

Representations of Blackface and Minstrelsy in Twenty-  
First Century Popular Culture

Jack HARBORD

School of Arts and Media  
University of Salford, Salford, UK

Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements of the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy, June 2015

## Table of Contents

<b>List of Figures</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1. Literature Review of Minstrelsy Studies</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2. Terminology and Key Concepts</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>3. Source Materials</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>4. Methodology</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>5. Showing Blackface</b>	
5.1. Introduction	58
5.2. Change the Joke: Blackface in Satire, Parody, and Irony	59
5.3. Killing Blackface: Violence, Death, and Injury	95
5.4. Showing Process: Burnt Cork Ritual, Application, and Removal	106
5.5. Framing Blackface: Mise-en-Abyme and Critical Distance	134
5.6. When Private goes Public: Blackface in Social Contexts	144
<b>6. Talking Blackface</b>	
6.1. Introduction	158
6.2. The Discourse of Blackface Equivalency	161
6.3. A Case Study in Blackface Equivalency: Iggy Azalea	187
6.4. Blackface Equivalency in Non-African American Cultural Contexts	194
6.5. Minstrel Show Rap: Three Case Studies	207
	i

**Conclusions: Findings in Contemporary Context**

**230**

**References**

**242**

## List of Figures

Figure 1 – Downey Jr. playing Lazarus playing Osiris	30
Figure 2 – Blackface characters in <i>Mantan: The New Millennium Minstrel Show</i>	64
Figure 3 – <i>Mantan</i> : Cotton plantation/watermelon patch	64
Figure 4 – <i>Mantan</i> : chicken coup	64
Figure 5 – Pierre Delacroix surrounded by African American caricature memorabilia	65
Figure 6 – Silverman and Eugene on return to café in ‘Face Wars’	71
Figure 7 – Blackface crowd outside the police station in ‘Face Wars’	73
Figure 8 – Smith family in blackface in ‘An Apocalypse to Remember’	75
Figure 9 – Chris Griffin in blackface as Bill Cosby in ‘Halloween on Spooner Street’	77
Figure 10 – Token Black wears whiteface in ‘Free Willzyx’	79
Figure 11 – Eric Cartman/Mitch Connor in blackface in ‘201’	80
Figure 12 – Cartman approaches the home of George Zimmerman wearing hooded top and blackface in ‘World War Zimmerman’	81
Figure 13 – Law enforcement official removes blackface from Cartman in ‘World War Zimmerman’	82
Figure 14 – Tracy Jordon in whiteface in ‘Believe in the Stars’	85
Figure 15 – Jenna Maroney in blackface in ‘Believe in the Stars’	86
Figure 16 – Maroney and L’Astname as ‘two black swans’ in ‘Christmas Attack Zone’	87
Figure 17 – Jon Hamm as Abner in ‘Live from Studio 6H’	89
Figure 18 – Dave Chappelle as ‘Racial Pixie’ in <i>Chappelle’s Show</i>	91
Figure 19 – Animated Manray dances at the end of a shotgun in <i>Bamboozled</i>	96

Figure 20 – Manray’s assassins wear the blackface merchandise masks of <i>Mantan</i> in <i>Bamboozled</i>	97
Figure 21 – Triangle of Sloane, Delacroix, and blackface film in <i>Bamboozled</i>	98
Figure 22 – Delacroix in blackface lies dying on his office floor in <i>Bamboozled</i>	99
Figure 23 – Ace Boon Coon is shot on the set of ‘Black and Ugly as Ever’ in ‘The Wu-Tang Candidate’	101
Figure 24 – Silverman is shot on the steps of the police station in ‘Face Wars’	104
Figure 25 – Collected images of burnt cork ritual in <i>Bamboozled</i>	108
Figure 26 – Lighting of match in <i>Bitch Bad</i>	110
Figure 27 – Pink wig on mannequin in <i>Bitch Bad</i>	110
Figure 28 – Corks in tin dish in <i>Bitch Bad</i>	110
Figure 29 – Burning corks in <i>Bitch Bad</i>	110
Figure 30 – Burning corks with ‘grills’ in <i>Bitch Bad</i>	110
Figure 31 – ‘Christy’s Melodies’ shows absent blackface	113
Figure 32 – Virginia Serenaders shows absent blackface	113
Figure 33 – W. H. West’s Big Minstrel Jubilee	113
Figure 34 – Al. G. Field Greater Minstrels	114
Figure 35 – Womack tentitively applies blackface	116
Figure 36 – Manray applies blackface for first time	116
Figure 37 – Womack applies blackface aggressively	116
Figure 38 – Manray appears passive and resigned in blackface	116
Figure 39 – Womack cries as he faces his blackface mask	117

Figure 40 – Male performer applies bandana in <i>Bitch Bad</i>	118
Figure 41 – Male performer displays grillz in <i>Bitch Bad</i>	118
Figure 42 – Female performer measures-up breast enhancers in <i>Bitch Bad</i>	118
Figure 43 – Female performer puts on wig in <i>Bitch Bad</i>	118
Figure 44 – Blackface in shoe polish tin in <i>Bitch Bad</i>	119
Figure 45 – Female performer first applies blackface in <i>Bitch Bad</i>	119
Figure 46 – Male performer applies blackface in <i>Bitch Bad</i>	119
Figure 47 – Female performer applies blackface in <i>Bitch Bad</i>	119
Figure 48 – Male performer applying red lip-stick in <i>Bitch Bad</i>	119
Figure 49 – Female performer puts on gloves in <i>Bitch Bad</i>	119
Figure 50 – Images of distress and sadness in <i>Bitch Bad</i>	120
Figure 51 – Pepitone applies Silverman’s blackface in ‘Face Wars’	121
Figure 52 – Pepitone take things seriously in ‘Face Wars’	121
Figure 53 – Make-up paraphernalia litters the make-up table in ‘Face Wars’	122
Figure 54 – Silverman shocked at the transformation in ‘Face Wars’	122
Figure 55 – Silverman overjoyed with the transformation in ‘Face Wars’	122
Figure 56 – Pigmentation alteration paraphernalia in <i>Tropic Thunder</i>	124
Figure 57 – Lazarus’s ‘dramatic reveal’ in <i>Tropic Thunder</i>	124
Figure 58 – Lazarus overjoyed with the transformation in <i>Tropic Thunder</i>	125
Figure 59 – Lazarus’s stages of blackface removal in <i>Tropic Thunder</i>	127
Figure 60 – Sarah Silverman with smudged blackface in ‘Face Wars’	128
Figure 61 – From blackface to Hitler Moustache in ‘Face Wars’	128

Figure 62 – Images of woman removing blackface in <i>Bitch Bad</i>	130
Figure 63 – Images of man removing blackface in <i>Bitch Bad</i>	131
Figure 64 – Black and white theatre in <i>Bitch Bad</i>	141
Figure 65 – White over black labour in <i>Bitch Bad</i>	141
Figure 66 – Theatre now in colour in <i>Bitch Bad</i>	141
Figure 67 – Lupe Fiasco and the staged images	142
Figure 68 – Whitney Isleib wears blackface make-up to a fancy dress party	147
Figure 69 – Coaches Brian Basteyns and Harold Seeley attend a fancy dress party dressed as members of the Jamaican bobsled team	148
Figure 70 – Waverly High School students re-enacted assault on Rihanna by Chris Brown	149
Figure 71 – Lambda Theta Delta fraternity members perform ‘Suit and Tie’	153
Figure 72 – Greg Cimeno and William Filene masquerading as Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman	154
Figure 73 – <i>From the Plantation to the Penitentiary</i> album artwork	172
Figure 74 – ‘Boz’s Juba’	223
Figure 75 – ‘Jube in Dance’	223
Figure 76 – ‘Juba in Charles Dickens’s <i>American Notes</i> ’	224
Figure 77 – Slaps of the foot in ‘Chicken Noodle Soup’	224
Figure 78 – Market step in ‘Chicken Noodle Soup’	227

To my parents David and Moira. I am immeasurably grateful for your unwavering patience and support, without which this work and all of my achievements would not have been possible.



## Abstract

Blackface minstrelsy just ain't what it used to be. This statement should not be understood as a call for the return of the minstrel show. Quite literally, minstrelsy and its central feature blackface manifest themselves in divergent ways from their nineteenth and twentieth century manifestations, convey a range of meanings, and serve a number of social and artistic functions in the twenty-first century. Through the analysis of a variety of texts and practices from across cultural fields including music, television, film, journalism, social media, and academic discourses of minstrelsy this thesis identifies how blackface and minstrelsy are manifested, their function in critical, artistic, and social contexts, and the effects of their appearance in popular culture. To achieve this, discussion utilises the analytical methodologies of semiotics and discourse analysis to identify the themes and tropes and consistencies and inconsistencies that form the image and concept of blackface minstrelsy in the twenty-first century. Initial conclusions point to a number of contrasting functions and effects: the notion of equivalency with cultural and industrial practices; use as a discursive and iconographic signifier of racism, exploitation, and marginalisation in cultural criticism; application in comedic, dramatic, and artistic contexts as a tool of satire, parody, and irony; and public displays of blackface, seemingly ignorant of its problematic signification. In conclusion, the thesis locates its findings within wider discourses of race, appropriation, and marginalisation in American society. Moreover, this is positioned in the light of recent tensions between African American communities and the police, the fiftieth anniversary of the 'Bloody Sunday' confrontation on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, and the proposal of post-racialism following the election of Barack Obama as United States President in 2008.

## Introduction

The blackface minstrel show occupies a special and particularly problematic place in American culture and history. Performed initially by white European descendants in North American cities, the minstrel show developed in popularity, commercial appeal, and cultural influence, and spread across the United States and the wider world as cultural export. Its essential premise—and the feature for which it is mostly remembered—is its portrayal of African American life and culture through masquerade. Performers wore blackface make-up and costumes and used this performance medium to depict a range of characters, scenarios, and performance practices that chimed with their audience’s social, political, and cultural desires and expectations. Its formation in the early 1800s represents ‘the first formal public acknowledgement by whites of black culture’ (Lott, 1995, p. 4) and would develop into the United States’ first definable native popular culture, kick-starting a commercial industry ‘at a time when [it] lacked a definable *national* culture’ (Mahar, 1999, p. 9). However, the minstrel show primarily relied upon the depiction of slave and African American life, the appropriation of African American cultural practice, the normalisation and mythology of slavery, and the use of archetypal and caricatured representations of figures in American society (mostly, but not exclusively African American). The minstrel show is now widely regarded as a force of racist hegemony in a society built on slave labour. Therefore, despite its role in shaping the culture industries of America and developing a vast body of works and performance practices which had lasting impact and influence, it is primarily seen in popular consciousness as one of America’s most reviled traditions. The minstrel show is no longer a going concern in American culture having waned in popularity during the late 1800s. However, its ability to reignite feelings of racism, marginalisation, and exploitation remains and it is this concept that this thesis investigates in twenty-first century popular culture.

With the aim of laying the groundwork for the later discussion of blackface minstrelsy, I provide a literature review of minstrelsy studies. This chapter does not provide a history of minstrelsy, but rather a historical review of minstrelsy studies with the aim of demonstrating how minstrelsy has been represented in academic study since it began to be taken seriously during the early twentieth century as a noteworthy form of cultural expression, with notable

influence and impact. The review also introduces a number of the sources that are used to inform later discussions. Furthermore, the review serves another important function: to demonstrate the similarities and differences in the treatment of minstrelsy in academic and popular contexts.

In further support of later discussion, I provide a chapter that defines and explores some key terms and concepts which appear throughout this work. Terms such as 'blackface', 'ethnic masquerade', and 'minstrel show' are placed into context with the aim of outlining the origins of key ideas, demonstrating the differences between terms and the ways in which they have been applied and interpreted, and to allow for free discussion of them later in the work.

As a number of examples appear throughout this work, I provide a chapter which introduces examples and explains their value to the analysis of blackface and minstrelsy in twenty-first century popular culture. Examples are drawn from a range of media types and as a result are subject to differing approaches to discussion, public scrutiny, and social impact.

Before engaging in textual analysis proper it is important to explain the approaches to analysis adopted in the chapters 'Showing Blackface' and 'Talking Blackface' (each of which are outlined in more detail shortly). I therefore provide a 'Methodology' chapter which establishes the key concepts and methods of representation, semiotics, and discourse analysis applied in these later chapters.

Through the analysis and discussion of a range of popular cultural texts and practices this thesis outlines the function and effects of blackface and minstrelsy in the twenty-first century. This is achieved by showing two broad uses of blackface and minstrelsy in popular culture: 'Showing Blackface' and 'Talking Blackface'. The former demonstrates the function and effect of blackface and minstrelsy in popular media such as music video, film, and television. 'Showing Blackface' is divided into a series of sections separated by theme.

'Change the Joke: Blackface in Satire, Parody, and Irony' explores the relationship between blackface and its use in satirical and parodic contexts. As the examples presented show,

blackface and satire have a symbiotic relationship. On the one hand, blackface and minstrel imagery are highly charged symbols of racism and therefore make for useful materials in the satirical treatment of race as a subject in cultural criticism. On the other hand, satire works to frame and justify the use of blackface and minstrel imagery in a society where its use often provokes angry responses. As is also shown in this section, the use of blackface in satirical contexts is not without its challenges and consequences.

'Killing Blackface: Violence, Death, and Injury' explores the juxtaposition of blackface and violence, a relationship that emerges in a range of examples presented in this work. Such violence can be inflicted by others or self-inflicted, and the alignment of blackface with suicide also shows the power of blackface over the individual. Furthermore, and much like its use in satirical contexts, the theme of violence and death works to justify its use by performing a symbolic execution. Additionally, death and injury very often emerge as the consequences of wearing blackface, framing the practice as dangerous and punishable.

'Showing Process: Burnt Cork Ritual, Application, and Removal' explores the function of the masking process and how burnt cork ritual, blackface application, and blackface removal function as narrative devices used to navigate the psychological implications of wearing the mask. The examples shown in this section approach the process in both similar and contrasting ways. However, the commonalities in narrative form and structure demonstrate the intertextual nature of blackface and minstrelsy in popular culture.

As the above chapter sections will show, it is often necessary to find ways of justifying the use of blackface and mitigating its potential for audience misreading and offence. One such way this is achieved is outlined in 'Framing Blackface: Mise-en-Abyme and Critical Distance'. This section looks to the postmodern narrative device of mise-en-abyme and its ability to both deconstruct the processes of performance and place distance between performers and the act of blacking-up in a time when unproblematised instances of blackface can attract criticism and public scrutiny.

Sections so-far-discussed focus on theatrical uses of blackface and minstrel show imagery and explore the various ways in which its exploitation is justified, explored, and framed.

'When Private Goes Public: Blackface in Social Contexts' investigates cases in which members of the public engage in acts of social blackface, the implications of which differ from those of authored theatrical uses. Key to demonstrating the functions and effects of social blackface is the role that the internet and social media have played in exposing such acts to a wider audience.

Alongside the visual and narrative uses of blackface exists a discourse that I term the *Discourse of Blackface Equivalency*, which I explore in the chapter 'Talking Blackface'. This represents the rhetorical expression of an equivalent relationship between twenty-first century cultural practice and the minstrel show and its subsequent legacy in twentieth-century culture. This chapter uses the methods of discourse analysis to draw out themes from a range of written and spoken examples which have appeared since the beginning of the new millennium. Similarly to 'Showing Blackface', 'Talking Blackface' is divided into sub-sections which each explore a different discursive use of blackface minstrelsy as an equivalent concept.

The chapter section 'The Discourse of Blackface Equivalency' explores the developing discourse which establishes connections between blackface minstrelsy as a performance practice, social and cultural phenomenon, and commercial enterprise, and contemporary African American cultural practices. The Discourse of Blackface Equivalency is primarily, though not exclusively, concerned with hip hop and rap culture (a consequence of its frequent and established use in cultural criticism) and is represented across a range of media platforms, attracting contributions from a variety of people from the fields of music, film, journalism, and social media.

A recent example provides a useful case-study in blackface equivalency which is explored in 'A Case Study in Blackface Equivalency: Iggy Azalea'. Having recently emerged as a major force in commercial rap, Iggy Azalea has upset many within the wider hip hop and rap community. One of the fundamental reasons for this is her ethnicity and national origins: Azalea is white and Australian. This combination has raised questions over the appropriation of rap music and culture by white performers and their subsequent commercial exposure and success.

A somewhat unexpected finding of this research is the discovery of a Discourse of Blackface Equivalency outside of African American cultural contexts and criticism. In the chapter section 'Blackface Equivalency in Non-African American Cultural Contexts' I investigate the use of blackface and the minstrel show as a critical discursive concept in four cases: the portrayal of homosexuality in film and television; the casting of able-bodied actors in place of disabled actors in film and television; the portrayal of Italian-Americans in the MTV show *Jersey Shore*; and the portrayal of geek or nerd culture in the CBS show *The Big Bang Theory*.

In the earlier chapter section 'The Discourse of Blackface Equivalency' I discuss a contribution by hip hop journalist Byron Crawford who identifies three music videos which he terms 'Minstrel Show Rap'. These examples are 'Chain Hang Low' by Jibbs; 'Fry That Chicken' by Ms. Peachez; and 'Chicken Noodle Soup' by DJ Webstar. Taking Crawford's designation as a starting point, each example is investigated in 'Minstrel Show Rap: Three Case Studies' to explore the potential presence of blackface performance practice and the critical discourse that each song and music video attracts.

Conclusions reunite the findings of both 'Showing Blackface' and 'Talking Blackface' to demonstrate the function and effects of blackface and minstrelsy in twenty-first century popular culture and cultural criticism. Fundamental to understanding the ongoing significance of blackface and minstrelsy is the recognition of race and racism as a continuing concern in American society. Therefore, the findings of analytical chapters are placed into the contemporary context of race-relations in 'Conclusions: Findings in Contemporary Context' with the aim of demonstrating why blackface and minstrelsy continue to resonate so loudly in the twenty-first century.

#### My Perspective

I am not American, nor have I spent much time in the country. I do not, however, consider myself an outsider to American culture and history. The ubiquity of American culture throughout the world (viewed both positively and negatively) leaves few people unaware of, or unaffected by, its influence. American commercial goods and services are pervasive and there are few regions of the world unfamiliar with the signs and symbols of American

culture. The wider international consumption of American popular culture is of particular importance and is described by George McKay in *Yankee Go Home (& Take Me With U): Americanization and Popular Culture* (1997) as 'our primary experience of the USA' and as a 'near unavoidable presence' (p. 12). The films of Hollywood, the syndicated shows of network television, and the sounds and styles of America's musical landscape from jazz to rock 'n' roll and from hip hop to grunge are consumed and imitated across the world.

Part of what has made this work possible is the proliferation of American popular culture via the internet and mass media. The digitisation of cultural texts has made access and consumption easier than ever before, its presence even less avoidable. As a result, my geographic distance from the culture at the centre of this study is largely irrelevant. This is for a number of reasons. Firstly, my research is text-based and analysis of sources is not necessarily location specific, though it may be important to consider localised perspectives when discussing examples. Secondly, many of my sources are distributed and consumed through international broadcast media and online resources, making their consumption and evaluation an international concern; many of the examples used in this study such as *South Park*, *American Dad!*, *Family Guy*, and *30 Rock* have significant international audiences. And finally, a great deal of the display and discussion of blackface happens online on websites, discussion forums, in YouTube videos, and through the online broadcast of media such as interviews, entertainment, and news, making the internet a key resource for the collection of materials in this work.

## 1. Literature Review of Minstrelsy Studies

### Introduction and Organisation

Minstrelsy studies can be understood as the cross-disciplinary academic study of blackface minstrelsy. It takes no particular formal approach and the subject is studied from a variety of perspectives in a range of disciplines including history, musicology, cultural studies, media studies, film studies, and drama and theatre studies—though many texts on the subject synthesise a combination of approaches. My intention with this literature review is to investigate the ways in which blackface minstrelsy is interpreted and studied in the academic literature of minstrelsy studies; it does not provide a history of minstrelsy, nor does it provide a complete and exhaustive review of all the literature on the subject. Following the criteria outlined by Harris M. Cooper in ‘Organizing knowledge synthesis: A Taxonomy of Literature Reviews’ (1988), the review focuses on texts deemed ‘purposive’ of minstrelsy studies (in Randolph, 2009, p. 4), in other words texts representative of a particular field or discipline of minstrelsy studies or those considered ‘central or pivotal’ to the field of study (Randolph, 2009, p. 4). In addition to this purposive approach, this literature review outlines the changes of disciplinary focus and scholarly perspective in the study of blackface minstrelsy over time; a subject with such a wide history and problematic status in cultural memory has seen significant changes to its academic perception and validity. Ultimately, this review defines the shape of minstrelsy studies *not* the shape of blackface minstrelsy and demonstrates how the academic study of the subject has contributed to a diverse understanding of the cultural phenomenon and its historical and ongoing impact on popular culture.

### Blackface Minstrelsy’s Relevance and Scholarly Study

Whenever I mention to people that my field of study is blackface minstrelsy it usually results in a couple of common reactions: the raising of eyebrows (either in curiosity or confusion – or a perplexed combination of the two) and the accompanying question: ‘Is blackface minstrelsy even relevant today?’ Often very little of the tradition is known by those with



whom I speak outside, and very often inside of the academic community. Their question is certainly legitimate; the antiquity and apparent social rejection of blackface minstrelsy would seem to point to a contemporary irrelevance. However, many scholars of minstrelsy argue that not only is it relevant, it has remained *present* in some form in popular culture ever since its emergence. Stephen Johnson proposes in *Burnt Cork: Traditions and Legacies of Blackface Minstrelsy* (2012a) that 'the blackface minstrel tradition has never left us' (p. 2), a perspective amplified by Harriet J. Manning in *Michael Jackson and the Blackface Mask* (2013) who points to a 'continuum of blackface minstrelsy [that] is everywhere to be found, from its imagery, stage gestures and dance to its numerous tropes and conventions' (p. 1). From these claims it would seem baffling that there was not greater scholarly attention paid to such a significant presence in contemporary culture and a wider awareness of the form and its significance amongst everyday audiences.

