Blackface Broadcasting in the Early Days of Radio

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Numerous radio historians have studied the significance and influence of Amos 'n' Andy *during broadcasting's formative years, but scant attention has been paid to other programs that were similarly inspired by the traditions of blackface minstrelsy. This study traces the history of radio minstrelsy as a distinct genre and outlines its influence on other forms of programming using evidence drawn from trade publications and newspaper articles, the previous literature on early radio, and surviving audio recordings. The study also examines "hillbilly" shows from radio's early years, which drew from a similar performance tradition.*

In a study of blackface entertainment on the BBC, Michael Pickering (1996) writes that historians' neglect of the topic is a story of "omission and evasion" (p. 161). The same is true of American radio history. Much has been written about radio, its history, programming, and social impact, but to date, no historian has specifically studied the phenomenon of radio minstrel shows in the United States. When the subject has been broached, it has been within the context of a larger study, with perhaps a few paragraphs devoted to these specific programs, followed by a much lengthier discussion of *Amos 'n' Andy* (Barlow, 1999; Boskin, 1986; Hilmes, 1997; MacDonald, 1979; Vaillant, 2002; Watkins, 1994; Wertheim, 1979). This series was enormously popular, but it was certainly not the only radio program based on the traditions of the 19th-century minstrel show. The purpose of this study is to examine the entire genre of radio minstrelsy to illustrate how the specific conventions of blackface were adapted for broadcast presentation. This research not only fills a void in the historical record but also sheds light on the complex interplay of race, class, and gender within popular culture, themes that continue to fascinate and frustrate media scholars.[1]

Toll (1974) wrote that White performers had been "blacking up" since before the American Revolution, though minstrel shows did not crystallize into a distinct tradition until the 1840s (p. 26). In 1843, four White men calling themselves "The Virginia Minstrels" darkened their faces, adopted exaggerated dialects to parody Black speech, and performed a mixture of comedy and songs. The act inspired imitators across the country, and the minstrel show became "a national institution virtually overnight" (p. 21). "Minstrelsy," the name given to this theatrical form, enjoyed great

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popularity for a few decades. In major cities, minstrel troupes even built their own theaters, known as "Ethiopian opera houses" (p. 32). By the 1880s, blackface acts were no longer in vogue, and "by 1915, the professional minstrel show was practically a thing of the past" (Davidson, 1952, p. 180).

As the first form of popular entertainment created for working-class Americans, minstrelsy has generated a significant amount of scholarship. Some historians have charted its influence on later forms of entertainment, such as vaudeville, blues, ragtime, jazz, and country music, whereas other scholars have sought to explain the cultural significance of blackface (Bean, Hatch, & McNamara, 1996; Cockrell, 1997; Davidson, 1952; Lott, 1993; Roediger, 1999; Rogin, 1996; Toll, 1974).

For the handful of scholars who have devoted some attention to radio minstrel shows, racial discrimination has been the principal explanation. Both Hilmes (1997) and Vaillant (2002), for example, discussed these programs in relation to the construction of "whiteness" during radio's early years. This argument is one of the more popular explanations of minstrelsy in general, and historians have detailed how immigrant groups, particularly the Irish and the Jews, used the art form as a means to assimilate themselves into the ethnic mainstream (Roediger, 1999; Rogin, 1996). By clearly defining what it meant to be "Black," these groups aligned themselves on the other side of the racial divide.

In his book on the topic, Lott (1993) explored the "contradictory racial impulses at work" in minstrelsy (p. 4). He argued that the phenomenon cannot be understood only in terms of racial domination, an explanation previously used to dismiss blackface. To White audiences, African Americans were perceived as simple and unsophisticated, but they were also seen to embody the freedom of a preindustrial, agrarian lifestyle. Admittedly, this perception of Black culture was wrapped up in stereotypes, but it is not the kind of straightforward racial discrimination typically associated with blackface.

The concept of race cannot be ignored in any discussion of minstrelsy, but this research takes its theoretical lead from Lott (1993). The "construction of whiteness" theory can be used to explain some of radio minstrelsy's appeal, but it is impossible to fully understand this phenomenon if the discussion is restricted to a narrow view of racial domination. Minstrelsy perpetuated negative stereotypes of African Americans, to be sure, but there was more going on behind the blackface mask than initially meets the eye.

