African American history collections and newspapers: Accessible Archives, Adam Matthew, EBSCO, and Readex. Accessible Archives is a privately held corporation whose sales and marketing are handled by Unlimited Priorities. Its full-text database of primary source materials includes books, historical newspapers, pamphlets, and other archived material that focuses not only on Black Studies but also on several areas that are directly related and important to the subject area from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Its reach extends to grade schools and genealogists as well as to the academic market.

Adam Matthew is an independent subsidiary within the Sage Group. It is a digital publishing company whose collection African American Communities is the closest to PQBS in its thematic collection of primary resources, including oral histories, papers, photographs, periodicals, and more. The collection's focus on the daily lives of Black people concentrates on "race relations across social, political, cultural, and religious arenas," revealing "the challenges of racism, discrimination and integration, and the expressions of a unique African American culture and identity" from 1836 to 1986 (Adam Matthew Digital Ltd. n.d.). Its full-text and indexed database provides patrons with a user-friendly interface to view objects and primary sources along with detailed citation information for each resource, including the copyright holder. This collection is a staple for academics studying African American culture and history.

EBSCO Industries Inc. is a division of EBSCO Information Services, a privately held and family-owned company—one of the largest in the United States. EBSCO provides access to databases and e-journals, along with other services related to serials and monographs, across a wide variety of content and subjects. The African American Historical Series Collection is the competitive archive of periodicals that documents the history of African American religious life and culture from 1829 to 1922.

Finally, Readex, a division of NewsBank Inc., offers a fully searchable archival database of primary source materials of historical books, newspapers, and government publications. Its database and collections are also not focused solely on Black studies; they offer several unique collections that university researchers and students in African American history and related disciplines would find useful. African American Newspapers: By Series is the most closely related resource and covers the years 1827 to 1998.

ProQuest's database is more robust and offers more advanced features than Accessible Archives' very basic keyword searching. However, Adam Matthew, EBSCO, and Readex offer both Basic and Advanced Search options with indexed terms and more filtering options than Accessible Archives. Since Adam Matthew, EBSCO, and Readex have keyword and indexed terms, albeit fewer than ProQuest, it alleviates the initial requirement for more knowledge of specific key terms to find desired materials. Adam Matthew has a PDF viewer and detailed citations that compare to ProQuest's efforts in terms of providing patrons with an accessible and varied way to view and interact with the digital objects. In addition, the detailed citations provided for each object helps researchers find and connect to other materials and organizations related to their search and desired resources.

All four vendors have unique collections covering different time periods and regions within their databases and are great assets to researchers. It would be up to an institution's needs and means if it wishes to purchase perpetual access with annual host fees to these collections in addition to or instead of subscribed access to PQBS.

Purchase & Contract Provisions

Contract terms and conditions are standard. A copy of an end-user agreement can be requested from the Sales Team. General terms and conditions are available online at <https://about.proquest.com/en/about/terms-and-conditions>. Text and data mining is allowed through TDM Studio. A subscription allows an unlimited number of simultaneous users to access the database.

Authentication

Authentication and remote access are handled primarily through IP address ranges and proxy servers. ProQuest also offers other authentication methods: proxy, bar code, Shibboleth, referring URL, and manual login. Remote access is allowed as long as the user follows the terms, which state that customers must limit remote access to authorized users via a secure method of verification.

Author's References

Adam Matthew Digital Ltd. n.d. "African American Communities." Accessed September 11, 2022. <https://www.amdigital.co.uk/primary-sources/african-american-communities>

ProQuest Black Studies Review Scores Composite: ★★★★

The maximum number of stars in each category is 5.

Content: ★★★★

PQBS contains a vast collection of primary and secondary sources found nowhere else, covering a range of disciplines, about Black culture and experience.

User Interface/Searchability: ★★★★

A user-friendly search interface that also caters to advanced researchers offers extensive keyword searching in combination with specifically indexed terms. A wide variety of search limiters and supplemental functionalities and resources support users as they research.

Pricing: ★★★★

The price is a custom quote that depends on FTE, current related subscriptions, and perpetually purchased related collections.

Purchase/Contract Options: ★★★★

The contract and purchase terms seem standard and do not contain any overly restrictive clauses. Most content is owed and supplied to ProQuest by third-party licensors, so copyright agreements and continuation of service are determined by the owners.

Accessible Archives Inc. n.d. "African-American Newspapers Webinar Deck." Accessed August 14, 2022. <https://www.accessible-archives.com/collections/african-american-newspapers/webinar-deck>

EBSCO Information Services. n.d. "About EBSCO." Accessed September 11, 2022. <https://www.ebsco.com/about>

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Readex. n.d. "America's Historical Newspapers." Accessed August 14, 2022. <https://www.readex.com/products/americas-historical-newspapers>

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About the Author

Michele N. Hunt is an Acquisitions Librarian/Assistant Professor at Northern Illinois University. She has a BA in English language and literature, an MAT in elementary education from Rollins College, and an MLS from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. She currently manages the Acquisitions Unit in the Technical Services Department with the help of three skilled staff members. Her research interests are in assessment, analytics, history of tenure, and video game history. She is currently working on a coauthored paper focusing on library policy revision through an accessibility, diversity, equity, and inclusion lens. This is her first review for *The Charleston Advisor*. ■

Free Text Keywords: African American history | Black Studies | Black history | civil rights | culture | history | political history

Primary Category: History & Area Studies

Secondary Categories: Multidisciplinary (or interdisciplinary)

Type of Product Being Reviewed: Primary source digital content; Streaming video

Target Audience: Undergraduate (including community colleges); Graduate/Faculty/Researcher

Access: Subscription