Susan Gubar in *Racechanges: White Skin, Black Face in American Culture* (1997) goes some way towards explaining the seemingly quizzical omission of blackface minstrelsy from popular memory and scholarly attention when she proposes that '[n]ot only has the blatant racism of minstrelsy (quite reasonably) made white impersonations of blacks seem shameful, it has also (less reasonably) spilled over to discourage scholarship about its ongoing impact on American culture' (p. xvii). Gubar highlights an important notion in understanding the common reaction of people to the subject of blackface minstrelsy and its relative absence from popular memory: it is a shameful and uncomfortable part of history and is therefore best forgotten, or as Michael Pickering puts it, 'quietly and conveniently forgotten' (in Manning, 2013, p. 1). Such forgetfulness becomes significant in the light of social blackface in which claims of ignorance proliferate. Manning supports Pickering's proposal by explaining that blackface minstrelsy is 'relatively ignored in many historical accounts of popular entertainment' and that 'the legacy of the tradition in popular culture remains largely overlooked' (2013, p. 1). Furthermore, doubt over blackface minstrelsy's value as a field of study and phenomenon with ongoing significance may too have played a role in its rejection. Mel Watkin points out that '[u]ntil recently...the true historical significance of the minstrel phenomenon has generally been ignored or minimized by the facile assumption that blackface performance was merely innocuous entertainment' (in Bean; Hatch; McNamara, 1996, p. ix).

The ignorance and rejection of blackface minstrelsy from scholarly attention and cultural memory highlighted by Gubar, Manning, Pickering, and Watkins exposes an important, but potentially troubling concept: despite such collective amnesia minstrelsy had a significant and lasting impact on notions of race in America. In 'The Minstrel Mode' (1973) Blyden Jackson identifies what he terms the 'minstrel mode' which 'conquered and, outlasting blackface minstrelsy as such, had put the stamp of its own minstrel mode on virtually every approach of average Americans to Negroes and Negro life' (p. 156). Such a lasting impact on constructions of race is acknowledged by W. T. Lhamon in *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (1998) who describes blackface minstrelsy as a 'defining wedge for the construction of whiteness, and an albatross around the neck of black culture that has yet to be lifted' (p. 57). The notion that blackface minstrelsy has had a significant impact on shaping constructions of race is furthered by Mikko Tuhkanen in 'Of Blackface and Paranoid Knowledge: Richard Wright, Jacques Lacan, and the Ambivalence of Black Minstrelsy' (2001) in which he argues that 'minstrel mask perhaps continues to be a central figure in how "racial" visibility functions in the United States' (2001, p. 12). As can be observed from the thoughts of Jackson, Lhamon, and Tuhkanen, the role of blackface minstrelsy in defining and shaping notions of race in America is a concept symptomatic of minstrelsy studies of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.

In addition to any social impact on perceptions of race attributable to minstrelsy, there may also remain an industrial and commercial legacy within contemporary entertainment industries (though it is fair to say that the social, industrial, and commercial are interconnected). In *Behind The Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum American Popular Culture* (1999) William J. Mahar suggests that although the vehicle may have changed over the years, the essential model of the appropriation of marginal cultures remains largely the same:

[A]ntebellum minstrelsy established a now familiar pattern in American popular culture. Musical material borrowed from the cultural periphery establishes itself as a viable commercial product and develops into a respectable mainstream entertainment purged of any features that would complicate unduly the audience's perceptions of the need (or lack thereof) for

radical changes in American attitudes towards race, gender, and class (1999, p. 329).

Mahar's succinct observation tells us much about the relevance of minstrelsy beyond its years: the fundamental model of cultural appropriation in popular music markets has arguably changed little since the formation of American popular culture in the form of the blackface minstrel show and that peripheral cultural texts and practices—very often shaped by socially, economically, and politically marginalised groups—feeds the commercial entertainment markets. However, Mahar's suggestion that this is 'purged of any features that would complicate unduly the audience's perceptions of the need (or lack thereof) for radical changes in American attitudes towards race, gender, and class' (1999, p. 329) may have to be queried in the light of contemporary questions over cultural appropriation and exploitation raised by recent developments in popular culture and entertainment, examples of which will be discussed in more detail in 'Talking Blackface'.

With these assertions of minstrelsy studies outlined above come some necessary cautions: although patterns and similarities may be observable in popular culture and entertainment, it is wise to consider the effects of drawing connecting lines between the largely despised entertainment of blackface minstrelsy and contemporary cultural practice. However, it is also wise not to underestimate minstrelsy's importance both as a cultural remnant and as a marker of historical cultural taste and consumption. Moreover, the fact that a cultural phenomenon so substantial in scale and popularity and significant in cultural influence and social impact could be either forgotten or widely misunderstood makes the prospect of study not only tantalising, but hugely important in understanding the formation and management of race and social status, the development of popular music and culture, and the ongoing effects of cultural appropriation by white Americans of African American music and culture.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> A number of recent cases of apparent cultural appropriation by white popular music performers such as Miley Cyrus and Iggy Azalea of African American music, dance, and styles have led to an active debate in the popular press.

### International Scholarship of Blackface Minstrelsy

Blackface minstrelsy was primarily an entertainment form borne of and rooted in the culture of North America and the United States. It was, however, popular outside of this region and cultural context and attracted varying levels of interest, particularly in European and colonial locations such as Britain, Canada, Australia, and South Africa. Moreover, mainland European nations such as the Netherlands have their own blackface traditions distinct from the American theatrical tradition.<sup>2</sup> Britain embraced blackface minstrelsy during the nineteenth century and the form continued to be visible in mainstream British popular culture up until 1978 when the variety entertainment programme *The Black and White Minstrel Show* ceased broadcast by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). A number of important texts have attempted to account for blackface minstrelsy's popularity in the British Isles including Harry Reynolds's early work *Minstrel Memories: The Story of Burnt Cork Minstrelsy in Great Britain from 1836 to 1927* (1928), and more recently the collected works on British popular culture of the nineteenth century by Derek Scott, particularly 'Blackface Minstrels, Black Minstrels, and Their Impact on British Popular Music' (2006), Michael Pickering's *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain* (2008), Robert Nowatzki's *Representing African Americans in Transatlantic Abolitionism and Blackface Minstrelsy* (2010), and the ongoing investigation by Rachel Cowgill into the London Metropolitan Police Force amateur minstrel troupe of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The primary focus of this thesis, however, is the function and effects of blackface minstrelsy in the United States and as a result these texts will not significantly inform this work. However, they do represent the growing awareness of minstrelsy's importance outside of the United States of America and the growth in scale and scope of minstrelsy studies.

### Stages of Minstrelsy's Scholarship: Changes to Scholarly Perspective

This literature review does not attempt a strictly chronological structure. However, as a result of the differing approaches to the study of blackface minstrelsy over time, texts will appear in a broadly chronological order. This structural inevitability is recognised by

---

<sup>2</sup> The blackface companion to Sinterklaas (Saint Nicholas), *Zwarte Piet* (meaning Black Peter), from Netherland folklore has recently ignited protest in the country for its perceived racism (McBain, 2014; Tharoor, 2014).

Tuhkanen when he identifies 'three separate but inevitably overlapping stages' in the development of minstrelsy studies in the twentieth century (2001, p. 16). Stage one is represented by those producing works on blackface minstrelsy during the early decades of the century 'in whose most uncritical moments blackface representations were assumed to be the transparent results of simple cultural borrowing' (Tuhkanen, 2001, p. 16). Stage two is represented by those producing works on blackface minstrelsy during the mid-twentieth century who 'argue that, rather than mirroring African-American culture, blackface functions as a reflecting surface in which the image of the white audiences is projected according to social, political, and psychological exigencies—and at a considerable expense to African Americans' (Tuhkanen, 2001, p. 16). Stage three is represented by those producing works on blackface minstrelsy during the late-twentieth century (particularly during the 1990s) who began to 'question the status of nineteenth-century blackface performance as an unequivocally racist, anti-black practice, both in intentions and effects' and who 'break away from the "intentionalistic" concept of minstrelsy and instead emphasize its hybrid, creolized nature' (Tuhkanen, 2001, p. 16). Tuhkanen describes how such authors are hesitant to 'attribute blackface dynamics to one social group or another, or to argue that minstrelsy constituted a controlled, strategic program' (Tuhkanen, 2001, p. 16). What can be observed from Tuhkanen's claim is that over the course of a century the treatment of minstrelsy in academic literature changed significantly (along with the American social, cultural, political, and philosophical landscape), moving from largely uncritical literary sources, to those that acknowledged minstrelsy's racism whilst observing its role in American culture and society more broadly, to those that sought to question a solely racist motive and highlight its hybridity and cross-cultural origins.

Firstly, it is important to recognise the early literature of minstrelsy and the manner in which it treated the subject. During the early-twentieth century there were few substantial critical texts on blackface minstrelsy. *One Thousand Men of Minstrelsy, and One Woman* (1909) and *Monarchs of Minstrelsy: From Daddy Rice to Date* (1911) by Edward Le Roy Rice; *The Southern Plantation: A Study in the Development and Accuracy of a Tradition* by Francis Pendleton Gaines (1924); *Minstrel Memories: The Story of Burnt Cork Minstrelsy in Great Britain from 1836 to 1927* by Harry Reynolds (1928); and *Tambo and Bones: A History of the American Minstrel Stage* by Carl Wittke (1930) provide an insight into a dying tradition.

These largely (but not exclusively) uncritical sources according to Charles Hamm acknowledged 'without making too much of the fact, that demeaning images of blacks are found in blackface minstrelsy' (2000, p. 167). For example, Gaines attempts to 'outline the popular conception of the old plantation, to trace the development of that conception, and to make an analysis of it in comparison with the plantation as it actually existed' (1924, p. vii). In doing so, Gaines acknowledges the potential inauthenticity of the depiction of one of the minstrel show's most keenly utilised narrative and contextual settings. Furthermore, Gaines finds that the 'immense magnetism' of the minstrel show 'distorted many dramas of fundamentally serious nature' (1924, p. 103), examples of which can be seen in the multiple blackface renditions of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Wittke problematises some of the assumptions sustained through minstrelsy and challenges (though also partially upholds) the claims of authenticity that accompanied much of blackface minstrel performance:

Although the minstrels found the inspiration for their new art in the life of the Southern dandy and occasionally presented accurate delineations of the types they were trying to imitate, it would be an error to assume that the minstrel performers, as a class, really consistently expressed Negro life and feeling in their theatrical performances (1930, p. 39).

This challenges the frequent claims by minstrel performers that they accurately and authentically reproduced the culture of African Americans, a feature that remained present even up until the mid-twentieth century with the heavily minstrel-influenced radio broadcasts of *The Amos 'n' Andy Show* (Ely, 2001, p. 127). It is a widely held view today that minstrelsy did not accurately represent the lives and culture of African Americans. However, following on from similar claims by Gaines, Wittke's complication of an assumption of accuracy is valuable to the study of blackface minstrelsy and represents an early critical judgement of minstrelsy's claims of authenticity.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, and as importantly, Wittke also

---

<sup>3</sup> Gaines and Wittke were not the first to express a critical judgement of minstrelsy. Frederick Douglass provided one of the most scathing early assessments of blackface performance in an article in *The Northern Star*, published in 1848, in which he states that blackface performers are 'the filthy scum of white society,

challenges assumptions of minstrelsy's complete absence of features of real African American life at the time of performance. Rather, it should be understood that blackface minstrelsy during its long tenure in American popular culture has presented performances from those thoroughly inclusive of, to completely devoid of, any 'real' African American cultural practices.

Other contemporary and less critical texts from the early-twentieth century, such as Dailey Paskman and Sigmund Spaeth's *'Gentlemen, Be Seated!' A Parade of the American Minstrels* (1928), provide a more practical and instructional resource for amateur minstrel troupes which fed a market established through earlier texts such as *The Witmark Amateur Minstrel Guide and Burnt Cork Encyclopedia* (1899).

Towards the middle of the twentieth century texts on blackface minstrelsy became more critical of its racism, the voices of African American and African diasporic writers grew louder, and '[w]ith the advent of black consciousness and white guilt in the 1960s and 1970s...some writers began to emphasize and decry this aspect of minstrelsy' (Hamm, 2000, p. 167). This era of minstrelsy studies is argued by Tuhkanen to have been 'initiated by [Ralph] Ellison and confirmed by [Hans] Nathan, [Nathan] Huggins, [Robert] Toll, and [Alexander] Saxton' (2001, p. 16). Ellison's essay 'Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke' (1964) developed the notion that in blackface performance '[m]otives of race, status, economics and guilt are always clustered here' (p. 49). This represents a significant shift from much of the perspective of minstrelsy of the early-twentieth century. Moreover, it marked increased literary visibility of African Americans in criticism of and engagement with blackface minstrelsy. The works of Ellison's contemporary Hans Nathan also represented a movement towards a more analytical interpretation of blackface minstrelsy later developed by scholars such as Alexander Saxton, Robert Toll, Eric Lott, William J. Mahar, and W. T. Lhamon. In a development of the critical tone initiated by Gaines and Wittke, Nathan speaks in language more recognisable to the ear of twentieth and twenty-first century readers. For example, Nathan sees the treatment of African Americans in minstrelsy in a somewhat more abstract sense: '[t]he Negro had become not only an object of national concern, but, so to speak, a

---

who have stolen from us a complexion denied to them by nature, in which to make money, and pander to the corrupt taste of their white fellow citizens' (in Lott, 1991, p. 223).

fashionable commodity' (1962, p. 6). In this sense, Nathan recognised the role of the minstrel show is commoditising African Americans and their culture and there is little assumption on his part that images of African Americans were necessarily wedded to reality. Rather, African American culture was a marketable product which reflected the whims of the buying public. Moreover, Nathan acknowledges the political role of the inauthentic depiction of African American life, stating that in some popular minstrel songs 'the coloured man is a political artefact rather than a copy from life' (Nathan, 1958, p. 223). His development of the discussion of the political role of minstrelsy is expanded by later scholars such as Alexander Saxton, Eric Lott, and William J. Mahar. However, Nathan's usefulness is not restricted to his contribution to critical discourses. His collected works 'Dixie' (1949), 'Emmett's Walk-Arounds: Popular Theatre in New York' (1958), and *Dan Emmett and the Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy* (1962) demonstrate a serious and detailed musicological, ethnographic, and biographic approach to the study of blackface minstrelsy and constitute a vital touchpaper for minstrelsy studies. Nathan's works also awakened the study of pre-minstrelsy and antebellum blackface performance and its contribution to American culture during the third era of minstrelsy studies identified by Tuhkanen and include the works 'Black Musicians and Early Ethiopian Minstrelsy' (1975) by Eileen Southern; *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (1995) by Eric Lott; *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and Their World* (1997) by Dale Cockrell; *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance From Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (1998) by W. T. Lhamon; *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum American Popular Culture* (1999) by William J. Mahar; 'Death and the Minstrel: Race, Madness and Art in the Last (W)Rites of Three Early Blackface Performers' (2012b) by Stephen Johnson; and *The Creolisation of American Culture: William Sydney Mount and the Roots of Blackface Minstrelsy* (2014) by Christopher J. Smith.

Blackface minstrelsy began to be interpreted in different ways during the late-twentieth century when the 'voices of critical and theoretical discourse [were] brought to bear on blackface minstrelsy' (Hamm, 2000, p. 168). It is during this period that the 'plurality of voices' (Storey, 1998, p. 185) encouraged by the conditions of postmodernism demonstrated the various and varied ways in which blackface minstrelsy reflected and shaped American society and culture and highlighted its previously denied or unseen mixed ethnic and cultural origins. This third era of minstrelsy studies is argued by Tuhkanen to be represented by



authors such as Susan Gubar, Eric Lott, W. T. Lhamon, and Dale Cockrell (2001, p. 16) and is described by John Dougan as 'a more theoretically informed cultural history that seeks to dig underneath the surface of racist characterization and expose a more nuanced understanding of white working-class fascination with representations of blackness' (2001, p. 360).

In *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (1995) Eric Lott attempts to complicate some common perceptions of blackface minstrelsy, its origins, and socio-political function, suggesting that 'in blackface minstrelsy's audiences there were in fact contradictory racial impulses at work, impulses based in the everyday lives and racial negotiations of the minstrel show's working class partisans' (p. 4). Furthermore, Lott points to the role of minstrelsy's critics in dismissing the racial feeling of its audience as 'uncomplicated and monolithic' (1995, p. 4). Although no defender of minstrelsy's 'small but significant crimes against settled ideas of racial demarcation' (1995, p. 4), Lott seeks to view blackface performance in a more nuanced manner than many of his predecessors and uncover the role it played in forging and managing working class cultural identity in a formative American society.

W. T. Lhamon also attempts to complicate simplistic notions of blackface minstrelsy as racist enterprise or 'as the eponymous agent responsible for American racism' (1998, p. 188). Although he acknowledges that the entertainment form 'accompanied cruel domination' he claims this was not its original *modus operandi*: '[r]ather, it began in order to work out, and express, mixed feelings of identification and fascination through a growing grammar of charismatic gestures...As it evolved, blackface action encoded racial identification even as it inscribed racial stereotypes' (1998, p. 188). Clearly, the thoughts of Lott and Lhamon express the notion that blackface minstrelsy, to an extent, has been misrepresented and misunderstood as a cultural tradition and social practice.

It is also during this third stage of minstrelsy studies that writers began to argue most vociferously that minstrel practices can be observed in the cultural texts and practices of the late-twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This perspective spilled over into scholarship of the twenty-first century in which minstrelsy is increasingly utilised as a prism through which to observe the practices of contemporary cultures and to observe minstrelsy's legacy in popular

culture. Such a perspective has been developed by John Strausbaugh in *Black Like You: Blackface, Whiteface, Insult & Imitation in American Popular Culture* (2006); Yuval Taylor and Jake Austen in *Darkest America: Black Minstrelsy from Slavery to Hip Hop* (2012); Alice Maurice in 'From New Deal to No Deal: Blackface Minstrelsy, *Bamboozled*, and Reality Television' (2012); Catherine M. Cole in 'American Ghetto Parties and Ghanaian Concert Parties: A Transnational Perspective on Blackface' (2012); and Harriet J. Manning in *Michael Jackson and the Blackface Mask* (2013).

Minstrelsy studies in the twenty-first century has also sought to uncover the vestiges of blackface minstrelsy in the texts and practices of African American cultures. In Yuval Taylor and Jake Austen's *Darkest America: Black Minstrelsy from Slavery to Hip Hop* (2012) they attempt to explain why 'some African American entertainers willingly incorporate aspects of the [blackface] stereotype into their acts and why so many members of the black community still embrace the seemingly slanderous stereotypes and find them humorous' (Watkins in Taylor and Austen, 2012, p. xiv). Central to their argument is that black minstrelsy<sup>4</sup> (and its derivatives in popular culture) was not simply an exercise in denigration and self-humiliation for African American performers as is commonly espoused by its critics. Rather, that 'despite the appearance of black minstrelsy as a servile tradition, there were elements of *liberation* in it from its very beginning, and these were instrumental to its popularity' [authors' own italics] (Yuval and Taylor, 2012, p. 27). The authors seek to illuminate the often oversimplified view of blackface as a reluctant mask forced onto African Americans by an entertainment industry structured around white supremacist hegemony.

One of the most recent scholarly accounts of minstrelsy's legacy in the twenty-first century focuses on one of the icons of pop: Michael Jackson—someone who until this point had not been considered in any great detail in relation to minstrelsy (an exception is Lhamon, 1998). Manning contends that in 'his stage characterizations, his bows, spins and cocked knees and, of course, his own curious mask – with only limited knowledge of blackface minstrelsy one can see their relationship, clear as day' (2013, p. 2). However, although Manning's attention

---

<sup>4</sup> Taylor and Austen's focus in *Darkest America* is on 'black minstrelsy', a term used to describe the blackface performances of African Americans African diasporic communities within the minstrel tradition and not those of other ethnicities.

is predominantly afforded to Jackson he is not viewed in isolation and she positions him along a 'continuum of blackface minstrelsy' (2013, p. 1).

A text symptomatic of twenty-first century minstrelsy studies is the edited volume *Burnt Cork: Traditions and Legacies of Blackface Minstrelsy* (2012) which organises a number of contributions to the discipline (including offerings from established scholars of minstrelsy studies W. T. Lhamon, Stephen Johnson, Dale Cockrell, and Louis Chude-Sokei). The book centres on blackface minstrelsy's 'intentions' and 'reception' (Johnson, 2012, p. 3). Much like my own feelings on the subject, Johnson acknowledges the changing and cumulative concept of blackface minstrelsy in which it 'builds up in layers over time, adding racial meaning to the accepted imagery without entirely erasing the old, haphazardly accumulating ways of reading blackface that reshape, refocus, and redirect its intentions' (2012, p. 3). The repetition of the prefix 're' points to the notion that blackface minstrelsy and its meanings are in constant flux; the plurality of its meanings and functions never allowing for an entirely settled conception. This perspective is fundamental in understanding how the concept of blackface minstrelsy has changed and how its re-use in the twenty-first century builds upon existing perceptions and subsequently shapes contemporary understandings of it. Popular opinion would suggest that blackface minstrelsy was a simple case of white dominance and exploitation of African American culture—although this was certainly a significant part of it, it was not so simple. Johnson suggests that 'the intentions of blackface performance have always been flexible and its reception widely divergent' (2012, p. 4). It is the work of this thesis to account for how this flexibility and divergence is manifested in twenty-first century representations of blackface and minstrelsy.

We can conclude from this review of minstrelsy studies that blackface minstrelsy is argued to remain a significant presence in popular culture. However, Johnson proposes that there is not only a remnant, but a noticeable 'resurgence of blackface in contemporary society' (2012, p. 2). So why might this be? Are we rediscovering a taste for blackface? One significant change may bear some responsibility for this. Such a resurgence, Johnson argues, is facilitated by the dissemination of information and ease of access provided by the internet, a medium through which 'everything has become available to everyone, and not institutional—or personal—opinion can prevail against the Web' [sic] (2012, p. 3). This is an

important proposal and one that is demonstrated by the role of the internet in providing a platform for discussions of minstrelsy in popular culture, the dissemination of creative texts which use blackface, and the wider exposure of social blackface in private and semi-private contexts.