In order to study this obscure genre of early radio programming, I consulted a diverse variety of sources. Radio fan magazines held by the New York Public Library Performing Arts Division contained much information on the subject, as did the personal papers of Dailey Paskman, a radio program director of the 1920s, whose papers are kept by the same institution.[2] I also scanned microfilmed copies of *Variety,* particularly the reviews of specific radio programs for the years 1927 through 1937. From private collectors, I obtained as many recordings of radio minstrels shows as possible, supplementing this collection with select programs held by the Museum of Television and Radio in New York City.[3] The previous literature on broadcasting history yielded

further evidence on the topic. Given the lack of reliable information on the subject, as well as the practical limitation of my research, this article should be viewed as an exploratory study that in broad strokes delineates the history of radio minstrel shows, as well as their influence.

Rise and Fall

Minstrel shows were present from the earliest years of radio broadcasting. Pittsburgh station KDKA, whose opening in 1920 is traditionally cited as the birth of broadcasting, aired a complete minstrel show during its first year of operation ("Westinghouse to Cover Country," 1921).

In 1923, the blackface act of the "Gold Dust Twins," also known as "Goldy and Dusty," aired over New York station WEAF (Barnouw, 1966, p. 158). The *Gold Dust Twins* was one of the first shows to incorporate the name of the sponsor, The Gold Dust Corporation, into the name of the program, a practice that eventually became the industry standard (Douglas, 1987, p. 89). The act of Harvey Hindemeyer and Earl Tucker derived from the conventions of minstrelsy and their program featured "excellent banjo playing," an instrument first popularized by 19th-century blackface acts ("News Briefs From the Broadcasters," 1925).

By 1925, a number of stations regularly aired minstrel shows, including WLS and KYW (Chicago), WGBS (New York City), and KOA (Denver).[4] Hilmes (1997) found it odd that radio adapted this type of entertainment, which was "predicated on purely visual elements … that could not be transmitted over the air" (p. 87). But minstrels created the image of African Americans through more than appearance, for they also used the vocal technique that Watkins (1994) dubbed "racial ventriloquism" (p. 271). Some shows reinforced the minstrel image by referencing "burnt cork," a traditional makeup technique used to darken the faces of White performers. WLW (Cincinnati), for example, broadcast the *Burnt Cork Review* in 1926 (Watkins, 1994, p. 271), and NBC aired the *Burnt Cork Dandies* in 1934 (Hickerson, 1992, p. 59).

In a valuable reference work, Summers (1971) categorized the programming of the national radio networks from 1926–1956. Among the minstrel shows cited by Summers are the *Dutch Master Minstrels* on NBC Blue from 1928–1932 and the *Molle Minstrels* on NBC Red from 1934–1935. Radio minstrelsy was seen as particularly appealing to an older, male audience (Hilmes, 1997, p. 80), and the specific sponsors of these two shows, cigars and shaving cream, respectively, support this claim.

Summers's (1971), in his book, asserted that the *Sinclair Weiner Minstrels* appeared on NBC Blue from 1932–1936; both dates are misleading. The show had been airing on Chicago station WENR since at least 1929 ("WENR Minstrels," 1931). When NBC took over operation of the station, the already existing minstrel show attracted a sponsor, Sinclair Oil, and the name was thus changed. After the sponsorship ended, the same program survived but was now simply called *Minstrel Show.*[5] In their respective works, Watkins (1994) and Wertheim (1979) listed the *Sinclair Weiner Minstrels,*

along with Summers's airdates, and then listed *Minstrel Show* as if it were a separate program. This one example illustrates the difficulty, in fact near impossibility, of pinning down definitive information for radio programs of this era.

The blackface act that enjoyed the longest run on radio, next to *Amos 'n' Andy,* was the unusually prolific team of Pick Padgett and Pat Malone. In 1935, *Life* magazine dubbed them "perhaps the worst blackface team in existence" (cited in Slide, 1987, p. 34), yet they managed to remain on the radio, in one form or another, from 1929 until 1945 (Hickerson, 1992, pp. 316–317; Lackmann, 1996, p. 193). Using the names Pick and Pat, they first appeared on WOR (New York City), and then had their own show on CBS from 1934–1939, under a variety of names (Summers, 1971). For some of these years, they pulled double duty, as they starred on their own show while simultaneously playing the characters Molasses and January on the variety series *Showboat* (Lackmann, 1996, p. 193). Boskin (1986) reprinted some of their material in his book *Sambo* and noted that they "pandered to the Jim Crow tradition with its accent on mindless joking and crass dialect" (p. 167).

The long running *Aunt Jemima* series also bore the unmistakable mark of minstrelsy. This fictional character, a quintessential version of the mammy stereotype, was first brought to life on the minstrel stage (Manring, 1998, p. 61), before being adopted for advertising purposes by the Quaker Oats company. In various lengths and formats, the series aired from 1929–1953 on both CBS and NBC Blue, and featured traditional minstrel songs and blackface dialect (Hickerson, 1992, p. 27).

The handful of shows from the major networks, however, does not accurately indicate the popularity of this genre during the 1920s and 1930s, as local stations from coast to coast broadcast dozens of minstrel shows. Given the success of minstrelsy in the previous century, it is not surprising that this form of entertainment would appear in some form during radio's formative period. Surprisingly, however, these radio programs explicitly embodied specific conventions, utilizing the vocabulary, character names, jokes, songs, and structure of traditional minstrelsy.[6]

In the typical minstrel show, a character known as the "interlocutor" served as the master of ceremonies, and he spoke a more standard version of English than the other performers. Recordings of radio minstrel shows reveal not only the consistent use of an interlocutor, but even his traditional opening phrase, "Gentlemen, be seated!"

The minstrel troupe sat in a semicircle, with the two performers on the end known logically enough as the "endmen." They provided the bulk of the comedy, trading puns, riddles, and quips with the interlocutor. Tambo and Bones were the most common names for radio endmen, just as they had been in the previous century, and they continued to use the standard malaprop-laden dialect.

Toll (1974) wrote that derogatory jokes about women and women's rights were a standard element of the minstrel repertoire (p. 162), and this trend continued with radio. In a 1931 recording of *Dailey Paskman's Radio Minstrels,* for example, Mr. Bones tells the interlocutor that his hobby is women. When the interlocutor points out that Mr. Bones is married, the response is, "Yes, but that ain't no hobby!" This (not particu-

larly clever) remark characterizes the genre, which consistently portrayed marriage as the worst fate that could befall a man.

In addition to mocking women and marriage, endmen also joked about stealing chickens, gambling, and drinking. Commentary about current events and politics was also brought into the mix, as illustrated by the *Georgia Minstrel Boys* on WGY (Schenectady, NY) in 1924. According to a mention in *Radio Digest Illustrated,* the troupe aired a "clever burlesque" called the "Darktown National Convention" which spoofed the events of the Republican and Democratic parties ("Headliners of the Week," 1924).

The comedy on radio minstrel shows was interspersed with lively banjo numbers and sentimental ballads, common elements of a blackface act. The genre adopted the conventions of the art form so completely that even elements that made little sense for purely aural presentation, such as dancing and parades, appeared in the broadcasts.[7] Many early minstrel performers were Irish, and the link between this ethnic group and blackface entertainment continued into radio with KWK (St. Louis) airing the *Irish Minstrel Show* ("Irish Minstrel Show," 1936).

Most radio programs were based on the first part of the traditional minstrel show, characterized by the elements outlined previously. Typically, this first part was followed by an "olio," the middle part of the program, which featured specialty acts. Stump speeches were common during the olio, where a comic delivered a serious talk riddled with mispronounced words. After the olio was an "afterpiece," a comedy sketch that involved several performers. These afterpieces began as depictions of peaceful plantation life, though by the 1880s, parodies of Shakespeare and other scenarios were also common (Toll, 1974, p. 56).