#### Literature Review: Conclusions

From the sources provided in this review a number of conclusions can be reached regarding minstrelsy studies:

- Minstrelsy studies can be seen as a unique cross-disciplinary field of research, identified by significant changes in authorial perspective over time;
- Scholars propose the continued significance of blackface minstrelsy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, in eras and contexts seemingly far-removed from those of the original stage form;
- The general ignorance of blackface minstrelsy and the discouragement of scholarly attention may have caused people to lose sight of the impact it had, and continues to have, on the promotion and consumption of African American culture by people of differing ethnicities and backgrounds;
- Blackface minstrelsy was not simply entertainment, nor should it be viewed as such. Rather, it was a lasting phenomenon through which America shaped its racial, social, and cultural identity;
- Changes to ways of thinking instigated by the conditions of postmodernism of the twentieth century encouraged the nuanced study of the range of theoretical functions of blackface minstrelsy in the past and in the present;
- New technologies and media have influenced the way we access and interpret blackface and minstrelsy.

## 2. Terminology and Key Concepts

It is important that a number of key terms are defined, explained, and contextualised. Terms such as 'blackface' and 'minstrel show' are frequently used in popular discourses with little explanation of their meanings and significance; it is often left to the reader to interpret the terms or seek out further information on their meanings, a process increasingly enabled by greater access to information facilitated by the internet. Furthermore, it is important to clarify terminology at this point in the thesis to provide basis and justification for its use later in the work. This thesis does not provide a history of the minstrel show. It is, therefore, also the role of this section to place key terms at the centre of blackface performance into their historical context.

### Ethnic Masquerade

There are a number of contexts in which someone may participate in an act of 'ethnic masquerade', including for the purposes of a dramatic role for the stage or screen, a comedy sketch, or a fancy dress costume. The practice may be achieved through the application of make-up to change skin colour, the imitation of accent and dialect, and the wearing of clothing associated with a specific ethnic group. Ethnic masquerade does not relate specifically to the depiction of dark-skinned people, nor does it necessarily imply a mocking or demeaning function (though this is very often a result of its use). Examples of ethnic masquerade include those from twentieth-century film and television such as Orson Welles's portrayal of the title character in *Othello* (1952), Warner Oland's portrayal of detective Charlie Chan in *Charlie Chan Carries On* (1931), Ben Kingsley's portrayal of Indian independence movement leader Mohandas Karamchand (Mahatma) Gandhi in *Gandhi* (1982), and Shawn and Marlon Wayans's portrayal of Heather and Megan Vandergeld in *White Chicks* (2004).

The desire to change one's skin colour or take on the characteristics of another socio-ethnic group is a wider and more common practice than theatrical ethnic masquerade. Susan Gubar provides a useful term for the varied approaches to this process: racechange. The term is intended to 'suggest the traversing of race boundaries, racial imitation or impersonation,

cross-racial mimicry or mutability, white posing as black or black posing as white, pan-racial mutability' (1997, p. 5). The similarities between ethnic masquerade and racechange are basic: the adoption of characteristics and modes of representation with the aim of mimicking another ethnicity. However, whilst ethnic masquerade connotes a sense of impermanence, Gubar's term accounts for a wider range of possibilities including the more permanent incorporation of characteristics into an individual persona or social group. Such cases include the Japanese Ganguro style in which women darken their skin and bleach their hair blonde and the recent case of Rachel Dolezal whose exposure as ethnically Caucasian ignited a debate over what it means to be 'Black'.<sup>5</sup> The process, however, may not only rest on the skin-deep features of ethnic difference and may also involve the adoption of gesture, posture, and language, and the consumption of cultural texts and artefacts which signal the identity of another socio-ethnic group. The case of Rachel Dolezal, which will be returned to later in 'Conclusions: Findings in Contemporary Context', demonstrates the ongoing charged feelings that surround ethnic masquerade, racechange, and blackface in American society.

#### Blackface and the Minstrel Mask

The term 'blackface' serves an important function in this work as well as in discourses of popular culture. Firstly, for the purposes of this thesis 'blackface' will refer to the range of approaches to representing characters or dark-skinned people of African descent through the use of make-up. Other forms of ethnic representation through the use of make-up, costuming, and other forms of mimicry, where relevant will be described as *ethnic masquerade* or racechange. The reason for a distinction between blackface and ethnic masquerade is the presence and significance of the term 'blackface' in Western culture and, in particular, the history of blackface in minstrel shows and in subsequent popular culture media such as film and television. Furthermore, the term is primarily recognised for its connection to *this* history and is commonly used in popular culture, journalism, and cultural criticism, and as such its use here is an attempt to interact with contemporary occurrences of the term. However, 'blackface' is far from a simple concept and scholars of the subject have

---

<sup>5</sup> Rachel Dolezal was until recently the president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) chapter in Spokane, Washington. Following her 'exposure' as ethnically white she resigned from her position with the civil rights organisation and has been subject to criticism and support for her representation of herself as 'Black'.

sought to account for its range of functions and effects both inside and outside of the minstrel show.

Early blackface was produced through a process involving the combustion of wine corks, the ash of which was then mixed with water or another binding liquid to produce a black paste. This was then applied to the face and other exposed skin of performers. In later blackface performances the method may have been replaced by more conventional forms of cosmetic make-up or alternatives such as boot polish. The burnt cork method provides the genesis of one of the terms used to identify the blackface make-up used in minstrel shows and pre-minstrel blackface performance: the burnt cork mask (see Mahar, 1999 – *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask*; Johnson, 2012 – *Burnt Cork: Traditions and Legacies of Blackface Minstrelsy*). As is demonstrated later, the process of making burnt cork make-up continues to be a feature of interactions with blackface in contemporary popular culture.

Although formalised blackface minstrel shows became hugely popular during the early 1840s with the influence and success of groups such as the Virginia Minstrels, Cockrell points out that the use of blackface as a performative device and disguise was a common practice before its integration into the institution of minstrelsy. His research identifies thousands of theatrical instances in which blackface was used that predate its formalisation and adoption in the minstrel show (1997, p. 15). However, blackface was not solely a theatrical tradition and had origins in social practices and performance contexts independent of the theatre stage. Cockrell highlights the existence of blackface social practices in early New York City in which callithumpian bands (groups of working class merry and trouble makers) would don soot and grease masks; make a racket with pots, pans, whistles, and horns; and taunt 'both their social superiors and inferiors' (1997, p. 32). This was done, at least partly, with the aim of acquiring food and drink (the practice is not dissimilar to trick-or-treating conducted during Halloween). Cockrell also highlights a range of other ritual and social practices in which blackface was used, including in mumming plays and in morris dancing<sup>6</sup> (1997, pp. 50-51), both of which have their origins in Britain and mainland Europe. Cockrell contends that 'on one important level, blackface minstrelsy took as its signature characteristic the

---

<sup>6</sup> Blackface performance still occurs in British Morris dancing and has recently attracted criticism despite its apparent independence as a tradition from minstrelsy (Okolosi, 2014; Holehouse, 2014).

representation of black people, but in the ritual background loomed more profound Otherness, the accumulation of centuries of metaphorical use' (1997, p. 53). With this in mind, it is important to remember that although the term 'blackface' may have specific rooted meanings in current cultural expression and discourse, it has had a long and varied life, much of which is largely forgotten, particularly outside of academic research and ethnographic performance practices.

According to Mahar blackface was the minstrel show's 'primary convention' which 'served as a *racial marker* announcing that a single actor or an ensemble offered what were selected aspects of (arguably) African American culture' (1999, p. 1). However, Mahar disputes that blackface was solely, or even primarily, a device for the ridicule of African Americans in early blackface minstrelsy. In a similar vein to Cockrell, Mahar points out that blackface was used as much to critique white social practices as it was to depict black life. He suggests that:

[t]he blackface mask in those circumstances did *not* reflect white perceptions of black culture but served as a vehicle to express the disappointments and doubts of those "others" (including whites themselves) who dwelt on the margins of political power, economic comfort, and relative security in jobs, homes, and private life (1999, p. 41).

Therefore, despite its primary function as a racial marker it did serve other, more diverse functions than strictly as a device to ridicule African Americans.

The function of the blackface mask in minstrel shows is further debated in minstrelsy studies and scholars of the subject have attempted to explain the function and effects of its use. Mahar argues that within the minstrel show blackface functioned in four specific ways: as a 'racial marker', which signalled to audiences that a performance presented aspects of what was supposedly African American culture; as a '*disguise* for white performers who chose parody and burlesque as techniques to satirize majority values while still reinforcing widely held and fairly conservative views'; as a '*vehicle* for the creation of an "American" style of commercialized popular culture'; and as a '*masking device* for professional and amateur entertainers to shield themselves from any direct personal and psychological identification



with the material they were performing' (1999, p. 1). It is clear from Mahar and Cockrell's descriptions of blackface functionality that it was far from a simple device and may have performed a range of functions for both the audience and the performers.

Although blackface emerged in early nineteenth-century America as a defining feature of its popular culture, it remained a presence well into the twentieth century and became a prominent feature of the emerging medium of cinema. In *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (1998) Michael Rogin proposes that in early moving pictures blackface had an 'Americanising' function which aided in the integration of marginal ethnic groups into American society. This is no better evidenced than in Rogin's assessment of *The Jazz Singer* (1927) in which Al Jolson's character Jackie Rabinowitz sheds his strict Jewish upbringing for a career singing 'black music'. Blackface helped Jolson the actor and Jackie Rabinowitz the character to make the transition 'from immigrant Jew to American, as it had earlier done for Irish immigrants on the cultural border between black and white' (Rogin, 1994, p. 2). Therefore, although blackface may have functioned as a device of marginalisation for African Americans, it may have had the opposite effect for other marginalised groups in America who were more capable of integration into white society.

For Ralph Ellison, the blackface of minstrelsy worked to marginalise African Americans and to 'veil the humanity of Negroes thus reduced to a sign, and to repress the white audience's awareness of its moral identification with its own acts and with the human ambiguities pushed behind the mask' (Ellison, 1964, p. 49). In this sense, the blackface mask of minstrelsy worked to hide the realities of African American life and culture, condensing the complexity of lived experience into a simple sign.

Although the term 'minstrel mask' refers to a type of blackface, it is used in this work to refer specifically to the type of mask used in, and subsequently a signifier of, the entertainment form of the minstrel show. In this respect, it is distinct from ethnic masquerade and wider practices of blackface. The minstrel mask is signalled by a number of features which include the use of jet black make-up (a consequence of its derivation from burnt cork), the use of bordering to the eyes and/or mouth (achieved through a void in face paint or use of white or red make-up), and the use of an afro hair wig. The minstrel mask specifically recalls the

performance practices of the minstrel show and can be considered distinct from other forms of ethnic masquerade which use make-up to alter skin colour. However, it is important to remember that uses of make-up that do not constitute a minstrel mask by these terms may still draw associations with the minstrel show.

### Minstrelsy and the Minstrel Show

The word 'minstrelsy' is an over-arching term generally used in academic minstrelsy studies to refer to the wide range of institutional and performative practices associated with the minstrel show—the term is sometimes used in popular discourses, but the terms 'blackface' and 'minstrel show' figure more prominently (demonstrated later in 'The Discourse of Blackface Equivalency'). The term 'minstrelsy' brings to mind connotations of travel, performance, and entertainment and would be recognised by some as a term with a long history and application to contexts outside of America and blackface performance. Although individual blackface performers, bands, and troupes toured their performances around the country and further afield to international markets, this is not the sole reason for the term finding common usage in blackface minstrelsy. Cockrell points out that in the early 1840s perceptions of the term were conditioned by existing performance groups, commonly family singing groups, which performed for the middle-class theatre market. The association with existing respectable singing groups 'simultaneously reassured and confirmed the audience' (Cockrell, 1997, p. 152) and allowed for a dual reading of the term 'from two contrary perspectives: as satire by the common classes, and as descriptive by the middle class' (Cockrell, 1997, p. 152). It is with this context in mind, Cockrell argues, that Dan Emmett first used the term to market his four-piece blackface band The Virginia Minstrels in 1842. This group is largely credited with bringing the term into common parlance in the context of blackface performance. Although the term 'minstrelsy' is often uttered alone, it is also commonly preceded by the word 'blackface' to confirm its specific use in the institution of the American minstrel show and aside from other musical and performative contexts.

The term 'minstrel show' is used in this work to identify the staged manifestation of blackface minstrelsy that utilised a collection of diverse performance practices which developed and formalised over time since its formation in the early 1800s. Minstrel shows

grew and became more elaborate in scale and content throughout the century. A minstrel show could be comprised of a range of features including: vocal and instrumental music (both comic and serious); comedic monologue and dialogue; burlesqued performances of more serious theatrical and literary art forms such as Italian opera, British and European theatre, and Shakespeare; African American dialect impersonation in spoken and sung contexts (dialect often included exaggeration, innuendo, and malapropism); stock archetype characterisations based on ethnic, class, gender, religious, and political lines; standards of prop use and stage organisation (arrangement of troupe members, use of props, use of stage and auditorium space); standards of performance structure, often dictating number and order of performance sections; dance routines comprised of a variety derived from European and African American styles; costuming practices including those depicting archetype characters and specific characters; and last but not least, the defining feature of blackface make-up. The minstrel show existed as a stage form from the early 1840s onwards, though, as discussed above, blackface performance in various forms pre-dates this by some time.

The literal use of the term 'minstrel show', as outlined above, does not adequately account for the connotations the term conveys in popular memory and discourses of American culture and history. As will be shown with contemporary applications of the term in popular culture, it is rare that the full range of performance practices that constituted the minstrel show are evoked in critical discourses of contemporary cultural practices. Rather, a more narrow interpretation of the term is primarily evoked with the focus on highlighting the form's most demeaning images and troubling social functions and effects.

### 3. Source Materials

Although blackface remains a taboo subject in the twenty-first century, it is a rather more common practice than some may think. Whether it is through direct allusions to the minstrel show or through social blackface, the practice appears in a large number of contexts, far beyond the scope of this work. It is therefore the goal of this thesis to select and analyse a range of texts and practices from popular culture which are indicative of its use and occurrence. The selection used in this work is significant, but not exhaustive. Sources are drawn from across media platforms and areas of social life. In chapter one: 'Showing Blackface', examples from film, television, music video, and private social practice are discussed according to significant themes and issues surrounding their use of blackface. The perspective of authors and critics is included where available to contextualise their exploitation of blackface or minstrel show imagery and to position it within their wider body of work. As will be outlined in detail in the 'Methodology' chapter which follows this chapter, methods of semiotic analysis are applied with the aim of shedding further light on the potential meanings, functions, and effects of blackface and minstrelsy in visual media. Chapter two: 'Talking Blackface', uses a selection of sources from text-based and spoken media as materials for discourse analysis. These include feature articles, opinion pieces, documentaries, interviews, and social media publications. The aim of reviewing such sources is to identify how the concept of blackface and minstrelsy in its linguistic form is used in critical commentary of cultural practices. The basis for discourse analysis and the methods used in its application are also outlined in more detail in the 'Methodology' chapter.

What follows is an overview of the sources used throughout this thesis and a discussion of their value to research. The purpose of this is twofold: firstly, once introduced sources can be discussed freely without the necessity to explain their background or value to this research. Secondly, as the texts used within this work are sourced from a range of media they may be subject to different conditions of context, broadcast, and audience response. It is therefore also the work of this chapter to place sources into context and to highlight any specific considerations relevant to texts, their distribution, and reception. With this in mind,

discussion of sources in this chapter is separated by media (i.e. film, television, music video, etc.).

### Film

Blackface is not a common practice in twenty-first century film. However, there are some prominent examples in which it is used. An important contribution to the discussion of blackface and minstrelsy in popular culture is made by Spike Lee's film *Bamboozled* (2000). The film draws significantly upon the minstrel show and subsequent popular culture and entertainment such as early twentieth-century cartoon animation; the popular radio and television staple *The Amos 'n' Andy Show*; films featuring Mantan Moreland, Stepin Fetchit, Al Jolson, and Shirley Temple; D. W. Griffiths' notorious *Birth of a Nation*; and a range of artefacts and ephemera based on African American caricatures.

The fictional film portrays the attempt of protagonist Pierre Delacroix, an African American television producer for fictional network CNS, to create a 'coon show' which will be 'so negative, so offensive, and racist. Hence I will prove my point...the network, does not want to see Negroes on television unless they are buffoons' (Lee, 2000). The plan is hatched in response to his white boss Thomas Dunwitty's pressure to produce the new hit African American show for the network. Feeling alienated and disrespected, Delacroix proposes *Mantan: The New Millennium Minstrel Show*, which will feature blackface minstrel performance and racist humour. He fully expects the suggestion to lose him his job at the network. However, in a *Producers*-esque twist,<sup>7</sup> *Mantan* is commissioned by the network and becomes hugely popular. As the show develops and grows in popularity Delacroix loses grip of his subversive, satirical, and career-ending enterprise.

*Bamboozled* is significant to a discussion of blackface and minstrelsy in popular culture for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is the first film of the millennium to display blackface minstrelsy in such explicit ways. Although the film was not a significant commercial success, had limited

---

<sup>7</sup> In the Mel Brooks film *The Producers* (1968) struggling theatre producer Max Bialystock and his nervous auditor Leo Bloom hatch a plan to produce and stage a highly offensive musical called *Springtime for Hitler: A Gay Romp with Adolf and Eva at Berchtesgaden* with the aim of embezzling their investors' money once the play closes on its first night. However, contrary to their plan, the play is a huge success.

support from cinemas, and was difficult to finance (Lee, 2000 [DVD director commentary]), it represents a significant attempt to engage with blackface minstrelsy as a dominant narrative device. Secondly, the film roots the display and discussion of blackface within satire, literally defining the term in its opening scene, and exploits themes of racism and exploitation within its narrative and dialogue. As is shown with other examples in this work, blackface and satire go hand-in-hand. And finally, the film went on to influence subsequent popular culture interactions with blackface and minstrel show imagery and demonstrates the ways in which blackface practices in the twenty-first century are intertextual.

As a feature film which utilises blackface, *Tropic Thunder* (2008) stands in contrast to *Bamboozled*. The film, directed by comic actor Ben Stiller, is about the failed production of Vietnam War epic *tropic thunder*,<sup>8</sup> based on the 'real life' accounts of veteran John 'Four Leaf' Tayback (later exposed as a fraud who has never set foot in Vietnam). The war epic *tropic thunder* represents an opportunity for each of the lead actors who, for various personal and professional reasons, see it as a chance to develop their career and expand their range of performances.

The shooting of *tropic thunder* is not going well. In an effort to take control of the financially and artistically swollen project and his cast of prima donnas, director Damien Cockburn (played by Steve Coogan) takes the advice of Tayback to 'put those boys in the shit' (Stiller, 2008), relocating the shooting of *tropic thunder* and adopting a more gritty and improvised style. Cockburn strips the production back to a skeleton crew and has himself and the cast of central actors dropped into the jungle of Southeast Asia by helicopter. Moments after they arrive, Cockburn is killed by an old landmine. Unsure of whether this is part of the film's plot, the cast continue to act out their parts. However, it soon becomes apparent that they are no longer making the movie and the group become lost. One member of the cast (Tugg Speedman) eats hallucinogenic berries, becomes delirious, and is separated from the group. He is picked up by the members of a drug cartel and taken back to their base, deep in the

---

<sup>8</sup> The film inside of a film, both of the same name, presents some issues for productive discussion. For the purposes of clarity, I use the system provided by Quiana Lopez in her doctoral thesis 'White Bodies, Black Voices: The Linguistic Construction of Racialized Authenticity in US Film' (2012) in which the real life film is capitalised ('*Tropic Thunder*') and the fictional Vietnam War film that appears within the plot of *Tropic Thunder* is presented in lower case ('*tropic thunder*') (2012, p. 56).

jungle. The remaining cast and crew embark on a rescue attempt. Ultimately they are successful and flee the scene in the same helicopter which deposited them in the jungle.

However, it is the performance of Robert Downey Jr. as Australian actor and ‘notorious bad boy’ (Theroux & Coogan, 2008) Kirk Lazarus (loosely based on Australian actor Russell Crowe) with which this work is primarily concerned. In a controversial move, the makers of *tropic thunder* choose to cast white actor Lazarus as African American G. I. Lincoln Osiris. To perform the part Lazarus adopts the accent and dialect of Osiris; dresses in distinctive clothes that mark his character’s ethnic and cultural background (his helmet is emblazoned with the words ‘Black Power’, a black clenched fist, and a black panther); wears an afro wig with long pointed sideburns, a moustache, a goatee beard, and brown contact lenses hiding his bright blue eyes; and undergoes a surgical cosmetic procedure to darken his skin colour [see figure 1].



Figure 1: Downey Jr. playing Lazarus playing Osiris.

*Tropic Thunder* is important to this research for a number of reasons. Firstly, and in contrast to *Bamboozled*, the film was a big-budget production, a commercial success (Box Office Mojo, 2015), and featured a cast of high-profile actors, including Ben Stiller, Jack Black, and Robert Downey Jr. With this in mind, the decision to use blackface in a film of this stature

and commercial reach was a bold and potentially risky decision. Secondly, also in contrast to *Bamboozled*, the film does not explore minstrelsy or use a minstrel mask. Rather, it uses blackface as ethnic masquerade and, although calling upon many of the stereotyped features of African American identity, does not seek to engage with minstrelsy in its theatrical form. And finally, in a similarity with *Bamboozled*, *Tropic Thunder* is a work of satire, something made abundantly clear by its parodies of Hollywood clichés and narrative tropes.

### Television

Blackface and minstrel show imagery are rarely seen on television. However, they are occasionally seen, frequently inciting discussion of their effects and appropriateness. *The Sarah Silverman Program* episode 'Face Wars' (2007) deploys blackface as a satirical device in a comically surreal case of cultural ignorance and misunderstanding in which the title character Sarah Silverman (she plays herself) attempts to become 'black' to settle a dispute over who has it harder in America: Black or Jewish people. Following a dispute with café waiter Eugene, the pair agrees to trade places with the help of a make-up artist to discover who has the harder life. Following her transformation—rather than a case of realistic ethnic masquerade as the narrative suggests, her transformation is revealed to be an explicit minstrel mask—Silverman is verbally attacked in the street, ejected from an African American church, arrested for protesting a parking ticket, and finally shot on the steps of the police station following her release.