Although not part of every radio minstrel show, at least some did feature olios or afterpieces. A *Variety* review of the *Modern Minstrels,* for example, stated that famous blackface artist Bert Swor performed a "monolog in the second part," and that the show ended with a sketch called the "Fatal Wedding" that involved "the entire company" ("Modern Minstrels," 1934). Even better examples of afterpieces can be found in two episodes of the *Jack Benny Show.* In 1936 and 1942, the cast performed their version of a minstrel show, and both episodes conclude with a blackface parody of *Romeo and Juliet.*

Closely related to radio minstrel shows proper were the two-man acts, such as Moran and Mack, also known as the Two Black Crows, who reduced the art form to its simplest element, the endmen. In the early 1920s, the duo appeared on the *Eveready Hour,* one of the first successful variety shows on radio, and were then featured on the CBS series the *Majestic Hour* for a few seasons (Dunning, 1976, p. 187; Summers, 1971). Recordings of their radio performances do not exist, although they did produce a series of successful records in the 1920s. Jokes about raising farm animals and tangling with the police derived from the traditional stereotypes of lazy, uneducated Blacks.

Two performers in Chicago, Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll, revolutionized the formula of the blackface act. In 1926, their show *Sam and Henry* premiered over

WGN and ushered in a new era of broadcast programming (Ely, 1991, p. 54). Gosden and Correll utilized the standard blackface dialect, but their characters radically departed from the typical Tambo and Bones. Sam and Henry were presented as real characters, with some sympathetic elements, whose adventures gradually unfolded over episodes that aired on a daily basis. Moran and Mack, on the other hand, simply told a random collection of jokes. Listeners did not have to hear one routine to understand the next.

In 1929, NBC took the program national, although the name had been changed by this point to *Amos 'n' Andy* for contractual reasons (Ely, 1991, p. 57). The immediate and unparalleled success inspired a number of other shows to adopt a similar formula, including *George and Rufus* on WOV (Brooklyn) and *Anaesthetic and Cerebellum* on KGW (Portland) (MacDonald, 1979, p. 344). Describing these other acts, Watkins (1994) wrote that "some are more memorable for their bizarre names than for their humor" (p. 272).

Despite their influence on the genre, however, it is a mistake to credit *Amos 'n' Andy* as solely responsible for the popularity of blackface radio. Indeed, when Gosden and Correll first began their show, critics charged that much of their material was taken from the routines of Black comics Miller and Lyles (Ely, 1991, p. 166), and *Variety* initially compared them to Moran and Mack ("Funny Boys," 1927).

Although some performers reduced the minstrel show to only two comics, others took the practice of racial ventriloquism to an even greater extreme—one-man minstrel shows. In these acts, a single performer created a variety of voices, such as George Lee, who played the endmen as well as the interlocutor on WMCA (New York City) ("George Lee," 1934). Jimmy Scribner, meanwhile, utilized 22 distinct Black voices in the program *The Johnson Family,* which began in 1936 and ran for over a decade (MacDonald, 1979, p. 345).

Although radio minstrel shows flourished during the 1920s and 1930s, minstrelsy was largely defunct as a form of professional stage entertainment. Radio thus provided an outlet for performers whose careers might otherwise have been over, such as the legendary duo McIntyre and Heath, who appeared over WEAF ("McIntyre and Heath," 1934). Barlow (1999) described this dynamic succinctly: "Radio came of age during the twilight of blackface minstrelsy and helped prolong its slow demise" (p. 8). Dailey Paskman expressed a similar sentiment, although he was far more enthusiastic. In 1928, he coauthored a book on blackface entertainment which included a photo of his own troupe, known simply as the "Radio Minstrels" (Paskman & Spaeth, 1928). The photo's caption noted that minstrelsy had been "reborn at the microphone, revived in the modern theatre" by the technology of radio. Perhaps the lack of the grotesque visual image allowed the aural version of minstrelsy to survive longer than the stage version.

Variety reviews of these programs consistently noted that minstrelsy was an outdated, old-fashioned form of entertainment: "Strange to show business minds is the popularity in Chicago of the WENR Minstrels. Nothing is deader in show business proper than minstrelsy" ("Inside Stuff—Radio," 1932, p. 48). Another review stressed

that the audience for such programming was in the rural (and nonelectrified) regions: "Selections are of the vintage of two decades ago on the possibly valid theory that popular tunes take quite awhile to percolate into the kerosene lamp districts" ("Murphy's Minstrels," 1931, p. 82).

Although these radio programs were criticized for being tedious relics of an earlier era, there was remarkably little criticism from the mainstream press concerning the racist content. In 1929, *Variety* noted that the national networks had a permanent ban against comedy in any dialect, although "blackface talk" was acceptable ("Yid Comedy Gets Over," 1929). Blackface entertainment was not only seen as nonoffensive but as wholesome and acceptable for all ages. "I believe there is no finer, cleaner humor than that contained in the old-time minstrel shows," wrote Dailey Paskman (1927).