Silverman's use of blackface in 'Face Wars' is useful in this thesis for a number of reasons. Firstly, the type of blackface worn by Silverman is a minstrel mask and is clearly intended to reference the minstrel show. It is not, as understood by Silverman, a case of ethnic masquerade. Secondly, the show is a work of satire and announces its intentions to use the blackface minstrel mask as a tool of 'postmodern irony' (Harmon; Schrab; Silverman, 2007). And finally, Silverman's provocative style shows blackface as an example of her tendency towards incendiary images and themes. She has been described by critics as a 'complete provocateur' (Logan, 2013), 'distasteful' and 'simultaneously fascinating and maddening' (Lowry, 2013), and as a comedian whose 'comedic persona IS someone who pushes the boundaries of good taste' (Czajkowski, 2013). Such conclusions stem from her choice of



subject matter which includes rape, race and racism, child abuse, and the Holocaust.<sup>9</sup> However, Silverman's comments in stand-up, in scripted television, and film performances are shielded by a sense of irony rooted in her comic persona. Terry Gross claims that '[o]n the surface her comedy may seem offensive to Jews, African Americans, Latinos, gay people, you name it, but that's because she is in persona as someone who is clueless, uninformed, but certain in her beliefs' (Gross, 2011). Ultimately, the butt of the joke is intended to be Silverman and her ignorance, and not the social or ethnic groups used within the joke or scene. Silverman claims that this approach affords a form of security when navigating potentially problematic and offensive subjects. She states:

There is a safety in what I do because I'm always the idiot. Unless you're just listening to buzz words and not taking into account the context of the situation, you see I'm always the ignoramus. So no matter what I talk about or what tragic event, off-color, dark scenario is evoked in my material, I'm always the idiot in it (Silverman in Gross, 2011).

This self-conscious, self-critical, and ironic approach does not always shield her from condemnation and she has been censured by critics and advocacy groups for her use of racial slurs (Aoki, 2001).

Satirical situation comedy *30 Rock* is described by Emily Nussbaum in the *New Yorker* as 'a surreal machine capable of commenting on anything, from feminism and prismatic perspectives on race to national politics, reality television, and corporate culture' (2013). It is a show that, according to Zeeshan Aleem of the *Huffington Post*, 'deliberately and enthusiastically wrestles with issues of race, class, and gender' (2010). Blackface is used in three episodes of *30 Rock*: 'Believe in the Stars' (2008), 'Christmas Attack Zone' (2010), and 'Live from Studio 6H' (2012). These episodes engage with the inappropriateness of using blackface and show characters commenting critically upon its use; a theme that appears in other instances of blackface discussed in this work.

---

<sup>9</sup> The Holocaust is referenced by Silverman in 'Face Wars' in her conversation with Eugene in the café as evidence of the greater suffering inflicted upon Jewish people in comparison to African Americans.

*30 Rock* uses the frame of the television industry—specifically the network NBC, at which the show is set—to engage with a range of problematic topics. The show portrays the processes of the television comedy world from the perspectives of the team of writers and staff at television network and draws from the experiences of comedy writer Tina Fey and her time writing for real-life sketch and variety comedy show *Saturday Night Live*. *30 Rock* portrays the working lives and relationships of the cast and staff of the fictional television show *TGS with Tracy Jordan* for which Fey's lead character Liz Lemon is head writer.

The show has received specific praise from some critics for its handling of the subject of race (Touré, 2010; Coates, 2013), which features as a theme and focus in a number of episodes. However, some have responded contrastingly, accusing the show of perpetuating and exploiting racist stereotypes (Aleem, 2010; Whites Educating Whites, 2013). Particular criticism came from Zeeshan Aleem in the *Huffington Post* who describes the show as 'terribly racist' (2010). Aleem draws specific attention to the character Tracy Jordan:

[Jordan is] the only black protagonist of the show, is invariably depicted as a hyper-sexual, mentally challenged, violent, emotionally unstable, irresponsible man-child [who] serves as an exhaustive and educational catalogue of the feared and loathed qualities of "blackness" accumulated over the course of American history (Aleem, 2010).

What reviews and criticism of the show demonstrate is that it provokes discussion of race and its success and/or failure to appropriately engage with the topic. It is perhaps little surprise that in a show which frequently includes offensive and challenging subject matter that blackface would make an appearance.

Animation provides a medium through which subjects, scenes, situations, and characters can be explored that conventional filmed acting cannot. The development of adult animation, pioneered by *The Simpsons* during the early nineteen nineties, paved the way for a series of highly successful television shows such as *South Park*, *Family Guy*, and *American Dad!* which have further developed the genre and widened its appeal. *South Park's* often rude humour in which child characters verbally abuse each other would be a very difficult show to cast and

produce. *Family Guy*'s taste for the 'cut-away' (a largely unrelated short scene used to make a passing joke) could make for a costly and logistically challenging production. But most importantly, the genre has witnessed an expansion in the exploration of risqué and taboo subjects with both of the above examples frequently exploiting and exploring racist, homophobic, anti-Semitic, and sexist themes.

Comedy animation series *South Park* has encountered numerous controversies during its seventeen years on-air. Its scatological humour, foul-mouthed child characters, racist and anti-Semitic themes, celebrity defamation, and use of sacred figures such as Jesus and the Muslim Prophet Muhammad have seen it come under critical and public scrutiny. *Telegraph* newspaper critic James Delingpole describes it as 'the most gratuitously offensive [satire] in the history of television' (2010), a quality both decried and celebrated by critics and viewers. Its reputation for profanity and offensive content has attracted red ratings in all assessed categories in The Parents Television Council's traffic light system of review.<sup>10</sup> Amongst the show's cache of offensive and provocative material, blackface appears in numerous episodes. Those discussed in this work are 'Summer Sucks' (1998), 'Free Willzyx' (2005), '201' (2010), and 'World War Zimmerman' (2013).

Each episode uses blackface in a different way or to achieve a different effect: 'Summer Sucks' uses blackface as a passing offensive gesture; 'Free Willzyx' uses blackface and whiteface as absurd disguise; '201' uses blackface to engage with the mistrust of African American men, racism, and the election of Barack Obama; and 'World War Zimmerman' uses blackface as a means of commenting on the trial of George Zimmerman for the killing of Trayvon Martin.

*Family Guy* is an animated series produced by Fox Broadcasting Company and is created by Seth MacFarlane. The program centres on the lives and exploits of the Griffin family living in fictional town of Quahog, Rhode Island. The show is surreal and features a talking dog and

---

<sup>10</sup> The Parents Television Council is an advocacy group whose mission is to 'protect children and families from graphic sex, violence and profanity in the media, because of their proven long-term harmful effects' (Parents Television Council, 2014). It uses a traffic light system, assessing media in the categories of sex, language, and violence.

evil-genius baby amongst other outlandish characters. *Family Guy* features blackface in the episode 'Halloween on Spooner Street' (2010) as a passing reference. It interacts with the notion of offence, the inappropriateness of blackface, and unequal perceptions of racism in American society.

*American Dad!* is an animated series produced by Fuzzy Door Productions and co-written and created by MacFarlane, the creator of *Family Guy*. It centres on the lives and exploits of the Smith family led by Stan Smith, a highly patriotic but somewhat ignorant CIA agent. The series emerged in 2005 in the shadow of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks and its first episode satirised the threat-level culture that followed the event. Stan Smith's ignorance of others' feelings and cultures is a theme often exploited in the series and forms the basis of the show's use of blackface in the episode 'An Apocalypse to Remember' (2007).

### Music Video

In 2012 rapper and music producer Lupe Fiasco released the album *Food & Liquor II: The Great American Rap Album Pt. 1*. (2012a) and subsequently the music video *Bitch Bad*. The album reached number one in the Billboard Rap Albums chart and maintained a chart position for seventeen weeks (Billboard, 2014). Lupe Fiasco's material is often described as 'conscious rap' for its cultural criticism and focus on social and political topics, which has attracted both loyal fans and detractors.

According to Lupe Fiasco, a function of the album 'is to delve into American history, American experiences, American ideals, American realities, and also American phenomenon' (2012c). And it is with the music video *Bitch Bad* that he brings together two such features of American history and culture: hip hop and the blackface. Fiasco explains that the aim of using blackface in *Bitch Bad* is to 'shed some light on the minstrel period in American history and the entertainment business back in the twenties and the teens and [relate] that to how it is today. It's a pure American experience kind of thing' (2012d). The video's director Gil Green elaborates upon the song and video's approach explaining that 'Lupe is proving a point here with his lyrics. You got to pay attention to the lyrics on this one and hopefully the imagery will match it' (in Lupe Fiasco, 2012d). The fundamental premise of the song and

video is to highlight the prevalence of the term 'bitch' and 'bad bitch' in rap music and the impact it may have on the aspirations and expectations of children and young adults influenced by rap industry portrayals of women, something that Lupe Fiasco finds to be 'confounding, very conflicting, very interesting to say the least' (2012d). This music video example is included in this work because of its interaction with a long-running concept of equivalency between hip hop and minstrelsy, which it achieves by juxtaposing blackface images and practices alongside those of hip hop culture.

The narrative of the *Bitch Bad* music video depicts a young boy and girl as they grow up with differing understandings of the term 'bad bitch': the boy, through his mother's love of songs which use the term; the girl, primarily through her own consumption of images of women in rap music videos. Later in the video the children have grown up, they meet, and their differing understandings of femininity and womanhood clash. This narrative is presented within the tripartite structure of a theatrical performance and is divided into three acts. Act One presents the story of the young boy, Act Two presents the story of the young girl, and Act Three shows their meeting in later life. To frame the tripartite structure and to allude to the history of minstrelsy, the video is shot in a small theatre and the scenarios are played out in various parts of the building (the stage, the auditorium, dressing rooms, stairwells, and outside the front of the theatre).

In 2006 hip hop journalist Byron Crawford published two articles entitled 'Minstrel Show Rap' (2006a) and 'Black People WTF?' (2006b) on hip hop magazine website XXL and his own website ByronCrawford.com respectively. The content of the articles is broadly similar and their main arguments and examples are the same. In both articles Crawford provides three cases of what he terms an 'Insidious new trend: Minstrel show rap' (2006a). The examples are 'Chain Hang Low' (2006), 'Chicken Noodle Soup' (2006), and 'Fry That Chicken' (2006). In a contribution to the Discourse of Blackface Equivalency with hip hop, Crawford describes the examples as 'an outright and purposeful embrace of minstrelsy' (2006a). The three examples provided by Crawford have attracted varying critical attention from other commentators and each offer something unique with regards to understanding blackface minstrelsy as it appears in the twenty-first century. 'Chain Hang Low' by rapper Jibbs uses a well-known melody for its main chorus hook. This melody featured in the popular early

minstrelsy song 'Zip Coon' and it is primarily this association that has attracted the attention of critics. The accompanying dance to 'Chicken Noodle Soup', the chicken noodle soup dance, has been compared to minstrel dance styles. The final example 'Fry That Chicken' has primarily attracted attention from critics for its thematic use of fried chicken, although other features of the music video including location, use of child cast members, and the cross-dressed performance of its author Ms. Peachez have also garnered critical comments from observers. Each of these examples is discussed in detail in 'Minstrel Show Rap: Three Case Studies' later in this work.

### Written Fiction

The connections between minstrelsy and hip hop are not isolated to Lupe Fiasco's *Bitch Bad*. Published in the *Bronx Biannual* in 2007, 'The Wu-Tang Candidate' (Lewis, 2007a) details the rise to fame of blackface rapper Ace Boon Coon (Ace), whose appropriation of minstrelsy's themes, imagery, and mask rather unsurprisingly causes a great deal of controversy. However, in a similar twist to Lee's *Bamboozled*, Ace's performance results in a great deal of success. The story is fictional and is written by popular culture critic, writer, and journalist Miles Marshall Lewis. Although fictional, Lewis claims that the story is not so far-fetched: '[w]ould a blackface MC be any crazier than Lil Jon wearing diamond-encrusted dental fronts more expensive than suburban McMansions?' (2007b, p. 83) he asks in his follow-up article 'Facing Off: Blackface, Minstrels and Hip Hop' in popular culture magazine *Dazed and Confused* in which he explains the motivation and background to 'The Wu-Tang Candidate'.

The story provides a snapshot of Ace's career in which he appears in a full blackface minstrel mask and performs rap songs that evoke the themes of minstrelsy and its legacy in popular culture. He eats watermelon on stage, integrates minstrel songs into his performance, and puts on vulgar stage shows. Ace's controversial image finds him an apparent enemy in the form of aspiring politician Hedley Dixon, inciting a feud that results in his very public assassination on the Miami Beach set of his music video 'Black and Ugly As Ever'.

Much like many of the other sources presented for discussion in this research, 'The Wu-Tang Candidate' is a work of satire, something made clear by Lewis in his article for *Dazed and*

*Confused*. Lewis points out that although '[m]aking parallels between the once vibrant voice of the urban under-class and the embarrassing minstrel genre...is a sacrilege...[t]he use of parody and satire was an easier way to get at this unsettling question and its even more troubling answers' (2007b, p. 82).

#### Discourse Analysis Sources

The written and spoken sources used in the chapter 'Talking Blackface' are drawn from a range of sources including news websites, specialist websites, blogs, and television interviews. News websites include the UK *Guardian*, the UK *Telegraph*, the *New York Daily News*, *The Baltimore Sun*, the *San Jose Mercury News*, and *The Tampa Tribune* provide a range of examples. Some contributions from these sources are provided in the form of interviews, others in the form of feature articles and opinion pieces. A television interview with film director Spike Lee is provided by the Black Entertainment Television program *Our World with Black Enterprise* and hip hop documentary *The N Word: An In-Depth Discussion* (2004) directed by Todd Williams provides one of the contributions from Stanley Crouch. The specialist publications *XXL* and *Noisey* by *Vice* provide contributions from Byron Crawford and Angel Haze respectively. As these examples will demonstrate, those providing contributions to the Discourse of Blackface Equivalency come from various professions, backgrounds, and positions of influence and include academics, journalists, cultural critics, music performers, and film directors.

#### 4. Methodology

This thesis seeks to interpret the functions and effects of blackface and minstrelsy in creative, critical, and social contexts. It is therefore important to use a methodological system that helps to interpret the varied ways in which they are represented in popular culture. As the review of source materials preceding this section demonstrates, blackface and minstrelsy are represented across a range of media including film, television, music video, social media, and conventional text-based media. These forms comprise the visual, aural, and written. As a result, this work uses the methods of semiotics and discourse analysis as the basis of analytical discussion, which are framed by the concept of representation. Each of these broad analytical methods and concepts is rooted in the study and interpretation of language and systems of communication, a commonality that makes their combination in this work an appropriate and natural synthesis. To begin, this chapter outlines the basis upon which the study of language in cultural theory and analysis rests by looking at the primary ways in which language has been interpreted. From this point, I explore the concept of representation as proposed by Stuart Hall in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997) before moving on to outline the key sources and methods of both semiotics and discourse analysis applied in later chapters. The discussion of semiotics introduces the key concept of signification and the application of semiotic analysis to the texts of popular culture by theorist Roland Barthes, specifically in his book *Mythologies*. The discussion of discourse analysis looks to the methods outlined by Paul Gee in *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* (2005) and provides a system of terms employed in the analysis of written and verbal communication. This chapter does not attempt to create a rigid system of analysis, but to use the concepts and methods of representation, semiotics, and discourse analysis to frame its investigation of blackface and minstrelsy as a communicative system of signs and concepts.



## Understanding the Study of Language

The acknowledgment of language and its connection to culture is not a new concern. However, it is in the twentieth century that ‘the interrelationships of language and culture have been the focus of a great deal of sustained attention’ (Burke; Crowley; Girvin, 2000, p. 2). The study of language in the Western world during the twentieth century was heavily influenced by the work of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure whose theoretical approaches to studying language form the basis of structuralism<sup>11</sup> (Storey, 2012, p. 113). Broadly speaking, his work is comprised of three approaches to the study of language: the history of languages; the relationship between language and culture; and, the study of signification (Burke; Crowley; Girvin, 2000, p. 4). Although these three approaches can be discussed independently of one another, they are ultimately connected and interrelated.

The study of the *history of languages*<sup>12</sup> is to analyse the ways in which language develops and is ‘institutionalised, codified, gendered, linked to specific groups in education, privileged, and downgraded’ (Burke; Crowley; Girvin, 2000, p. 5). The meanings of words change with their use and setting. Certain words fall out of favour and remain dormant in a language’s lexicon, others adapt, and others remain largely unchanged. But words and language do not simply change of their own accord. The development of language is dependent upon how it is put to use by individuals and groups within a given context and at a given time. The language of African Americans—this includes terminology, dialect, and accent—became an important means of representing slave and African American life and culture in blackface minstrelsy and in establishing and maintaining a distinction between them and others in American society.

Within the minstrel show the language of African Americans was ‘institutionalised’ as a core identifier of minstrel performance, and ‘codified’ into a system of language used to represent them. It was, to a large degree, shown to be inferior and antithetical to ‘civilised’

---

<sup>11</sup> The fundamental principles of structuralism will be outlined in more detail later under the heading ‘Semiotics’.

<sup>12</sup> The study of the ‘History of Languages’ in this context should not be considered as etymology, but as the investigation of how language and its meanings alter and develop. It is not so concerned with the origins of words, but with their function at given points in time.

and cultivated language. This was fundamentally connected to the social, political, and economic status of African Americans as slaves (and subsequently as free citizens) and interrelated to their access (or lack thereof) to education. In the slave system of America the control of literacy, and therefore control of the written form of language, was managed by a system of laws legislated on a state-by-state basis called Slave Codes. These laws designated the status of slaves, their rights, and the duties of slave owners. Common to Slave Codes was the prohibition of education for slaves and the punishment of slave owners who broke the rules. A result was that African American language developed under regulation as a vernacular language, not a literary one. Therefore, although it was rooted in the common tongue of America, it developed with some independence of more formal forms of language. The legacy of this formed a key feature of minstrel performance which utilised 'Black Dialect' in songs and spoken performances such as monologues, speeches, comic dialogue, and lectures. It was signified by a number of features such as phonemic substitution,<sup>13</sup> mispronunciation, and (in comic instances) malapropism. In this regard, the interpretation and manipulation of African American language by minstrel performers was a significant signifier of blackface minstrelsy and its use on the minstrel stage had a lasting impact on the perception of African American language and culture.

If 'culture' can be viewed as 'a particular way of life, whether of a people, period or a group' (Williams in Storey, 2012, pp. 1-2) then language can be viewed as our means of expressing our cultural identity. It is with this in mind that the relationship between *language and culture* becomes an important association. This relationship is of great importance to the study of minstrelsy and its appearances in the twenty-first century. As has been shown in the struggles for civil rights in American history, the control of language and its means of dissemination have been central to the social and political determination of minority and marginalised groups. Burke et al. point out that language is a 'battleground for the contestation of political and cultural identities and values' (2000, p. 5). Minstrelsy, viewed by

---

<sup>13</sup> The work of Mahar provides an in-depth analysis of African American dialect in early minstrelsy (1999). Phonemes such as 'th' were replaced with a 'd' in the adaption of words such as 'that' and 'then', creating 'dat' and 'den'. In words where the 'th' appears mid-word such as 'brother' or 'other' this was most often replaced with a 'dd' creating 'brudder' and 'udder' respectively. In cases where a word ends with the phoneme 'th' this is often replaced with an 'ff' such as in 'both' creating 'boff'. In words featuring an 'st' phoneme this was often replaced with either an 's' or 'ss' adapting words such as 'first' to 'firss', 'last' to 'lass', and 'master' to 'massa' (Mahar, 1999, p. 83).

many as the cultural manifestation of white racist hegemony, used language and other sign systems to represent African American life and culture with varying motives and results. In minstrel shows, the people whose language was purported to have been on display were not wholly in control of that language (though with the gradual introduction of African American minstrel troupes following the Civil War this did begin to change). The discursive and linguistic 'battleground' identified by Burke et al. is one in which 'language has been the prize to be won' (2000, p. 9). No more so is this evident than in the use of terms to describe African Americans, a broad lexicon of which appeared in minstrel song and stage performances. During the twentieth century, this lexicon of terms was fought over, leading gradually to the shift in publicly acceptable identifiers for African Americans. Terms used frequently in minstrel shows and subsequent popular culture (songs, films, advertising, etc.) became increasingly unacceptable.

Much of the power of words like 'nigger', 'coon', and 'darkey' lay in the hands of those who used them to describe African Americans. Even in early scholarship of minstrelsy (Gaines, 1924; Wittke, 1930), which provide some of the earliest critical observations of minstrel practices, terms such as 'darkey' are used with no sense of shame nor attempts to justify their use; something unthinkable in current academic literature. In his criticism of minstrelsy's corrupting influence and lack of realism, Gaines describes the appearance of dances 'unlike any of the reckless jiggging of the true darkey' (1924, p. 109) and describes changes to minstrelsy during the middle of the nineteenth century that failed to reproduce the 'grotesque characteristics of negro habits of finery and misfit' (1924, p. 110). The language used by Gaines may be difficult for many current readers to comprehend, but it is language that is mirrored in other minstrelsy studies texts of the early twentieth century. Carl Wittke provides necessary engagement with the inauthenticity of minstrelsy's depiction of African American life. However, he also perpetuates the language of marginalisation: 'minstrels found the inspiration for their new art in the life of the Southern darky' (1930, p. 39).

Words such as 'darky' form part of the Discourse of Blackface Equivalency that this work seeks to uncover. However, the words are now often used by African American critics of popular culture, not by white scholars or minstrel performers. In this sense, they are now no

longer solely in white hands. To 'win' these words is to take ownership of them, to control their meaning and use. The fact that the 'N-word' was ceremonially buried by the NAACP in 2007 demonstrates the power of racialised terminology and its ongoing significance in American society.

The *study of signification* is the study of the way language means; that is, how concepts are conveyed by signs (linguistic, pictorial, etc.). In the use of a sign system like a written and spoken language, the relationship between the signifier (aural or visual stimuli) and the signified (its meaning) is the 'result of convention – of cultural agreement' (Storey, 1998, p. 74). The organisation of meaning is a complex one and is connected to a word's historical use, function within discourses, and relationships to power and status. The acknowledgement of this and the closer inspection of signification, forces an analysis and evaluation of the use of language in its control of meaning. To return to an earlier example, there is no natural relationship between the word 'nigger' or 'darky' and a person with dark skin with ancestral roots in the African continent; the meaning of the word is one of cultural convention and a particularly troubling one at that. But the word 'nigger', as most will likely know, has had and continues to have great power in post-colonial contexts and its use has been contested and debated in various areas of culture and media.<sup>14</sup>

With the aim of further separating the processes of language, Saussure distinguishes between two components in the formulation of a structuralist theory of language as proposed in *Course in General Linguistics* (1893): *langue* and *parole*. The former refers to 'the system of language, the rules and conventions that organize it' (Storey, 2008, p. 113). The latter refers to 'the individual utterance, the individual use of language' (Storey, 2008, p. 113). In this sense, one must understand the *langue* (rules of language) to participate in *parole* (the performance of language). In terms of this research, one must understand the function of blackface minstrelsy in discourses of popular culture—informed by its historical significance and prior and current uses in culture—to participate in a given discursive or artistic practice which evokes it. However, different participants and observers will have

---

<sup>14</sup> Controversy was recently ignited by United States President Barack Obama's use of the term 'nigger' on the WTF with Marc Maron podcast (Zaru, 2015). Wider debate of the term's appropriateness was instigated by CNN anchor Don Lemon holding up a large sign displaying the word during a broadcast (Mazza, 2015).

differing understandings of the terminology and imagery and it is by no means assured that observers will react in the same way.

These foundational concepts form the backbone of the study of language and symbolic systems of communication. Although we may speak of these concepts independently of one another they are intrinsically connected in the construction of a coherent historical and cultural dialogue. Moreover, the following key concepts of representation, semiotics, and discourse share a common basis: the communication of meaning through language and systems of communication.

### Representation

The title of this work is *Representations of Blackface and Minstrelsy in Twenty-First Century Popular Culture*. Therefore, it is impossible to continue without both defining the term and demonstrating its importance in this work. Our starting point, as is Stuart Hall's in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997), is language. Hall describes language as 'the privileged medium in which we "make sense" of things, in which meaning is produced and exchanged' (1997, p. 1). It is important to recognise that when Hall talks about 'language' he does not mean strictly spoken or written language, but the various forms of communication through which meaning is conveyed. In this context we can consider language to include spoken, written, pictorial, graphic, photographic, gestural, and symbolic forms of communication (a notion returned to later in under the heading 'Semiotics'). This acknowledgement that language takes multiple forms is particularly important to this research as the focus of discussion is separated into two components: 'Showing blackface' (the visual representation of blackface, minstrelsy, and associated features) and 'Talking blackface' (the discursive representation of blackface and minstrelsy as concepts in discourses of popular culture). Although this research separates the two for the purposes of clarity, both approaches are two sides of the same coin; they are both forms of communication in which the meaning of blackface and minstrelsy in the twenty-first century is conveyed. It is in my conclusions that I bring the two components back together with the aim of demonstrating the fundamental relationship between the two components and their common features.

For Hall, language, in all of its forms and mediums, is capable of conveying common meanings. In this sense, it is a 'representational system' (1997, p. 1). That is, its function is to 'represent to other people our concepts, ideas and feelings' (1997, p. 1). Within any culture or society there are a range of different opinions, feelings, and understandings of ideas. However, for a society, culture, or social group to communicate successfully there must be a level of common understanding between members in the shared recognition of 'cultural codes' (Hall, 1997, p. 4). That is, members must be able to interpret meaning through their ability to understand and communicate using broadly similar systems of thought and communication. Hall suggests that '[m]eaning is a dialogue—always only partially understood, always an unequal exchange' (1997, p. 4). There is always an element of interpretation at work in any exchange of meaning between parties, with each participant calling upon their own experience and knowledge to construct the meaning of communicated ideas. There is often confusion in exchange, and intended meaning may be lost in communication. Such a disparity may be attributed to cultural difference, access to information, or simply through misunderstanding. Therefore, it is important to remember that meaning is not always conveyed successfully, nor is the intended meaning of a performance of language (in any of its potential forms) always interpreted by the receiver as the communicator intends. To return to some earlier terms, this constitutes a mismatch between the *langue* and the *parole*. This is abundantly clear in the use of problematic concepts and images such as blackface in which a viewer may misinterpret the intentions of the user, leading to offence and controversy.

In the construction of meaning through the use of language we do not create meaning from nothing. The communication of ideas is always a result of appropriation. That is, we use existing ideas, concepts, and images to convey how we feel and what we mean. Language in all of its forms represents a vast lexicon of signs and concepts, ready to be called upon at a moment's notice. Metaphors provide an illustrative example as they work to fill in a conceptual space with a recognisable idea that helps to summarise or symbolise a common feeling. Hall proposes that:

Meaning is also produced whenever we express ourselves in, make use of, consume or appropriate cultural "things"; that is, when we incorporate them

in different ways into the everyday ritual and practices of daily life and in this way give them value or significance (1997, pp. 3-4).

This observation is of fundamental importance to this research, for it is in the act of appropriation and the exploitation of its signs that blackface and minstrelsy gain and maintain value and significance. The antiquated form of minstrelsy is *made* to mean in our contemporary context; its signs are remobilised today with the aim of meaning anew. Hall further proposes that '[i]t is by our use of things, and what we say, think and feel about them – how we represent them – that we *give them meaning*' [author's italics] (1997, p. 3). In the twenty-first century appropriation of minstrelsy those who use it both call upon its historical meanings and *give it meaning* through reuse; they appropriate its meanings and reinforce and develop them.

Fundamentally, representation is the use of something to help us express what we mean; it *represents* what we feel and think, or at least we hope it does. Put simply, all forms of representation help us to 'say something' (Hall, 1997, p. 5). It is my aim with this work to uncover what using blackface and minstrelsy helps those who use it to 'say'.

### Semiotics

Generally speaking, semiotics is the study of signs and symbols. As a method of analysis it developed from structuralism, which works on the principle that culture can be understood as existing within a system of structures in which meaning is produced and conveyed. Dominic Strinati defines structuralism as 'a theoretical and philosophical framework relevant to the social sciences as a whole, which stresses the universal, causal character of structures' (2004, p. 78). So for structuralists, the structures of culture are not trivial observations, but have a causal impact on the construction of meaning and therefore on our actions and ideologies. Moreover, structures help us to understand the world in which we live. For example, we are able to discern something's meaning and value in relation to other things, or where it exists within a structure. Structures such as binary oppositions create either/or relationships in which things are good or bad, up or down, in or out. It is not to say that there is no middle-ground between these extreme polar positions, but that they provide the

boundaries in which to construct our understanding of the range of possibilities in a given situation or context.

Theories of structuralism have been applied to the texts of popular culture with the aim of discerning their ideological function. According to Roy Shuker, the structuralist 'views of popular culture and media forms concentrate on how meaning is generated in media texts, examining how the "structure" of the text (visual, verbal, or auditory) produces particular ideological meanings' (2005, p. 257). The legacy of structuralism is the study of signs and symbols in the analytical processes of semiotics. However, Strinati argues that semiotics as a system can be separated from the wider philosophical and political imperatives of structuralism and can operate as a method for analysing cultural texts, practices, and human interaction in its own right (2004, p. 79).

The theoretical deconstruction of written and spoken language initiated by Saussure helped to establish the key terms and concepts of semiotics. His fundamental contribution to the study of semiotics is his separation of the sign into two components: the signifier and the signified (discussed earlier as the *study of signification*). The signifier is the visual or aural component: the stimulus that begins the process of communication. The signified is the concept elicited by the signifier: the idea or image that comes to mind when one encounters the stimulus. Together the two components complete the sign. As efficient communicators we do not as a matter of course separate the two in our minds. Rather, we consume them combined as meaning. However, for Saussure the meaning created and communicated through the process of signification is often arbitrary, particularly in the case of written language, and is a result of cultural convention. This may all seem obvious. But it is through the process of signification that meaning is established, maintained, and managed. Therefore, to separate the components is a means of better understanding how ideas and concepts are attached to words, pictures, and symbols.

Those who followed Saussure applied the range of terms and concepts to wider systems of communication, or as Hall proposes above 'representational systems' (1997, p. 1). One such follower was Roland Barthes. John Storey describes Barthes's 1957 book *Mythologies* as 'quite simply one of the founding texts of cultural studies' (1998, p. 82). According to Storey,



Barthes goal in *Mythologies* is to 'make explicit what too often remains implicit in the texts and practices of popular culture' (1998, p. 81). In other words, to unpick and illuminate the signification of meaning in the texts and practices of popular culture which so often go un-interrogated and ignored. *Mythologies* organises a series of short essays which apply semiotics to a range of texts and practices from across popular culture (predominantly French popular culture), including: wrestling; advertisements for cars, detergents, and toys; literary criticism; and, the French love of red wine. This eclectic selection of examples is certainly interesting, but what is of primary importance is his application of semiotic principles beyond the field of linguistics and into the wider areas of cultural practice in an era of technological development and media proliferation. Furthermore, his essay 'Myth Today' (included in *Mythologies*) provides many of the foundational concepts of semiotic analysis.

Much like Saussure's principle of arbitrary meaning in linguistic signs, Barthes proposes that '[a]ny material can arbitrarily be endowed with meaning' (2009, p. 131). In other words, any object or sign can be made to mean something, something that very often has no tangible or natural relationship with the object or its other potential functions. A useful example is flags, which are purely symbolic in function. The combination of shapes and colours, presented on cloth and usually in the shape of a rectangle, conveys more than the simple sum of its parts. The appearance of a flag may elicit responses and feelings ranging from pride to shame and love to hate (or perhaps a complex combination of these polar oppositions) depending on who is interpreting the flag's meaning. Operating as symbols of nation, peoples, and culture they are raised and lowered, valorised and burned the world over. Blackface minstrel tradition provides us with an example to illustrate this point in which the symbolic identity and belonging attached by some to national flags is aptly and troublingly signalled by the Will A. Heelan and J. Fred Helf coon song<sup>15</sup> 'Every Race Has a Flag but the Coon' (1901). The African American sense of displacement and national disfranchisement is symbolised by their lack of inclusion in American society and lack of determination and power as a socio-ethnic group.

---

<sup>15</sup> 'Coon songs' were a popular style of song derived from the traditions of minstrelsy which featured in vaudeville and musical theatre in the United States of America during the late 1800s and early 1900s. They 'typically employ a stage dialect supposedly imitative of black Americans' speech and draw upon a repertoire of crude racial stereotypes conventionalized in blackface minstrelsy, from which the genre emerged' (Wise, pp. 155-156).

Barthes developed Saussure's basic principle of the signifier/signified/sign model to incorporate further levels of communication to account for the phenomena of transient meaning in signification. For Barthes, the literal signifying practice (the designation of a sign's literal qualities) is only the first stage in the signifying process. This he terms primary signification or *denotation*. From denotation further meaning is produced (such as the concepts of pride, shame, love, or hate elicited by a flag) at a level of secondary signification or *connotation* (Barthes, 1964, p. 89). For Barthes it was at the level of connotation that 'myth' is produced and it is here that ideology functions most potently. According to Storey, myth is 'ideology understood as a body of ideas and practices, which, by actively promoting the values and interests of dominant groups in society, defend the prevailing structures of power' (Storey, 2012, p. 121). The minstrel show conveyed the myth of African American culture and life as something both fascinating and subordinate. At its most outwardly sympathetic to African Americans it still maintained the distinctions between black and white as profoundly different and the institution of slavery as a feature of natural social order. Alexander Saxton points to how minstrel performers '[o]n the one hand, propagating the plantation myth, they portrayed slavery as benign and desirable. On the other hand they reinforced the image of the South as symbol of the collective rural past and of individual childhood' (1975, p. 18). In this sense, the minstrel show worked to maintain the prevailing structures of power and to perpetuate the notion of slavery as normality. Following the abolition of slavery, social control remained an important feature of minstrelsy's function. With African Americans no longer property and subject to the legal constraints<sup>16</sup> incumbent with that status, they represented different opportunities and threats to social order. The song style of coon songs, which became popular during vaudeville and perpetuated some of the most outwardly demeaning images of African Americans established in minstrelsy, 'was a manifestation of a peculiar form of the will to believe – to believe in the signified "coon" as represented in the songs – as a necessary socio-psychological mechanism for justifying segregation and subordination' (Dormon in Wise, 2012, p. 156). It is the signifying capacity of blackface minstrelsy as a sign system capable of reaching both back into history and into the repository of American racism that gives it its power.

---

<sup>16</sup> Although abolition eventually freed slaves from chattel slavery, there remained harsh restrictions on the civil rights of African Americans. The Jim Crow Laws, which followed the abolition of slavery during the period of Reconstruction, enforced the segregation of African Americans and white Americans leading to widespread disfranchisement and inequality in housing, education, employment, military service, and free movement.

### Discourse and Discourse Analysis

Discourse is put simply the 'domain of language use' and 'refers to a body of meaning associated with a particular topic or field, regardless of the form of its transmission' (Shuker, 2005, p. 81). It is clear from this basic definition that the concepts of discourse, representation, and signification are profoundly related by their commonality: the communication and management of meaning. Moreover, the scholarship of each of these disciplines tends to acknowledge this fundamental connection between these terms and processes. Hall further develops the notion of discourse as:

ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice: a cluster (or *formation*) of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society' (1997, p. 6).

Hall's definition highlights the way that discussion of particular subjects groups together, forming not only the body of ideas relevant to a given subject, but also the relationship of this discussion to activities, institutions, and discursive practices.

Paul Gee argues for the separation of 'Discourse' (presented with a capital 'D') and 'discourse' (presented with a lower-case 'd'). This, he argues, is an important distinction. The former refers to the communicative processes around a specific area or subject that incorporates 'ways of combining and integrating language, actions, interactions, ways of thinking, believing, valuing, and using various symbols, tools, and objects to enact a particular sort of socially recognizable identity' (Gee, 2005, p. 17). The latter refers to 'language-in-use or stretches of language (like conversations or stories)' (Gee, 2005, p. 17). Therefore, when discussing the specific discursive uses of blackface and minstrelsy I apply the capitalised form of 'Discourse'.

From the descriptions above it is clear that discourse is a complex term and one that is connected to not only how we communicate, but also how we think, act, and group ourselves in social, professional, and institutional contexts. Therefore, to analyse a Discourse

is to attempt to isolate how language is used to manage these parameters; it is to shine a light on the mechanisms of identity, power, and knowledge. Gee proposes that discourse analysis seeks to identify 'patterns and links within and across utterances in order to form hypotheses about how meaning is being constructed and organized' (2005, p. 99). It is, therefore, a thematic approach which aims to identify how and where such themes are articulated and how they are connected.

The methodology used to analyse the written and spoken sources used in this section is derived from the analytical methods of discourse analysis outlined by Gee in *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* (2005). He provides an array of theoretical tools and examples to demonstrate how language functions in the enactment of 'activities, perspectives, and identities' (Gee, 2005, p. 4). Rather than providing a rigid system, Gee encourages the adoption, adaption, development, and reinterpretation of terms, theories, and methods—or what he describes as 'thinking devices'—to a reader or researcher's own specific field of enquiry (2005, p. 6). It is with this encouragement in mind that I have chosen to focus my analysis of the written and spoken texts in this work on the following key concepts, terms, and methods.

Gee identifies two related functions of language: 'to support the performance of social activities and social identities and to support human affiliation within cultures, social groups, and institutions' (2005, p. 1). This can be simply summarised as 'performance' and 'affiliation'. Each time we use language we *perform* discursive activities; we engage in acts of parole. The performances in which we participate in the family home, the recreational space, and the workplace will often differ substantially in content and style. I am currently engaged in an act of discursive performance and the manner in which I speak here will not necessarily mirror the way I speak to friends and family. Furthermore, the fact that I have chosen blackface minstrelsy as an important issue worthy of discussion says much about the activities and identities I myself perform through discursive practice. It also says something important about my cultural, social, and institutional *affiliations*. Humans use language to align themselves with particular social groups and professional institutions. The language one uses, the subjects one talks about, and the way subjects are discussed is an important symbol of participation and membership within social groups, institutions, professions, and

areas of cultural life. Not using the correct discursive patterns and rules may lead to exclusion or confusion. As is shown shortly with Gee's terms of analysis, such discursive performances and expressions of affiliation can be identified through observing how we communicate in a range of discursive contexts.

Gee identifies 'seven building tasks' of language and explains that when we communicate verbally or in written form 'we always and simultaneously construct or build seven things or seven areas of "reality."' (2005, p. 11). With this central notion in mind it becomes possible to think in detailed ways about how language is constructed around specific subjects, by individuals or groups, and within institutions or organisations. The seven building tasks of language are:

- **Significance:** We use language to make things significant (to give them meaning or value) in certain ways, to build significance;
- **Activities:** We use language to get recognized as engaging in a certain sort of activity, that is, to build an activity here-and-now;
- **Identities:** We use language to get recognized as taking on a certain identity or role, that is to build an identity here-and-now;
- **Relationships:** We use language to signal what sort of relationship we have, want to have, or are trying to have with our listener(s), reader(s), or other people, groups, or institutions about whom we are communicating; that is, we use language to build social relationships;
- **Politics (the distribution of social goods):** We use language to convey a perspective on the nature of the distribution of social goods, that is, to build a perspective on social goods...How I phrase the matter has implications for social goods such as guilt and blame, legal responsibility or lack of it, or [a subject's] bad or good motives;

- **Connections:** We use language to render certain things connected or relevant (or not) to other things, that is, to build connections or relevance... Things are not always inherently connected or relevant to each other. I have to make such connections. Even when things seem inherently connected or relevant to each other, I can use language to break or mitigate such connections;
- **Sign systems and knowledge:** we humans are always making knowledge and belief claims within these systems. We can use language to make certain sign systems and certain forms of knowledge and belief relevant or privileged, or not, in given situations, that is to build privilege or prestige for one sign system or knowledge claim over another.  
(Gee, 2005, pp. 11-13).

Language is used to endow certain opinions, identities, and artefacts with *significance*. The field of minstrelsy studies, as an ongoing and evolving Discourse, attempts to draw attention to the significance of minstrelsy as a cultural movement with notable social, political, stylistic, and historical significance. Its mere discussion endows it with significance; to talk about something is to give it a material reality and significance. Within academic discussions of minstrelsy various individual elements (politics, sexuality, gender, race, etc.) are given further significance, often highlighting features of history that are little or unknown, or deemed unimportant within popular conversations about minstrelsy. In the popular and non-academic Discourse of minstrelsy it is also given significance in its equivalency with contemporary cultural practice. Features of its performance, industry structures, and social impact are evoked in comparative discussions of twenty-first century culture. These features are given significance through association.

As Gee suggests, language can identify one's participation in a particular *activity*. For example, the language of a fan, critic, and scholar will point to their participation and place within certain activities, like, for example a concert. How each of these people will speak or write about the concert may differ significantly. However, it is important to remember that

one person can occupy all of these subject positions and change their use of language to signal their participation in a specific activity. One's use of language may signal their participation in the activity of cultural criticism by using certain terms and structures of language to place value on the practices of others (as is shown later in 'The Discourse of Blackface Equivalency').

Our participation in activities will subsequently play a role in determining our *identities*. Our uses of language may work to reinforce our own security in membership to a range of cultural and social groupings; help us to make sense of our own identity as individuals; and help others to understand their identity in relation to ours. Language can be used to reinforce and challenge hierarchies, assert one's political ideology, and one's sense of familial and social responsibility, all of which help to demonstrate our identity to ourselves and to others.

Language works to establish and maintain *relationships* between people or to break them. To use a simple example: the terms 'us' and 'them' construct a useful oppositional relationship of collective pronouns. Similarly, the collective pronoun 'we' provides a signal of inclusion or of commonality. Linguistic identifiers of cultural or ethnic difference (both official and colloquial, polite and slurring) provide shortcuts for signalling the status of a subject as outsider or member. The minstrel show did an efficient job of identifying African Americans as 'other', as different to other ethnic groups in American society.

The concept of blackface minstrelsy as a symbol of American racism (and the nation's taste for such images in wider popular culture) is used in critical discourses of popular culture to identify moral failings on the part of entertainers, public figures, and industries. In this sense, the concept of minstrelsy is used to illicit ideas of shame and disgust (in the subject or consumer of such discourses) that accompany the minstrel show in American cultural memory; in other words, minstrelsy is used as a discursive concept in the *distribution of social goods*. This is signalled in a number of different ways. For example, deploying terms like 'coon' or 'darker' connotes the minstrel show (through the terms' ubiquitous use in songs and performances) and work to illicit uncomfortable feelings that engage us in historically specific and confrontational ways. Those who utilise the terminology and concept of the

minstrel show often seek to manage the distribution of social goods such as shame, embarrassment, and guilt.

Such discursive distribution of social goods is explored in Norbert Elias and John Scotson's *The Established and the Outsiders* (1965). The focus of their study is the discursive practices of inhabitants of the small East Midlands town of Winston Parva (false name) in which an 'outsider' community (new-comers to the town) comes into social conflict with an 'established' community (those residing for a number of generations). Elias and Scotson observe that established and outsider group residents attributed to themselves a 'group charisma' and a 'group disgrace' respectively that was enforced and controlled by 'praise gossip' and 'blame gossip' (Elias and Scotson, 1994, p. xxii). Furthermore, the established group used 'exclusion and stigmatisation' as 'powerful weapons...to maintain their identity, to assert their superiority, keeping others firmly in their place' (Elias and Scotson, 1994, p. xviii). Essentially, the established used discursive practices to maintain power through the distribution of the social goods of praise and charisma, blame and disgrace.

In the Discourse of Blackface Equivalency, *connections* are established between contemporary cultural practices and those of the minstrel show. Gee points towards the ways in which language is used to draw attention to, or away from, connections between things. This may be achieved in a number of different ways. For example, in critical discourses of popular culture which evoke minstrelsy, a person may use analogy, metaphor, or simile to identify connections between an aspect of contemporary culture and minstrel shows. As will be seen in the analysis of examples later in this work, creating connections between twenty-first century cultural practice and the institutional and performative practices of minstrelsy is a recurring discursive theme.