In his study of *Amos 'n' Andy,* Ely (1991) described critical newspaper coverage but noted that the resistance was centered within the Black press (pp. 173–177). The African American community, however, was not unified in its displeasure with the show, with attitudes split along class lines (pp. 179–181). Blacks in the upper and middle classes, for example, were most alarmed by the show's negative potential, whereas lower class Blacks were more willing to embrace the humor. Although the Black press expressed some outrage over the racial stereotypes of *Amos 'n' Andy,* the mainstream press in the 1920s and 1930s was silent about the racism of radio minstrel shows.

In contrast to the original minstrel acts, the radio shows did not seek to present authentic representations of African American culture. Admittedly, the blackface acts of the 19th century were not accurate representations of African Americans, although they nonetheless promoted themselves as such. Radio minstrelsy, by comparison, was a nostalgic, self-reflective art form that strove to recreate earlier forms of minstrelsy. The shows created by Dailey Paskman, for example, specifically imitated the famous acts of Bert Williams and others. The theme song for Pick and Pat's show in 1935 also exemplifies this nostalgic appeal. Entitled "Bring Back Those Minstrel Days," the lyrics recall such famous minstrels as Lew Dockstader, Honeyboy Evans, and Primrose and West, explicitly linking the radio program to popular performers from decades before.

Popular culture, however, is not a static, reified mass, and can represent numerous, often contradictory, points of view. Although most listeners thought of radio minstrel shows as old-fashioned nostalgia acts, there were some who did see them as realistic representations of Black culture. In the August 1930 edition of *Radio Digest* for example, the editor praised the New Orleans-based blackface team Smokey Joe and Tee-tain because they educated the public about "a little known race of Americans—the French speaking n****** of the Delta Region" ("Look Out fo' Mah Operation," 1930, pp. 81–82).

During World War II, the more extreme racial stereotypes began to disappear from radio due to a concerted effort from both government and industry (MacDonald, 1979, pp. 346–356). Radio minstrel shows declined during this period as well, perhaps for similar reasons. Some programs, however, managed to survive beyond this

point. Pick and Pat inexplicably stretched their career all the way into the age of video and starred in an ABC television series ("American Minstrels of 1949," 1949).

The "construction of whiteness" concept could also be invoked to explain the decline of this genre. If minstrelsy was a means for immigrants to portray themselves as White, it could be argued that by the middle of the 20th century, this mechanism was no longer needed. By this point, these groups had successfully achieved some level of integration within mainstream America.

Another plausible theory, one that does not invoke race, is that radio minstrel shows were stuck in an "artistic adolescence," unwilling to evolve with the changing demands of the audience. As radio's popularity grew, the programs became more polished, yet minstrel shows continued to use material from decades before. The lack of women in minstrelsy has been cited as a principal reason for the overall decline of this art form (Davidson, 1952, p. 213), and the exclusion of women may have similarly hampered the radio shows. Minstrelsy, considered outdated even in the 1920s, was even more of a relic by the early 1940s.

Influence

Determining a precise death date for the genre's tombstone is difficult because minstrelsy did not come to a complete finale. Instead it filtered into other forms of entertainment. The basic structure of the minstrel show, a mixture of comedy and songs, is also the same formula of radio variety shows, and the former certainly had some influence on the latter. Furthermore, both Eddie Cantor and Al Jolson launched their careers through blackface before hosting successful variety shows on radio. Should we thus deduce that variety shows directly descend from minstrel shows?

Davidson (1952) took this argument even further when he wrote that a standard technique of variety shows, in which supporting characters poke fun at the host, is merely another form of endmen mocking the interlocutor (p. 204). If we combine Davidson's statement with minstrelsy's recognized influence on jazz, blues, ragtime, and country music, we are left with a most confusing assumption: Virtually all of the programming on early radio is derived from blackface minstrelsy.