Meaning is not solely communicated by written or spoken language and it is important to consider other methods of conveying meaning through non-linguistic *sign systems*. Blackface minstrelsy developed a collection of visual, non-linguistic signs to identify African American culture and social practices. As was outlined earlier in the discussion of representation and semiotics, non-linguistic sign systems operate as powerful structures of communication in



their own right and can be viewed as analogous to conventional linguistic systems of communication.

It is often tempting to think about ideas as being unique or specific to the individual uttering or writing them down. One may feel a sense of ownership or power over a word or idea when deploying it in spoken or written communication. However, as Gee points out, we are merely 'carriers' of a Discourse which has 'existed before each of us came on the scene and most of them will exist long after we have left the scene' (2005, p. 18). When we engage in a Discourse we may make a significant or entirely insignificant contribution to its development. Either way, we are one voice within a far wider historical discursive process. Once this notion recognised, it encourages us to think about how each utterance within a Discourse carries it forward and builds upon that which has come before. The Discourse of Blackface Equivalency relies on the cultural dialogue that has been going on for some time. However, carriers of the Discourse build upon it and develop it in new directions which both deploy and adapt its meanings in contemporary contexts, reflecting Johnson's observation that the meaning of blackface minstrelsy 'builds up in layers over time...haphazardly accumulating ways of reading blackface' (2012, p. 3).

The concept of minstrelsy does not evoke the same feelings now as it did in the past. It has shifted significantly as a concept in cultural consciousness, moving through a series of phases to reach the point of its current contemporary perception (as was demonstrated in the literature review). It is important to remember that the discussion of minstrelsy as an artistic and discursive concept represents it as it appears now and as it has appeared in the past through the observation of cultural artefacts and records. My analysis and discussion of this represents only one passing observation of the concept which is subject to change and development in the future as others build on my contribution and carry the concept forward into future discursive practices.

It is made apparent by the perspectives outlined above that the concepts and methods of representation, semiotics, and discourse are fundamentally connected, not only by their scholarly history (Saussure's influence in particular), but by the primacy of language as a point of focus; or to put it another way, the function of language in all of its forms as a

means of constructing and conveying meaning. With this in mind, a synthesis of these concepts in an investigation of blackface and minstrelsy in the twenty-first century is of particular use in developing an understanding of what their signs, symbols, and concepts mean and how they function in specific contexts. The separation of this work's investigation into two distinct, but ultimately related areas (*Showing Blackface* and *Talking Blackface*), allows for a narrowing of focus onto visual and discursive systems of representation. I do not argue that these fields are separate entities. Far from it, they are two sides of the same coin.

## 5. Showing Blackface

### 5. 1. Introduction

As has been shown so far, blackface is argued to have served a number of potential functions in the minstrel show and in subsequent popular culture which utilised the practice. Blackface continues to serve a range of functions in the twenty-first century, though now with contrasting effects. Using analysis of a range of texts from across the fields of popular culture, this chapter demonstrates how blackface is shown, treated, and framed in a range of contexts. In addition to demonstrating its function, this chapter highlights the key effects of using blackface and investigates some of the debates surrounding its use. In the published texts of popular culture such as film, television, music video, and literature methods of deconstructing the meaning of the mask often enable the engagement with the problematic status of blackface in American culture and history. Contrastingly, in social contexts uses of blackface are most often not afforded the same critical justification nor are the motives for use typically read positively.

## 5. 2. Change the Joke:<sup>17</sup> Blackface in Satire, Parody, and Irony

Satire is a double-edged sword and those who choose to deploy offensive imagery and subject matter in the pursuit of humour and cultural criticism must recognise the potential for them to offend as much as they provoke ironic reflections upon their repurposing in a new critical context. The irony of satire is that to effectively criticise the flaws of history, politics, and cultural practice, one must redeploy those flaws, and always with the dual-potential to reinforce and as well as criticise one's targets. This is ultimately the paradox of parody and satire, key to which is the appropriation and repetition of recognisable cultural signs. Such signs come pre-loaded with a signifying potential based on their prior use and place in cultural memory. In 'Parody and Decorum: Permission to Mock' (2009) Jerry Palmer describes how parody repeats 'some pre-existing discursive entity', which must also be 'simultaneously transformed' by the process (Palmer, 2009, p. 80). The repetition of recognised signs or discursive entities retains the potential to offend. Such a notion is acknowledged by Linda Hutcheon who suggests that the repetition of parody simultaneously 'legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies' (in Morris 2003, p. 73). However, parody and satire must retain the potential to offend as this is a key function of the humorous repurposing of offensive signs. The aim of satire and parody is not simply to repeat offensive material to elicit a humorous response. This is where a distinction between, for example, racist jokes in social situations and satire and parody that utilise racist materials should be highlighted. The distinction is in the intent of the author and performer, the treatment of the offensive materials being appropriated and redeployed, and the response of an audience (not always a predictable reaction).

There have been cases where the intent of the author of a satirical text mismatches with the reception of its audience, leading to a failure of satire. The case of the BBC sitcom *Till Death Do Us Part* (1965-1975) provides an illustrative example. Lead character Alf Garnett is an ultra-conservative white working-class family man who expresses his racist opinions of the

---

<sup>17</sup> Ralph Ellison's collection of essays *Shadow and Act* (1964) includes an essay entitled 'Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke' which discussed the role of blackface in representations of African American life and cultural practice. He describes how the American entertainment industry reduced African Americans to a 'negative sign' which most often appeared in a 'comedy of the grotesque and the unacceptable' (1964, p. 48).

changing ethnic and political landscape of Britain. According to Brett Bebbler in 'Till Death Us Do Part: Political Satire And Social Realism in the 1960s and 1970s' (2013), although the programme's writer Johnny Speight 'clearly meant to satirize an aging generation of working-class conservatives and to alarm audiences with his characters' vitriol', he finds that conversely 'many audiences identified with [Garnett's] opinions rather than appreciating the writer's irony' (2013, p. 254). This, one can imagine, could be a disturbing prospect to a satirist.

Palmer's work seeks to illuminate the 'boundary beyond which parody ceases to be a legitimate artistic device for humour and/or social criticism, and becomes unacceptable, to some group of people' (Palmer, 2009, pp. 79-80). This boundary is the area in which successful satire operates. To fail to justify your satirical and parodic intentions may lead to negative responses from an audience. However, to not push the boundary far enough is to fail to confront problematic and offensive materials. It is therefore the role of the satirist to manage this boundary. Moreover, as Bebbler points out, authors may find themselves in the middle-ground where their intentions are not matched by audience responses.

The goal of a satirist must be to challenge conceived and entrenched ideas; to both play with signifying practices and strive for the 'destabilisation of meaning' (Palmer, 2009, p. 86) through parody and humour. Blackface and minstrelsy represent a particularly problematic system of signs that a satirist may draw upon in cultural criticism. What follows is a discussion of how satire and parody figure in contemporary redeployments of these signs, in particular the blackface mask. Key to this discussion are questions of how authors of satirical texts which utilise blackface and minstrel subject matter manage the boundary between offence and humour; if they indeed do manage to destabilise meaning through parody and satire; and what narrative devices and methods are used to ensure satire's successful reception with audiences.

Pierre Delacroix – *Bamboozled*

Satire, one A: A literary work in which human vice or folly is ridiculed or attacked scornfully.

B: The branch of literature that composes such work.

Two: Irony, derision or caustic wit used to attack or expose folly, vice, or stupidity.

(Lee, 2000).

Spike Lee acknowledges the necessity of satire in the exploitation of blackface minstrelsy during the opening scene of *Bamboozled* in which the creator of *Mantan: The New Millennium Minstrel Show*, Pierre Delacroix, defines the concept and genre for the viewer (cited above). It is clear from the outset that Lee is both conscious of the conditions and effects of exploiting blackface minstrelsy in a satire of the American entertainment industry. He deploys the device of definition with a dual-function: to justify the satirical function of minstrel imagery for Delacroix the character; and as a signal to the viewer of Lee's own intentions with using the signs of blackface minstrelsy. Furthermore, by stating the definition of satire it makes the mis-reception of the film's content less likely and shield's Lee from culpability in its potentially destructive effects.

In 'Raising Minstrelsy: Humour, Satire and the Stereotype in *The Birth of a Nation* and *Bamboozled*' (2003) Michael H. Epp suggests that the film's 'narrative bitterly indicts the racist stereotypes on which American television relies for its humour, and rejects satire as a cynical excuse for their repetition' (2003, p. 25). However, *Bamboozled* is itself a satire (something made abundantly clear through the definition in the opening scene) which uses the repetition of racist imagery to achieve its critical effect. Therefore, the film finds itself in a paradoxical situation where the film appears to conform (at least in part) to the focus of its own criticism. This is something observed by Epp who points out that the film's 'repetition of minstrel stereotypes was itself marketed and justified as satirical' (2003, p. 25). However, this inevitable paradox in the satirical and parodic use of minstrel imagery has not escaped Lee's attention. The self-conscious torment experienced by Delacroix as creator of a modern-day minstrel show may indeed reflect Lee's own feelings about the paradoxical nature of satire; the necessity to show that which you seek to destroy. Susan Gubar argues that Lee

shows an 'awareness of his movie's inevitable complicity in minstrelsy's degradations' (2006, p. 34), a consequence he counters with the violent deaths of key characters complicit in the production of *Mantan* (discussed in more detail in 'Killing Blackface - Violence, Death, and Injury').

Lee plays upon the failure of satire and the possibility of audience mis-reception. Delacroix's initial goal of disastrous, career-ending satire becomes increasingly received by industry colleagues and audience members as legitimate humour in which any reflection upon the racist history and continued racist tendencies of American entertainment is lost. Such a notion is outlined by Morris who places Dunwitty (Delacroix's boss) as a figure symbolic of this process. She proposes that, although Dunwitty continually professes his 'passion for African-American history and culture', he is positioned as a racist character (2003, p. 72). Furthermore, Lee uses Dunwitty 'to demonstrate that a white man would not be aware of the satire intended for him and for the television industry, blind as it is, to racism' (Morris, 2003, p. 72).

Lee does not pull his punches when it comes to showing blackface and racist imagery in *Bamboozled* which features blackface caricatures including a Mammi, Zulu, and Jim Crow-type ragged character [see figure 2]; scenes of chicken coups, watermelon patches, and cotton fields [see figures 3 and 4]; a range of racist merchandise and memorabilia<sup>18</sup> (also referred to as 'Negrobilia'<sup>19</sup>) [see figure 5]; the use of terms like 'nigger' and 'coon' in dialogue (both on and off stage); and a house band called the Alabama Porch Monkeys (performed by real-life hip hop band the Roots). But a question should be asked: what is the effect of showing the blackface mask and such a condensed sign system of racist imagery? Scholarship tends towards seeing *Bamboozled* as a positive exploration of race and issues of exploitation through satire. Morris views *Bamboozled* as a film in which 'the cultural operations of race are exposed, through parody, as unstable, dynamic, and, ultimately,

---

<sup>18</sup> Cultural artefacts based on African American and blackface caricatures remain a collectable market commodity, the desire for and collection of such items is outlined in 'From Despicable To Collectible The Evolution of Collective Memories for and the Value of Black Advertising Memorabilia' (2004) by Stacey Menzel Baker, Carol M. Motley, and Geraldine R. Henderson.

<sup>19</sup> The term 'Negrobilia' is used by John Strausbaugh in *Black Like You: Blackface, Whiteface, Insult & Imitation in American Popular Culture* (2006) to describe the types of artefacts that litter Delacroix's office in *Bamboozled*.

constructed effects perpetuated by media' (2003, p. 72). In this sense, the use of blackface and racist imagery are ultimately justified by the film's effect as an illuminating and destabilising force. Phil Chidester, Shannon Campbell, and Jamel Bell take this notion one step further, viewing the film as 'a key document in the contemporary struggle of African Americans to forge and maintain a meaningful sense of racial identity' (2006, p. 289). Jamie Barlowe views the satire as a successful exploration of race in which '[t]he real satire—the real joke—though, is on all of us in the United States, as a nation that cannot face its own history of colonialism, hegemony, cultural imperialism, slavery, discrimination, fear-based perceptions, and racism' (2003, p. 12). It is apparent from these scholarly accounts of *Bamboozled* that the satire is largely viewed as successful and the use of blackface, although uncomfortable, is ultimately justified by its destabilising effects and confrontation of genuine conflicts of race and exploitation in America and its culture industries. However, critics in the press and media have not been so praising of the film or its use of blackface and racist content, demonstrated by the film receiving an overall rating of 48% from critics' reviews<sup>20</sup> (*Rotten Tomatoes*, 2015). Jonathan Rosenbaum of the *Chicago Reader* refers to *Bamboozled* as 'basically sloppy, all-over-the-map filmmaking with few hints of self-criticism' (Rosenbaum, 2008) and as an 'intriguing failure' by Wally Hammond of *Time Out* (Hammond, 2006). Other reviews from critics highlight its successes whilst acknowledging its production and narrative failures. Lisa Schwarzbaum of *Entertainment Weekly* states that although 'there is a good satire stuck in one corner of *Bamboozled's* circus of stereotypes' [author's italics] the film 'punishes every character, and hectors every viewer without mercy — or logic' (Schwarzbaum, 2000). It is certainly true that both characters and viewers are punished for their involvement and enjoyment respectively. However, Roger Ebert is the critic who most clearly engages with the film's ultimate challenge: does *Bamboozled* effectively destabilise the meaning of blackface? Ebert proposes that '[b]lackface is so blatant, so wounding, so highly charged, that it obscures any point being made by the person wearing it. The makeup is the message' (2000). This sentiment may not just apply to *Bamboozled*; any twenty-first century use of blackface may face this same quandary: blackface is so powerful an image that it is impossible to see beyond it. Ebert roots his claim in what blackface represents to Americans in which 'feelings run too strongly and deeply for any satirical use to

---

<sup>20</sup> *Rotten Tomatoes* aggregates the percentage from across a range of reviews, providing a percentage rating based on the calculation.



be effective' (2000). This assertion calls into question the legitimacy and success of every example shown in this chapter, and arguably the whole thesis.



Figure 2: Blackface characters in *Mantan: The New Millennium Minstrel Show*



Figure 3: *Mantan*: Cotton plantation/watermelon patch; Figure 4: *Mantan*: chicken coup.



Figure 5: Pierre Delacroix surrounded by African American caricature memorabilia.

Lee's reputation and success as a film director makes his exploration of blackface subject to significant publicity and influence. However, as a work of satire the film has attracted both criticism and praise. Comments from film critics point to a range of reasons why the film may not be effective and attract such low critical ratings, many of which relate to the use of blackface. Some critics face this issue directly (Egbert, 2000; Schwarzbaum, 2000) and some refer to the general construction of the film and its narrative failures (Hammond, 2006; Rosenbaum, 2008). However, as the subject matter is so underexplored in popular culture this may have had an effect on the success of its exploration in *Bamboozled*. Moreover, the production quality of the film (something criticised by reviewers) may have been impacted by the difficulty in attracting funding and support due to its content. There also appears to be a disparity between scholarly and journalistic accounts of *Bamboozled* in which academic works tend towards a positive view of the film's function and effects and popular reviewers tend towards negative responses. Lee's satirical blackface text has split opinion. So has *Bamboozled* in fact succeeded as a work of satire?

If a goal of *Bamboozled* is to confront the viewer with the offensive images of blackface minstrelsy with the aim of raising awareness of genuine social problems, then any misreading of satirical functions or failure to view the use of blackface as effective or justified

risks the performance of the opposite function: the enforcement of stereotypes and racist signs and the failure to confront, deconstruct, or destabilise them. This raises an important question: is the image of blackface so potent that any use or exploration of it in cultural texts dominates any useful message an author attempts to make with it?

Unlike *Bamboozled*, *Tropic Thunder* does not recite the dictionary definition of satire in its opening scene. It does not need to; it is abundantly clear from the outset that *Tropic Thunder* is an exercise in satirical film making. The opening sequence of the film is staged as a selection of advertisements and film trailers, making the experience of watching feel like a trip to the cinema (regardless of whether you are in fact watching it in one). The effect of this sequence is threefold: firstly, it enforces the notion that the viewer is experiencing a real film with real actors; secondly, it enforces the concept of mise-en-abyme (explored in detail in Framing Blackface: Mise-en-Abyme and Critical Distance); and thirdly, it introduces and establishes the four central characters and provides the necessary context of their theatrical penchants, which will significantly inform later scenes and narrative.

Firstly, Alpa Chino bursts onto the screen in an advertisement for his line of confectionery products (energy drink Booty Sweat and candy bar Busta-A-Nut). Sandwiched between two voluptuous dancers, Chino slaps and mimes kissing their bums whilst repeating the line 'I love that pussy'. This amplified moment of hyper-heterosexuality, product placement, and vulgarity satirises those practices as they appear in commercial rap culture. Chino is followed by Tugg Speedman in a trailer for the latest instalment in his *Scorcher* series of one-man-against-the-universe action movies, *Scorcher VI: Global Meltdown*. Speedman is depicted standing on a precipice overlooking a sea of lava on a scorched planet Earth brought about by its ceased rotation—in one hand he holds a large gun, in the other a baby. The voice-over announces: 'Now, the one man who made a difference five times before is about to make a difference again' (Stiller, 2008). Speedman's *Scorcher* trailer satirises the Hollywood taste for excessive serialisation of successful action franchises, whilst mocking the heroic individualism that pervades the genre. Next up is Jeff Portnoy whose film sequel *The Fatties: Fart 2* sees him occupy every main character in a vulgar scatological gross-out comedy. The trailer both parodies the real-life film series derived from the *Nutty Professor* starring Eddie Murphy in which he plays each main character, and satirises the seeming egotistical desire of

some actors to occupy the entire cast roster of a film. Finally, we see the trailer for '5 Time Academy Award Winner' Kirk Lazarus's latest risqué exercise in method acting *Satan's Alley*, which explores the forbidden love between two lonely monks in a remote monastery. The trailer works to establish Lazarus as an actor who is willing to take significant risks in his choice of acting roles and one who does not shy away from taboo subjects and characters. This introduction to Lazarus lays the groundwork for his risky use of blackface.

Although *Tropic Thunder* does not recite the dictionary definition of satire, its opening sequence functions in much the same way and the grossly amplified Hollywood clichés would leave only those entirely unversed in American cinema history in no doubt of this fact. As a result, it is unlikely to be the subject of audience or critical misinterpretation. With the satirical die cast *Tropic Thunder* is able to progress to further and potentially more controversial topics and situations, such as the portrayal of disabled characters by able-bodied and award-hungry actors and, most importantly for this research, the casting of white actors as African American characters using blackface.

Reactions to *Tropic Thunder* from the press and critics have been mixed, though few complete a review or article without mentioning Downey Jr.'s appearance in blackface. Downey Jr.'s portrayal of Lincoln Osiris attracted little public condemnation from African Americans and, after a pre-screening, attracted no ill-will from civil rights organisation the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) (Horn, 2010). Moreover, the potential controversy of Downey Jr.'s portrayal of Osiris was largely overshadowed by angry responses from disability groups to Stiller's portrayal of a mentally disabled character in Speedman's self-indulgent *Simple Jack* and *Tropic Thunder's* repeated use of the term 'retard' (Adler, 2008).

The casting of Downey Jr. as a fictional white Australian actor playing a fictional African American character in a bombastic shambles of a movie provides a large measure of satirical distance from the controversies of wearing blackface. Lazarus's wearing of dark skin make-up is unlikely to trigger the same emotive sentiments that come with the wearing of the blackface minstrel mask; its stylisation including red and white bordering for lips and eyes is likely to evoke more charged feelings from viewers through its association with the

institution of minstrelsy. *Tropic Thunder* is also partially shielded from criticism through its self-acknowledged use of a problematic character in a satire of Hollywood and its over-blown film-making process. Had there not been a portion of critical engagement with the subject of ethnic masquerade, responses to Lazarus would have undoubtedly been far more extreme.

*Tropic Thunder* does offer opportunities to critically engage with the obvious controversies of casting a white man to play a black character. Particularly useful to a discussion of race and blackface is the casting of African American actor Brandon T. Jackson as Alpa Chino. Dialogue between Lazarus and Chino provides the film's most significant engagement with the offensive nature of Lazarus's ethnic masquerade.

There are a number of reasons why *Tropic Thunder* succeeds in using blackface with little negative critical reaction. The film is a satire of Hollywood, calling upon a raft of clichés to confirm this, from its overpaid prima donna actors to its aggressive financier, from its overblown pyrotechnics to its penchant for product placement. Its status as a satire is abundantly clear from the outset. Framed by this context, the use of blackface (and Hollywood's historical exploitation of it) are placed in a position of humorous and satirical criticism. They are seemingly there to be ridiculed and not celebrated. It is unlikely that such signs will be read as sincere, but rather that the controversial blacking up of Lazarus will attract the same satirical ridicule as the other absurdities of the film. However, as is shown by Lee in *Bamboozled*, satire always runs the risk of being misinterpreted by its audience. Therefore, although the intentions of writers Ben Stiller, Justin Theroux, and Ethan Cohen may be to mock the uses of blackface in Hollywood history, they also run the risk of reinforcing its racist effect in the context of *Tropic Thunder*. Furthermore, although the use of blackface is subject to critical attention it is Lazarus's personal demons which form the focus of his moment of realisation. Although blackface is 'removed' and the man beneath exposed, the act of blacking-up is left uninterrogated and unresolved in the film's finale. It is unclear whether the pigmentation operation is reversed or if Lazarus reflects in any way upon his racechange.

The makers of *Tropic Thunder* signal their understanding of the potential of casting a white actor in blackface to be offensive and for it to be viewed as racist. This is achieved explicitly

in the accompanying mockumentary *to Tropic Thunder*, *Tropic Thunder: Rain of Madness* in which fictional director Damien Cockburn states: '[w]e talked about whether it was racist or not and we came to the conclusion that it definitely isn't racist. So that was reassuring' (Theroux & Coogan, 2008). By providing this acknowledgement of the controversy and racist potential of blackface the makers of *Tropic Thunder* achieve two things: firstly, they imply a sense of ignorance on the part of Cockburn and others involved in the making of the film, rooting the use of blackface in absurdly oblivious artistic ambition. Secondly, by acknowledging it as a problematic practice they remove any sense of a desire to offend. By making this statement they appear to be making play with the notion of offence, not aiming to cause it.

At the beginning of *The Sarah Silverman Program* episode 'Face Wars' Silverman is denied the use of leisure facilities by a Valley Village Country Club employee, something she attributes to her being Jewish. Following this encounter she goes for lunch with friends and family members at a local restaurant during which she recounts the seemingly anti-Semitic encounter. The conversation is overheard by an African American waiter (Eugene) and he confronts Silverman, providing the narrative foundation for the episode.

**Sarah Silverman:** It's like everywhere I go I am a second-class citizen. There is nothing harder than being Jewish in the entire world.

**Eugene:** Miss I think there are harder things than being Jewish. Like being Black.

**Sarah Silverman:** Erm, did Black people have the Holocaust?

**Eugene:** No, but we did have four hundred years of slavery.

**Sarah Silverman:** [Sarcastic tone of voice] Oh, I'm so sorry you guys had to like, er, have great singing voices and really catchy songs while we got...Oh yeah, murder showers.

**Eugene:** Ok, so what you're saying is because of our music we suffered less than the Jews?

**Sarah Silverman:** [Pause] Yes.

**Eugene:** You know ma'am, I wish you could walk a mile in my shoes. I bet you wouldn't last an hour.

**Sarah Silverman:** I would love to. Why don't we switch places for a day. My friend Eddie Pepitone is like this incredible make-up artist. He'll totally make me black. And then we'll settle the score once and for all.

(Harmon; Schrab; Silverman., 2007)

The trading places storyline of 'Face Wars' is a common narrative trope and can be found in numerous literary and theatrical examples. The narrative is also used in other explorations of blackface including John Howard Griffin's *Black Like Me* (1961)<sup>21</sup> and the *30 Rock* episode 'Believe in the Stars', the latter of which is discussed in more detail shortly. True to her word, Silverman undergoes her blackface transformation. Rather than a case of convincing ethnic masquerade her transformation is revealed as a blackface minstrel mask (the application and removal of which are discussed in 'Showing Process: Burnt Cork Ritual, Application, and Removal'). Clearly thrilled by the transformation, Silverman departs to experience life as an African American. She encounters various problems immediately. She is verbally abused in the street, ejected from an African American church service, and finally arrested for a dispute over a parking ticket, all of which she attributes to her being Black and not because of her blackface mask. Much of the comic nature of these scenes is derived from the seemingly genuine confusion of Silverman over the difference between a blackface mask and being genuinely African American. Therefore, comments from passers-by such as 'You're disgusting!' and 'I spent my life trying to rid the world of people like you' are confused by Silverman to be racist comments and not as a result of her use of blackface.

Following confrontation and abuse as the result of her use of blackface, Silverman returns to the restaurant in which the initial challenge was agreed. Still wearing the blackface make-up, she meets with Eugene and agrees with him that 'it is so much harder to be Black than it is to be Jewish' adding 'I'd kill myself if I were Black' (Harmon; Schrab; Silverman., 2007). At this point Eugene turns round to reveal his (until now unseen) Jewish transformation [see figure 6]. Sporting a Kippah (Jewish cap), Payot (side curls), a strap on nose, and a T-shirt reading 'I "heart" money' in Cursive Hebrew, Eugene disagrees stating: 'You were right. It's harder to

---

<sup>21</sup> *Black Like Me* is a work of non-fiction in which white Journalist John Howard Griffin travels across the Southern states of the United States on public transport and via hitch-hiking whilst disguised as an African American through the use of blackface.

be Jewish' (Harmon; Schrab; Silverman., 2007). This scene has a number of important functions. Firstly, it brings the 'trading places' narrative full-circle forcing its participants to confront their initial prejudices or misconceptions—a key function of such narratives. In this sense, the scene also parodies the narrative trope itself by amplifying the moral lesson learned by each party. Secondly, it aligns two historically persecuted cultures, acknowledging the stereotyping of them in racist representations and discourses. Thirdly, it works to disarm Silverman's use of blackface by contrasting it with similarly offensive images of Jewish cultural signs and stereotypes.



Figure 6: Silverman and Eugene on return to café in 'Face Wars'

The relationship between the historical oppression of African Americans and Jews is explored by Susan Gubar in 'Racial Camp in *The Producers* and *Bamboozled*' (2006) in which she describes how Mel Brooks and Spike Lee 'depend upon alienating performances-within-the-movies that are meant to be in the worst possible taste, especially for those with a heightened conscience about death camps and the deadliness of ongoing racial prejudice'



(2006, p. 26) in their respective films *The Producers* (1968) and *Bamboozled* (2000). Silverman makes play with this comparison, connecting together the institution of slavery and blackface and racial stereotyping with the mechanised genocide of the Holocaust in an intentionally distasteful game of 'competitive victimhood' (Sammond, 2015). Such a parallel is further reinforced by Gubar who argues that '[i]f genocide signifies denationalization and selective mass murder, the absurd cartoon Africa has become...and all the murdered black bodies constitute an African American Holocaust' (2006, p. 33).

Much like *Bamboozled*'s recitation of the dictionary definition of satire, Silverman attempts to make it abundantly clear to the audience why blackface is being used in 'Face Wars', and ultimately to further justify its use as a satirical device. Following her release from the police station after her arrest, Silverman walks out to address a waiting crowd of blackfaced supporters who have gathered outside [see figure 7]. The crowd chant:

**Rally Speaker:** 'What do we want?'

**Rally crowd:** 'The freedom to explore issues of race in American culture through the use of postmodern irony'  
(Harmon; Schrab; Silverman., 2007).

The chant unambiguously announces Silverman's approach to the use of blackface in 'Face Wars'. The referential nature of postmodernism, and in particular the appropriation and redeployment of historical cultural signs, is acknowledged by the announcement of this statement and works to ensure that viewers are both aware of her intentions in using the mask and works to prevent viewers from misreading her use of the mask as racist.



Figure 7: Blackface crowd outside the police station in 'Face Wars'

To understand Silverman's motive for privileging the notion of postmodern irony it is first necessary to outline it as a conceptual approach to cultural criticism. The chief function of postmodern irony is, according to Linda Hutcheon, as a 'rhetorical and structural strategy of resistance and opposition' (cited in Shugart, 1999, p. 434). Silverman's use of blackface is not sincere but is intended, and indeed signalled by the chant of the crowd, as an act of resistance and opposition. On the one hand, it is a seeming resistance to historical racist hegemony and its remnant in twenty-first century culture, something that Silverman claims is the function of much of her ethnicity-based humour. On the other hand it is resistance to the notion that blackface is off-limits in popular culture. However, in mobilising images generally perceived to function within a system of racist hegemony, Silverman risks criticism for her attempts to subvert such signs for ironic purposes. Indeed, the risk of irony is that some people will misinterpret it, regardless of professed motive, as racist nonetheless. Moreover, it is arguable that for irony to work effectively some audiences must interpret it to be offensive. Without oppositional voices irony, parody, and satire fail to find their target.

Where readings that fail to acknowledge the polysemic nature of postmodern signification meet irony, a paradox is illuminated. Helene A. Shugart proposes in 'Postmodern Irony as Subversive Rhetorical Strategy' (1999) that:

This is true particularly in the case of limited or superficial readings of postmodern, subversive irony, wherein messages are apprehended selectively from among the several articulated by the irony. Isolating one message and thus disregarding the paradox in which it is embedded arguably belies the ultimate function of postmodern irony (1999, p. 436).

The paradox of postmodern irony is not that it is a problem that needs to be solved, but rather that 'the strength of postmodern irony inheres in its ability to cultivate rather than transcend paradox' (Shugart, 1999, p. 436). It is tempting to ask whether 'Face Wars' challenges, cultivates, or transcends the paradox of postmodern irony. However, this would largely defeat the point of viewing it through this prism. The setting of postmodern irony—bluntly proclaimed by the blackface crowd—provides a frame through which to explore the humour of offence and discomfort, whilst toying with the ever-present potential to upset and offend viewers. It may also be worth considering whether the use of blackface in 'Face Wars' raises questions of whether it is acceptable to explore blackface as a valid tool of cultural criticism and to investigate under what circumstances is it appropriate to wear the mask. However, it is also wise to consider other effects such as the potential normalisation of blackface in popular culture and the use of the guise of satire (and the ground-work laid by satirists who have used blackface) to indulge in blackface practices which provide more pleasure to the wearer than valid cultural criticism. Silverman argues that '[r]elations between black and white would be greatly improved if we were more accepting of our fears and our feelings and more vocal about it' (in Thorpe, 2003), but to do so exposes her to both the risks and rewards of satire.

In the *American Dad!* episode 'An Apocalypse to Remember' (2007) the Smith family are invited to 'a banquet honouring minorities in America' (Aoshima, 2007). They arrive at the venue and face the door with their backs to the viewer. Stan's son Steve Smith asks his father: 'Are you positive this is what the invitation said?' (Aoshima, 2007). The doors open to

reveal the Smith family in blackface [see figure 8]. Following a hasty retreat Stan is asked by his daughter Haley if he had read the invitation, which Stan says he 'skimmed for key words'. The invitation in fact reads 'Black people changing the face of America'.



Figure 8: Smith family in blackface in 'An Apocalypse to Remember'

The premise of the episode is that Stan Smith is an ignorant person who frequently makes embarrassing blunders and social faux pas. This is demonstrated in 'An Apocalypse to Remember' by his complete misunderstanding of the nature of the event and the social unacceptability of blackface masking in general. Stan represents a portion of American society that is seemingly ignorant of the potential offence that can be caused by white Americans wearing blackface (an issue raised by the examples of social blackface discussed in 'When Private Goes Public: Blackface in Social Contexts'). The humour of this act is compounded by the event that the family are attempting to attend: an event which celebrates the contributions of African Americans to American society. In contrast, blackface represents the abuse and exploitation of African American culture in American history. The

scene plays upon the irony created by the juxtaposition of blackface (a symbol of American racism) with an event which seeks to show racial progress in American society. Much like Silverman, Stan becomes the focus of hatred and ridicule for his error of judgement. In this sense, blackface is acknowledged to be the antithesis of racial progress and Stan is punished for his ignorance and poor judgement.

In the *Family Guy* episode 'Halloween on Spooner Street' blackface is used to highlight the inequality of racist masquerade in American society. It is Halloween and the Griffin family prepare their costumes. The son of the family Chris Griffin comes down stairs dressed in a Bill Cosby costume, an element of which is a blackface mask with a border around the mouth which exposes his natural light skin tone beneath [see figure 9]. Upon seeing his costume his mother, Louis Griffin, chastises Chris:

**Louis:** What in god's name are you doing? You can't go out dressed like that.

**Chris:** Why not? I'm Bill Cosby.

**Louis:** Ok, but you can't go out like that.

**Chris:** Well come on mom, don't I look like him?

**Louis:** Well yes, but Chris you can't just walk around in blackface. It's racist.

Now go upstairs and put on that Indian chief costume I bought you.

(Langford, 2010)



Figure 9: Chris Griffin in blackface as Bill Cosby in 'Halloween on Spooner Street'

In this context, blackface is used to demonstrate the differing perceptions of racism associated with different types of ethnic masquerade. Whilst the use of blackface is very often recognised as racist, other forms of ethnic masquerade are often not viewed in the same light despite their fundamental similarities. The contrast between Native and African Americans is particularly relevant to the success of the joke and socio-historical satire. Both African Americans and Native Americans have been violently persecuted in American history and both communities have suffered lasting social inequality, stereotyping, and marginalisation as a result of their historical subjugation. Though, whilst it is generally accepted that for a white American to masquerade as an African American is unacceptable, it is not as clearly recognised that to masquerade as a Native American is equally unacceptable. In this sense, the scene works to draw attention to the racism of blackface, whilst also shining a light on other lesser-acknowledged forms of racism in American society. The irony of the scene draws attention to the racist effects of both examples of ethnic masquerade by holding them up side-by-side for the viewer and exposing the inconsistencies and inequalities between them. The scene also engages with the problematic uses of blackface in Halloween costuming, an issue discussed in more detail later in 'When Private goes Public: Blackface in Social Contexts'.

A number of episodes of satirical adult animated series *South Park* exploit blackface. In an early episode 'Summer Sucks' (1998), black ash covers the town of South Park following the destruction of a giant out-of-control firework snake. One of the series' few African American characters, Chef (voiced by Isaac Hayes), returns from holiday to be welcomed by the town's residents who are seemingly unaware of the fact that they now all wear what appear to be blackface masks. Chef takes offence and the episode ends with him seeking to engage them all in physical violence (Parker, 1998). Blackface is shown in 'Summer Sucks' to be an offensive and provocative practice. This brief use of blackface initiated a range of more involved and developed uses of blackface in *South Park*.

In the episode 'Free Willzyx' (2005), a number of the child characters plot to rescue an orca whale called Jambu from an aquarium park after being fooled by two mischievous staff members into believing the whale can speak to them. Blackface is used in this episode as disguise when conducting the rescue. The rescue party is comprised of nine children, only one of whom is African American, the rest are white. All of the white children's faces are covered in black face paint. However, the sole African American child, Token Black, wears white face paint [see figure 10]. In an act of comic inversion, what appears to be a disguise to aid their night-time trespass is shown to be an absurd act of ethnic exchange, which works to highlight the African American child's ethnicity and to show it as Other to the rest of his friends. Token is frequently the focus of race-based storylines, as will be shown shortly with the discussion of 'World War Zimmerman' (2013).



Figure 10: Token Black wears whiteface in 'Free Willzyx'

In the episode '201' (2010), Eric Cartman's hand is possessed by Mitch Connor.<sup>22</sup> Cartman is seeking information on the identity of his biological father, supposedly known by genetic scientist Dr. Mephisto. To gain entry to the laboratory of Mephisto, Cartman's hand/Mitch Connor is given a blackface mask and wig and adopts the caricatured voice of an African American man [see figure 11]. He claims there has been a serious accident and needs to use the phone. When he is refused entry by Mephisto he claims it is because he is black and that he had hoped things would have changed since America had a 'black president'. Mephisto eventually relents and allows the troubled passer-by to enter. Once inside, Connor removes the wig and rubs off the face paint, revealing his true identity.

---

<sup>22</sup> Mitch Connor is an occasional imaginary conman character that possesses Eric Cartman's hand in a number of episodes. The viewer and *South Park* characters are never sure if Cartman is in control of Connor and therefore responsible for the often troubling actions of the character. Connor is manifested through the use of drawn on eyes and mouth.





Figure 11: Eric Cartman/Mitch Connor in blackface in '201'

Blackface is used in '201' to reference a perceived entrenched mistrust of African American men in American society. The crude blackface make-up applied to the hand of Cartman is an absurd addition to a scenario that evokes long-held fears in American society over the perceived propensity of young African American men to commit crime. Mephisto's initial reluctance to let Connor in is allayed by engaging in a discourse of racial equality, hope, and post-race generated by the election of Barack Obama. The absurdity of the scene is compounded by the fact that Mephisto fails to recognise that Connor is merely a hand and only recognises his blackness, which forms the defining element of his judgement of the character.

The uses of blackface in *South Park* shown so far have engaged with general issues of offence, race exchange, and racial equality. In a parody of apocalyptic zombie film *World War Z* (2013), the makers of *South Park* use blackface to engage with a more specific and divisive subject: the controversial killing of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman and his subsequent trial and acquittal. The episode 'World War Zimmerman' (2013) centres on the notoriously racist character Eric Cartman's fear that African Americans will rise up in chaotic vengeance in response to a not-guilty verdict. He identifies school friend Token Black (the only African American boy at the school) as 'Patient Zero'—later described by a news reader

as the 'nine-year old threat to humanity' (Parker, 2013)—and manages to convince enough people of his paranoid vision to cause panic amongst citizens, media, military, and law enforcement. In an attempt to halt the perceived threat, military officials seek the help of the recently acquitted Zimmerman to kill Token Black, or as they put it 'shoot a young African American for us' (Parker, 2013). Realising that the 'outbreak' of racial chaos will be stopped by instead killing Zimmerman, Cartman travels to Florida to assassinate him. To perform the killing unnoticed Cartman disguises himself in a hoodie and painted black face as he approaches the home of Zimmerman [see figure 12]. Zimmerman, comically endowed with a sixth sense, detects Cartman's presence and shoots the approaching blackfaced figure who is mistaken by Zimmerman and two military and law enforcement officials for a black teenager. Zimmerman is congratulated and thanked by the officials for shooting the approaching 'threat'. The lifeless Cartman is approached by one of the officials who wipes off the blackface make-up exposing Cartman's white skin [see figure 13]. The scene quickly changes to a fast-tracked trial in which Zimmerman is tried and executed by electric chair. The execution takes up ten seconds of the twelve-second trial and execution sequence in what becomes a protracted and agonising experience for Zimmerman.



Figure 12: Cartman approaches the home of George Zimmerman wearing hooded top and blackface in 'World War Zimmerman'



Figure 13: Law enforcement official removes blackface from Cartman in ‘World War Zimmerman’

Blackface is used by *South Park*’s creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone in ‘World War Zimmerman’ as a tool to help satirise one of the most divisive and high-profile challenges to race relations in recent American history. The killing of Martin and acquittal of Zimmerman raised questions over the perceived disproportionate deaths of African Americans by police and citizens protected by laws which permit lethal force, also known as ‘Stand Your Ground’ laws<sup>23</sup>. Zimmerman was protected by this statute (Florida Statute 776.013) which stipulates that an individual may use deadly force and is not obliged to retreat when ‘[a] person is presumed to have held a reasonable fear of imminent peril of death or great bodily harm to himself or herself or another’ (Florida Legislature, 2015). Stand Your Ground laws have been condemned by critics for their disproportionate impact on African Americans. In a report entitled *Shoot First: “Stand Your Ground” Laws And Their Effect On Violent Crime And The Criminal Justice System* (2013) published by Mayors Against Illegal Guns, data shows that ‘[a]mong people shot to death in the black population in states with Stand Your Ground laws, the rate of those homicides found to be justifiable more than doubled between 2005 and 2011, while it fell in the rest of the country’ (2013, p. 3).

---

<sup>23</sup> Although the ‘Stand Your Ground’ statute is in place in Florida, similar laws also apply in twenty-two other states in the United States of America (Mayors Against Illegal Guns, 2013, p. 2).

In 'World War Zimmerman' Cartman's use of blackface is not intended by the character as a performance of ethnic masquerade (something that he has done in other episodes of *South Park*). It is, rather, used as a form of disguise and camouflage to aid a stealthy siege of Zimmerman's home. However, the blackface mask used by Cartman becomes a performance of ethnic masquerade when perceived by others as genuine African American ethnicity. His blackness ultimately becomes the justification for his death. In addition to Cartman's blackface make-up he wears a hooded top with the hood raised. This seemingly minor addition plays on the significance of Martin's appearance the evening of his death during which he wore a hooded top, which some commentators have claimed contributed to Martin's death.<sup>24</sup> Since Martin's death the hooded top has become a symbol of the teenager's killing and one of many symbols of the wider Black Lives Matter movement, which is '[r]ooted in the experiences of Black people in this country who actively resist our dehumanization [and] is a call to action and a response to the virulent anti-Black racism that permeates our society' (Black Lives Matter, 2015).

The transient qualities of blackface make-up (its ability to be applied and removed) become a useful comic device in the episode and are used to suggest the absurdity of impulsive reactions with fatal consequences. Moreover, the ease with which the blackface is removed by the law enforcement official (shown in figure 13), and the speed with which Zimmerman is judged for the killing of a white person, are used to demonstrate the sense of inequality that may come with being African American in twenty-first century America and the speed with which opinions may change when violent acts are perpetuated upon different ethnicities in American society.

*South Park's* writers use blackface to affect Zimmerman's fictional trial and execution, something denied by his acquittal for Martin's killing. The prolonged execution, in which Zimmerman is jolted repeatedly with electricity for an uncomfortably long period of time, functions as a form of popular-culture justice in which alternative realities can be played out

---

<sup>24</sup> In an episode of *The O'Reilly Factor*, host Bill O'Reilly proposes that '[i]f Trayvon Martin had been wearing a jacket like you are and a tie like you are, Mr. [Allen] West, this evening, I don't think George Zimmerman would have any problem. But he was wearing a hoodie and he looked a certain way. And that way is how "gangstas" look' (O'Reilly, 2013).

and the perceived injustices of real life can be reversed. Therefore, although Zimmerman walked free in real life he is judged and executed in *South Park*.

*30 Rock* episode 'Believe in the Stars' (2008) uses a strikingly similar narrative device to *The Sarah Silverman Program* episode 'Face Wars' in its trading places narrative of 'competitive victimhood' (Sammond, 2015), in which Tracy Jordon (played by Tracy Morgan) and Jenna Maroney (played by Jane Krakowski) argue over who is the most marginalised and oppressed in American society: black men or women. The scene begins with Jordon and Maroney sat at a table with a professional mediator who has been hired by their employers NBC to resolve a financial dispute over Jordon's failure to pay Maroney for the voice-over work she completed in the production of his pornographic video game.<sup>25</sup>

**Maroney:** Tracy thinks he can treat me unfairly because I'm a woman.

**Jordon:** What? Please. We are here because white folk think they can do whatever they want to black folks. It's like when Adrian Brody kissed Halle Berry at the Oscars. White people stole jazz, rock and roll, Will Smith, and heart disease. Now they think they can take my hard-earned money.

**Maroney:** Liz [Lemon] says in this day's America, it's harder to be a woman than a black man.

**Jordon:** If it weren't for you people, I'd still be in Africa. Gorgeous, politically stable Africa.

**Maroney:** My people? Women are the oppressed ones. And it's even harder being a beautiful woman. Everyone assumes I don't try in bed. It's discrimination.

**Jordon:** Whatever. You couldn't last one day in my shoes, Maroney.

**Maroney:** I could totally be black. You should try being a white woman.

**Jordon:** Okay, I will. Freaky Friday social experiment.

**Maroney:** Oh, it's on.

(Scardino, 2008).

---

<sup>25</sup> Dialogue has been edited to show only the most relevant material and excludes minor contributions from additional cast members.