This argument, too extreme to be taken literally, is worth raising because it highlights the difficulty in charting the specific influence of one art form. By the 1920s, minstrelsy had already influenced so many aspects of popular culture that it began to fade into the background; its influence defied precise definition. Despite such difficulty, a few specific radio traditions can be linked to minstrelsy, including "Negro spiritual" shows, "Uncle Remus" shows, the practice of gender ventriloquism, and hillbilly comedy shows.

A *Variety* review of the KFI (Los Angeles) series *Plantation Nights,* which was based around spiritual and gospel songs, harkened back to the earliest days of minstrel shows: "Imaginary locale is an old southern plantation where the darkies come to serenade the owner" ("Plantation Nights," 1932, p. 44). There were many such programs during ra-

dio's early years, and despite the fact that the performers may have been actual African Americans, the public associated this form of entertainment with blackface.

Minstrelsy also proved compatible with children's entertainment, and a number of radio performers adopted the "Uncle Remus" persona to tell stories in dialect. An article in *Radio Digest Illustrated* stated that the performer on KHJ (Los Angeles) is the "only one," as far as California is concerned ("Uncle Remus Gives Radiophans Treat," 1925). The character known as "Spareribs" from the *Sinclair Weiner Minstrels* also had his own show devoted to bedtime stories for children ("Spareribs," 1934).

Female impersonation was a common element of blackface shows, especially towards the end of the 19th century (Toll, 1974, pp. 139–140), and the practice of gender ventriloquism was also common in early radio, with White performers playing the roles of Black women. Marlin Hurt is perhaps the most famous example of this phenomenon. He was the voice of "Beulah," a Black maid, on the popular series *Fibber McGee and Molly,* before the character was spun off into her own program (Watkins, 1994, pp. 284–285).

Radio minstrelsy had an even greater impact on the genre of "hillbilly" programs. Summers (1971) divided radio shows into various genres, one category of which was "hillbilly minstrel" shows. This label indicates a significant overlap between two genres, hillbilly and minstrel, that has also complicated this research. From reading only the *Variety* reviews, it is difficult to separate the genres: They both featured comedians with unusual names speaking in dialect, banjo numbers, and corny jokes, and were both seen as having a primarily rural appeal. For example, how do we categorize *Plantation Party*? Using the information from Summers's book, Wertheim (1979) said this was a minstrel show (p. 28), but Hickerson (1992) described it as a "country & western musical variety" program (p. 318). Separating the genres is not just academic hairsplitting; there is a crucial distinction between the two. In the hillbilly shows, the minstrel dialect became a nonracially specific "Southern" accent, and poor Whites served as the unassimilated "Other" in place of the comical Black characters.

The Grand Ole Opry, the most influential radio program in country music, clearly illustrates this dynamic of "minstrel-into-hillbilly." In *Bluegrass Breakdown: The Making of the Old Southern Sound,* Cantwell (1984) devoted an entire chapter to the influence of minstrelsy on this radio program (pp. 249–274). Cantwell is specific when he writes that George Hay adopted the conventions of minstrelsy in creating the Opry, "reserving the interlocutor's role for himself and [placing] his rural musicians in roles formerly occupied by stage representation of Negroes" (p. 254). Hay called his program the *Grand Ole Opry* as way of spoofing high culture, and it should be recalled that the first minstrel theaters were similarly known as "Ethiopian opera houses." Another example of how closely the two genres were related: The first full-time comedian on the Opry was Lasses White, a blackface comic who also had his own minstrel show on WSM (Nashville) (Wolfe, 1999, pp. 225–230).

By pointing out the overlap between the hillbilly and minstrel shows of radio's early years, I do not mean to suggest that there was a direct evolution of one form of programming into another. Although these examples indicate that at least some perform-

ers and some material migrated from blackface acts to hillbilly shows, minstrelsy alone does not entirely account for the origins of hillbilly programs. Stories and stage performances with rural characters, especially as contrasted with more-educated urban residents, have a long history that predates minstrelsy.

It would be negligent to discuss the history of radio minstrel shows without addressing the image of African Americans that they promoted. Granted, the issue of minority representation during broadcasting's early period is a complex subject, deserving of its own treatment, but it must be noted that minstrelsy supported negative stereotypes of Black culture. The minstrel shows were also a method by which comedy and music (allegedly) of African American origin could be broadcast over the airwaves, without actually having to employ African American performers. When Blacks were fortunate enough to appear on radio, they were frequently forced to play roles that Whites had originated. Hilmes (1997), for example, noted that Black comics Eddie Green and Ernest Whitman played Molasses and January on *Showboat* (p. 80), although Pick Padgett and Pat Malone created these characters. This unfortunate sequence of events occurred, no doubt, countless times.

Conclusion

Given current sensitivities towards issues of race, it is understandable why previous discussions of the genre have used racial domination as the primary explanation. Based on this research, however, it is not clear that race fully explains minstrelsy. A nostalgic appeal was equally important: Minstrelsy evoked an earlier, idyllic time when life was less complicated. Part of this simpler era may have included the restriction of Blacks to a certain role, although much of the material from radio minstrel shows contains no reference to race, and most of the songs were performed without dialect.

The element of nostalgia, central to radio minstrelsy's appeal, was equally important to the hillbilly shows of the period. Both genres invoked a similar image of a rural, rustic past. In the hillbilly shows, however, the distinction of race became instead a distinction of class, and a complete explanation of radio minstrelsy must take into account the centrality of class to its appeal. When the endmen made fun of the interlocutor, was this a statement about the division of the races or the division of class? Can the two issues be cleanly separated?

Although the original purpose of this research was to document the blackface radio shows that have lived in the shadow of *Amos 'n' Andy,* an unintended end result has been an increased understanding for this famous show. Previous radio historians have referred to *Amos 'n' Andy* as a minstrel show, failing to realize how significantly this program broke from established conventions of minstrelsy. Gosden and Correll did use the notorious dialect, but their program otherwise contained none of the standard minstrel conventions. Another equally significant change made by Gosden and Correll was that they did not acknowledge, at least within the program, that they were White. When other blackface performers called themselves minstrels and made references to burnt cork, they were acknowledging that they were "playing" Black. Some

scholars have pointed out that Gosden and Correll avoided the most malicious stereotypes (Ely, 1991; Wertheim, 1979), but the fact that they presented themselves over the airwaves as "real" Blacks gave even more destructive potential to their act.

The way minstrelsy adapted to the demands of the audience exemplifies the hegemonic process. In one of the more famous discussions of hegemony and broadcasting, Gitlin (2000) wrote that "the hegemonic system is not cut-and-dried, not definitive. It has continually to be reproduced, continually superimposed, continually to be negotiated and managed" (p. 590). Minstrelsy, which among other things embodied the dominant racist attitudes of society, was no longer seen as palatable to the public in the 1920s and 1930s, but Gosden and Correll successfully transformed the art form into something acceptable. In so doing, the new art form continued to support the racial, class, and gender divisions of the preexisting social order.

As stated earlier, my research has uncovered a wealth of information about a largely overlooked genre of radio programming and should be viewed as more of an opening argument rather than a final statement. Before the final word on radio minstrelsy can be written, additional research must be done to further understand the way gender and class operated within minstrel shows. The phenomenon should also be studied in relation to other ethnic stereotypes of the period, such as the Jewish, German, and Swedish acts that appeared on many programs. Although this article has raised many questions, it hopefully has elevated the subject of radio minstrelsy from the footnotes of history and established the genre as a topic worthy of serious academic research.

Notes

[1]For the purposes of this article, the words "blackface" and "minstrelsy" are treated as synonymous.

[2]The name "Paskman Papers" is used in this article to reference material used from this collection.

[3]A complete list of all recordings that were analyzed is included at the end of the reference list.

[4]This information comes from a variety of sources, specifically reference to WLS show in Ely (1991, p. 49), reference to KYW show in "Station Gleanings and News Briefs" (1925), numerous reference to WGBS show in the Paskman Papers, and reference to KOA show in "Broadcast Minstrel Show Makes Big Hit" (1925).

[5]This assertion is based on the fact that *Minstrel Show* continued in the same time slot formerly occupied by the *Sinclair Weiner Minstrels* (Summers, 1971) and had the same performer as the interlocutor (Hickerson, 1992, p. 267).

[6]Information regarding the specific traditions of minstrelsy is based on the works of Davidson (1952) and Toll (1974).

[7]Parades are featured in the *Showboat* episode (1937) and the *Jack Benny Show* (1942) features both an opening parade and dancing; dancing also appears in *Dailey Paskman Radio Minstrels* (1949).

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