Later in the episode, and with the help of make-up artists, Jordan transforms himself into a white woman in what can be described as a white-face performance of ethnic masquerade. In addition to light-coloured make-up to alter his skin tone, Jordan wears a short skirt, pink jacket, tights, high heels, and a long blonde wig, and adopts a shrill speaking voice when in conversation with colleagues [see figure 14]. This moment of white-face performance sets up the inevitable: the appearance of Maroney in blackface.



Figure 14: Tracy Jordan in whiteface in 'Believe in the Stars'

This moment comes when Maroney appears at the end of the corridor dressed in a suit and wearing dark brown make-up, an afro-hair wig, and false facial hair [see figure 15]. To provide a further racial dimension to the moment, Maroney struts and sings 'Ease on Down the Road' from the Broadway show and film *The Wiz* (1978), known as a predominantly African American version of *The Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum.<sup>26</sup> The moment is immediately subject to criticism from fellow character James 'Toofer' Spurlock who chastises Maroney for her costume: 'You realise this is incredibly offensive. And do you realise

---

<sup>26</sup> The *Wiz* is described by critic Frank Rich as a 'black variation' of Baum's original *The Wizard of Oz* which demonstrates what the writers saw as the 'connection between Baum's Kansas fantasy and the pride of urban black Americans' (Rich, 1984). Moreover, for Rich the stage show was a 'once-fervent expression of black self-respect' (Rich, 1984).

blackface make-up reignites racial stereotypes African Americans have worked for hundreds of years to overcome?’ (Scardino, 2008). This seemingly rational comment on the inappropriateness and historical context of blackface works to set up the next race-derived joke. Maroney reiterates the motive of her use of blackface: ‘we’re trying to prove who has it hardest in America: women or black men’ (Scardino, 2008), to which Vice-President of East Coast Television Programming Jack Donaghy retorts: ‘I’ll tell you who has it hardest. White men. We make the unpopular difficult decisions, the tough choices. We land on the moon and Normandy Beach and they resent us’ (Scardino, 2008).



Figure 15: Jenna Maroney in blackface in ‘Believe in the Stars’

By Toofer stating the seemingly obvious, that blackface is an offensive practice rooted in a long and difficult history for African Americans, *30 Rock* are able to mitigate the potential problems of its use. However, they are also able to exploit the awkward humour implied by the situation in which discomfort functions as a comic device. Furthermore, by introducing the irony of a rich white male announcing the difficulties of white male privilege, the scene comes full circle to enforce the notion that the competitive victimhood of Maroney and Jordon is framed by the over-arching power of white patriarchy of American society. Rick DesRochers in *The Comic Offense: from Vaudeville to Contemporary Comedy* (2014) observes that ‘[t]he needs to justify and explain the difficulties of minority status through comedy is

often an important part of the storylines in *30 Rock*' (p. 71). However, this is not something that DesRochers attributes to a fear of offence or an interest in political correctness. Rather, contrary to this he argues that it is done to show that 'the notion of diversity of ethnicity, race, and gender is revealed for being too broad and overly simplistic' (2014, p. 71). The simple either/or of Maroney and Jordan's competitive victimhood in 'Believe in the Stars' is shown to be a loser's game when juxtaposed white male privilege.

*30 Rock* continue to exploit blackface in later episodes. 'Christmas Attack Zone' (2010) uses blackface during its final scene in which Maroney performs a duet of 'Oh Holy Night (When Christ was Born)' with her cross-dressing boyfriend Paul L'Astname (played by Will Forte). They perform the duet in costume as two black swans (a theme drawn from that year's hit film *Black Swan* (2010)), with L'Astname dressed as Natalie Portman's character from the film and Maroney dressed as Pittsburgh Steelers wide receiver Lynn Swann. In a similar sense to 'Believe in the Stars', the scenes plays on the themes of gender and race exchange by having characters swap gender and by Maroney wearing blackface to portray African American football star Swann [see figure 16]. In what is perhaps an accidental allusion to blackface performance, the name 'two black swans' mirrors the stage, radio, and screen blackface comedy act Two Black Crows performed by Charles E. Mack and George Moran.



Figure 16: Maroney and L'Astname as 'two black swans' in 'Christmas Attack Zone'



The live episode 'Live from Studio 6H' (2012) mockingly mythologises the problematic moments of American live television history by presenting a series of flash-backs to parodies of shows such as *The Dean Martin Show*, *The Honeymooners*, and *The Amos 'n' Andy Show*. It is during one of these reflective moments that NBC page Kenneth Parcell (played by Jack McBrayer) recalls the network's black and white comedy *Alfie and Abner* (a parody of *The Amos 'n' Andy Show*). Similarly to 'Believe in the Stars' it is James "Toofer" Spurlock who questions the roles of African American in early television. Parcell responds:

Actually Mr. Spurlock NBC had the first two black characters on TV, sort of. For *Alfie and Abner*, NBC hired one African American and one Caucasian, because they thought that two black people on the same show would make the audience nervous. A rule NBC still uses today (McCarthy-Miller, 2012).

The camera fades to a kitchen scene in which Alfie (played by African American character Tracy Jordon) enters the room and calls out to his brother Abner informing him of his arrival home. A moment later Abner (played by white guest star Jon Hamm) enters the room dressed in dungarees, an afro wig, and dark smudges of make-up on his face. Hamm's portrayal of Abner signals minstrelsy and the exploitation of its themes in early American television in a number of ways: his costume (described above); his dialect and accent; his apparent stupidity (demonstrated through his child-like mentality); and his willingness to steal.

Hamm's portrayal of Abner does not exploit full blackface, but rather connotes it with smudges of dark make-up and with an afro-hair wig [see figure 17]. Considering the show has used full blackface in past episodes it is unclear why they chose to avoid its full use in this scene. What the application of make-up does achieve is an allusion to blackface without full committal to the practice.



Figure 17: Jon Hamm as Abner in 'Live from Studio 6H'

Abner uses black dialect reminiscent of that used in minstrelsy and by Gosden and Correll in the parodied *The Amos 'n' Andy Show*. When he first appears following the arrival of his brother Alfie, Abner announces 'Here I is Alfie!' (McCarthy-Miller, 2012), utilising verb substitution by replacing the grammatically correct verb 'am' with 'is'. Abner's relative poor grasp of technical English is reinforced in a later line in which he returns to the house and announces 'I's done stole dis catfish!' (McCarthy-Miller, 2012). The line continues to display his poor grammar through the use of the colloquial contraction 'I's', through the inclusion of the past participle verb 'done', and through the replacement of the 'th' phoneme in 'this' for a 'd'. This technique was common to minstrelsy. So ubiquitous was the technique, that the phoneme 'th' is rarely seen in examples of black dialect in minstrelsy (Mahar, 1999, p. 83). The line also demonstrates Abner's propensity for theft, shown by his pride at having stolen a fish, mirroring the trope of chicken theft utilised in minstrel and coon songs.

Abner presents as a child-like character in contrast to Alfie who speaks eloquently and seriously throughout the short scenes. Frustrated by Abner's offensive stereotypes, Alfie makes a plea for civilised resolution: 'You may anger me, but I believe non-violence is the path to change', to which Abner replies 'I believe you can catch a rainbow in your hat!' (McCarthy-Miller, 2012). The contrast between the childlike and troublesome Abner and the

eloquent and civilised Alfie works to portray the differences between white depictions of black life and the realities of African American life as shown in early-twentieth century television.

Some critics praise the success of *30 Rock* in exploring issues of race. Ta-Nehisi Coates writing in *The Atlantic* feels the show succeeds by 'not actually handling race or black characters so much as interrogating whiteness' (Coates, 2013). Such a notion can be seen in the sarcastic privilege displayed by Jack Donaghy in 'Believe in the Stars'. However, the characterisation of lead character Tracy Jordan has itself drawn parallels with minstrelsy, independent of a storyline which features blackface. *Whites Educating Whites* claims that his characteristics are 'drawn from the political history of slavery and segregation, and the accompanying cultural history of minstrelsy – something all the other exaggerated identities of the show cannot draw from' (*Whites Educating Whites*, 2013). Such a notion is supported by Zeeshan Aleem of the *Huffington Post* who, in an article entitled 'Is *30 Rock* Racist?' claims that Jordan is a black spectacle orchestrated by a team of white conductors, [who] looks more like an homage to the legacy of minstrelsy than a disruption of it' (Aleem, 2010). Such assessments of Jordan work to challenge *30 Rock's* potential as a disrupting force in the critical treatment of racism on television through the use of blackface and minstrel themes.

Dave Chappelle shocked the entertainment world when in 2005 he walked off the set of his hugely successful comedy show *Chappelle's Show* following the signing of a \$50 million contract to continue the show's production into a third series. Following his departure and subsequent disappearance<sup>27</sup> he was interviewed by Oprah Winfrey on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* in which he was questioned about his departure.

Known for his edgy and often offensive humour built on the subjects of racism, sex, and celebrity, audiences had come to expect extreme and often provocative material from the comedian. However, it was the nature of some of his sketches and their reception by viewers and colleagues that forced Chappelle to think differently about his work. He states that he 'was doing sketches that were funny, but socially irresponsible' and failing to 'pay attention

---

<sup>27</sup> Rumours circulated of mental breakdown and drug use. He in fact went to South Africa.

to things like [his] ethics' (in Winfrey, 2005). Alongside his own desires to push the boundaries of good taste, he felt as if he was being deliberately encouraged by others to take this route. He elaborates that the sketch that most clearly embodied this discomfort was 'Racial Pixies' in which characters of varying ethnicities are confronted by racial prejudice via a pixie who embodies the stereotypes associated with their race. The role of the pixie, according to Katherine P. Zakos in *Racial Satire and Chappelle's Show* (2009), is to 'encourage each of their counterparts to give in to their innermost desires and not to worry about whether or not their actions will confirm commonly held beliefs about their specific minority group' (pp. 37-38). For Chappelle 'every race has had this pixie, this racial complex' (in Winfrey, 2005). In the performance of the sketch, Chappelle appears on the seat in front dressed in a porter's outfit and wearing blackface. The pixie appears when Chappelle is asked by an air steward if he wants the fish or chicken dish during a flight. He enquires further as to the chicken's cooking method when it becomes clear the fish is unavailable. The steward replies 'it's fried' (Chappelle, 2006). The blackface pixie wails with delight and encourages Chappelle to order the chicken [see figure 18].



Figure 18: Dave Chappelle as 'Racial Pixie' in *Chappelle's Show*

For Chappelle the satirical use of blackface, something he describes as a 'very difficult image' (in Winfrey, 2005), was well-meaning and was chosen to function as the 'visual personification of the n-word' (Chappelle in Winfrey, 2005). However, he felt that he faced a crisis of communication, similar to that outlined in the case of *Til Death Do Us Part* discussed earlier. He felt that some members of the audience would appreciate the troubling subtext and laugh with him, whilst others would 'get something completely different' (Chappelle in Winfrey, 2005). Ultimately, Chappelle feared that the satire would not be successful and that the use of blackface, rather than working to challenge its signifying power as a symbol of racism, would work to titillate a portion of his audience and have a contrary effect to that intended.

Much like the impact blackface ultimately has on Pierre Delacroix in *Bamboozled*, what initially began as a satire intended to challenge preconceptions of race and internalised feelings of racial stereotyping became a burden too great to bear, compounded by the increased success of his show and exposure to a wider and perhaps less critical audience. Chappelle says 'I don't want black people to be disappointed in me for putting that out there' (in Winfrey, 2005). It is clear that the burden of responsibility that comes with using blackface weighed heavily on his conscience, a notion that Winfrey develops by proposing: 'You don't want to be disappointed in yourself' (2005).

### Conclusions

Satire, parody, and irony play a fundamental role in representing blackface in twenty-first century popular culture, in particular in mass-distributed formats such as television and film. As the examples presented here show, to interact with blackface and minstrelsy requires a level of awareness of its ability to offend and the development of strategies to mitigate its potential to be mis-read as racist comedy. It is also vital in satire and parody that the use of offensive images and ideas produces some 'destabilisation of meaning' (Palmer, 2009, p. 86). If one fails to do this, then all that is left is the offensive content. However, failure to destabilise meaning is a subjective judgement. To some, such as Roger Ebert, the use of blackface is never justified and represents such a potent symbol that it dominates any other critical objective set out by the author. To others (particularly the satirists themselves) the

potency of blackface is what makes it such a useful tool in their art. Part of the success and problem of satire and parody is that blackface will likely always achieve both offence and the potential to challenge it. Whether it is too potent an image is ultimately left to the viewer to decide. It is unlikely, however, that satirists will refrain from using blackface; the signs of its use so far this century make that an unlikely prospect.

However, perhaps there are ways in which blackface can be used and the success of the satire can be assured. Examples shown in this section have pointed to a variety of ways in which the use of blackface in satire is legitimated and justified. One key method is making the wearer of blackface a figure of ignorance and the target of ridicule. In 'Face Wars' and 'An Apocalypse to Remember' both Silverman and Smith are shown to be ignorant of the offence that is caused by the blackface mask; they are shown to be the idiots, not the imagined black 'Other' that the mask has historically represented.

If blackface has historically played a role marginalising African Americans, its role in satire is to invert this model, making blackface work to expose inequality and marginalisation. *30 Rock* positions inappropriate blackface masquerade within the wider context of white patriarchy and institutional power, showing the issues the masking practice exposes as ultimately dwarfed by the existing power structures that pervade within the television industry and wider society. *South Park* shows blackface to be a powerful tool in the exploration of notions of mistrust between white and African Americans and the entrenched associations of African American men with crime and as a threat. This is clearly demonstrated in both '201' and 'World War Zimmerman'.

A primary concern for satirists is the perceptions of their audience, which ultimately dictates the success of the satire. This became a particular problem for Dave Chappelle following his own use of blackface in 'Racial Pixies'. In a case of life imitating art, Chappelle's quandary mirrors that of Delacroix in *Bamboozled*, both experiencing a sense of unease and a loss of control of satire brought about by the growth of audience and the change in dynamic this brings to the reception of satirical comedy. For Chappelle, the potency of blackface was too strong to bear and it contributed to his departure from mainstream television.

Those who produce satire and parody which utilises blackface develop further strategies to justify its use and mitigate its impact. In the following section it is shown how violence and death are used to achieve similar aims and to further deconstruct the sign of blackface.

### 5. 3. Killing Blackface: Violence, Death, and Injury

The use of blackface and the exploitation of the minstrel show's images, themes, and artefacts are not without their consequences. The following examples demonstrate how the use of blackface, in particular the minstrel mask, is accompanied by the narrative themes of death, violence, and injury. Spike Lee's *Bamboozled* and Miles Marshall Lewis's *The Wu Tang Candidate* both present graphic depictions of murder; *The Wu Tang Candidate* and Jasiri X's song 'Just A Minstrel' allude to themes of suicide in the lyrics of raps; Sarah Silverman is shot and injured whilst addressing a blackfaced crowd; and *Tropic Thunder*'s Kirk Lazarus undergoes a figurative death and transformation following his moment of realisation.

Violence and death become the consequences for those who exploit minstrelsy and blackface in *Bamboozled*. Following an argument with co-star Womack, Manray is left alone to perform in *Mantan*. However, as he contemplates his performance in his dressing room he soon comes to recognise what his co-star meant when he said 'I'm not drinking the Kool-Aid'<sup>28</sup> (Lee, 2000). When confronted by Delacroix over his failure to get into costume and 'blacken-up' Manray responds: 'I'm not playing myself no more' (Lee, 2000). The comment has multiple meanings for Manray. On a superficial level, it merely signals his refusal to perform. However, it also functions as a refusal to give his permission to be exploited by the production. To be 'played' is to be fooled or exploited by another. In addition, the comment also functions as a refusal to play the 'self' and the representation of blackness that *Mantan* and minstrelsy may be seen to portray. Manray refuses to wear blackface and perform in what he describes as 'this blackface buck-dance shit' (Lee, 2000). In prophetic parting words Delacroix says 'Fine. It's gonna be your funeral' (Lee, 2000).

Manray is ejected from the television studio following his final performance (this time without costume or blackface) in which he announces in a defiant speech to the television audience: 'I am sick and tired of being a nigger and I'm not gonna take it anymore' (Lee,

---

<sup>28</sup> This statement references the 1978 mass suicide of over 900 inhabitants of the Jonestown settlement in Guyana. The inhabitants were killed by drinking Kool-Aid laced with cyanide. The phrase 'don't drink the Kool-Aid' is a legacy of the incident and has come to mean that one should not blindly trust the word of others or 'Whatever they tell you, don't believe it too strongly' (Urban Dictionary, 2015a).



2000). It is from here that he is kidnapped by hip hop group the Mau Maus and taken to an abandoned warehouse where he meets his end. Manray is made to stand in front of a camera and perform a final dance in a hail of bullets at the command of his captors who, recalling one of Manray's catchphrases, demand to see 'those educated feet' (Lee, 2000). In a cowboy-esque 'bullet dance' (TVtropes, 2015b), Manray is forced to dance as his captors fire bullets at the ground at his feet, which Gubar proposes 'epitomizes the deathly artistry that dooms Americans of all races to become voyeuristically invested in forms of entertainment that constitute violence against the black male body' (2006, p. 34). The scene is preceded by an animated short which utilises a caricatured version of Manray dancing at the end of a white plantation owner's shotgun. In one hand the caricature holds a slice of watermelon and in the background is the entrance way to the *Mantan* stage, based on the façade of the Coon Chicken Inn fried chicken restaurant chain which features a large blackfaced porter's face [see figure 19].



Figure 19: Animated Manray dances at the end of a shotgun in *Bamboozled*

Following his 'dance of death' the shots briefly pause before the guns are raised and Manray is shot down and killed. Although his death is ultimately the consequence of his involvement with minstrelsy and his wearing of the blackface minstrel mask, for Gubar it is also the viewer that is implicated by this scene (a theme that runs throughout the film); left to contemplate

their involvement in perpetuating a cycle of the commodification of violent black life and death. Ironically, it is the seemingly radical and 'conscious' Mau Maus who play the part of rap gang executioners, an image they appear to reject through their music and actions during the film. In a final ironic twist, the group wear the merchandised plastic blackface masks of *Mantan* during Manray's execution [see figure 20].



Figure 20: Manray's assassins wear the blackface merchandise masks of *Mantan* in *Bamboozled*

Following the public execution of Manray, Sloane, racked with grief and rage, goes to confront Delacroix. He is surrounded by the racist memorabilia he has collected since the beginning of *Mantan* and still wears the blackface mask now also adopted by audience and crew members of the show. The blackface caricatures of the money boxes, cookie jars, and figurines haunt and taunt him as he sits at his office desk. Fraught with anguish and rage, he trashes his office and the memorabilia that stares down at him from the shelves lining his office walls. Sloane enters the room, armed with a hand gun and forces Delacroix to watch a video of excerpts of blackface from America's television and film history and demands he 'look to what you contributed to [sic]' (Lee, 2000). At one point Sloane, Delacroix, and the television are positioned in a triangle with Sloane pointing with one hand at the screen and with the other hand pointing the gun at Delacroix [see figure 21]. As Sloane sobs, the voices

of film and television history's racist stereotypes play in the background, removing any comic effect and giving them (and the scene) a sinister feel. At various moments in the scene the screen of blackface performance is pictured alongside the raised gun of Sloane, juxtaposing the once comedic images of blackface comedy with anguish, sadness, and the threat of violence. As Delacroix approaches Sloane, asking for the gun, she fires two shots into his lower abdomen and he falls to the ground. In a mirroring of the earlier shot of Womack in front of the make-up mirror, a single tear rolls down Delacroix's face as he lays dying on his office floor [see figure 22]. The tear running down blackface works to achieve two important effects in this final scene: firstly, to show Delacroix's realisation of the anguish felt by Manray and Womack and the many other African American performers throughout history who wore the mask and enacted demeaning stereotypes; and secondly, to challenge the blackface mask as a sign of the happy and whimsical character so frequently played by those behind the mask. Left alone to contemplate his imminent death, Delacroix voices an internal monologue which brings his complicity in *Mantan* and its subsequent consequences into sharp focus: '[a]s I bled to death, as my very life oozed out of me, all I could think of was something the great Negro James Baldwin had written: "people pay for what they do and still more for what they have allowed themselves to become"' (Lee, 2000).



Figure 21: Triangle of Sloane, Delacroix, and blackface film in *Bamboozled*



Figure 22: Delacroix in blackface lies dying on his office floor in *Bamboozled*

Alice Maurice suggests that in a film otherwise laced with comedy, wit, and barbed satire, *Bamboozled* was subject to criticism for ‘crumbling into melodrama’ under the burden of its own content (Maurice, 2012, p. 202), something certainly reflected in reviews from film critics. However, the finale is necessary to demonstrate the consequences of playing with blackface. Moreover, it focuses the viewer onto the notion of violence and death, leaving them with this association as a concluding concept. Although *Bamboozled* certainly plays with the notion of offense, humour, and the paradoxical nature of satire, it seeks to leave the viewer with the feeling that there is nothing funny about what they have seen. Moreover, the viewer may be left with feelings of guilt of having perhaps enjoyed or found humour in aspects of the blackface performance used in the film. Gubar suggests that the function of the scene is to highlight how ‘intra-racial violence between black men and women...has everything to do with a dehumanization minstrelsy enacted mostly on men’ (Gubar, 2006, p. 34).

During the final moments of *The Wu-Tang Candidate* Ace Boon Coon is shot to death on the Miami Beach set of his music video ‘Black and Ugly As Ever’. His death is the culmination of an elaborate conspiracy of mutual publicity organised by Ace and aspiring politician Hadley Dixon, in which a fake assassin (with a fake gun) is to publicly gun Ace down in front of the

full glare of the world's media. A vocal adversary of Ace, the scam is planned to land Dixon with the primetime television interviews he covets and resultant publicity for his campaign for office. For Ace, the charade is intended to boost record sales, acquire 'immeasurable currency in controversy with the national spotlight trained on his minstrel antics' (Lewis, 2007a, p. 56), and build on the 'mythology of Ace Boon Coon' (Lewis, 2007a, p. 56). However, all is not what it seems and Dixon (in love with Ace's girlfriend Gigi) has other plans and, in a double-cross, has Ace 'murdered à la Tupac Shakur' (Lewis, 2007b, p. 82).

The music video for 'Black and Ugly as Ever' is not unlike many other rap music videos and features the rapper miming into the camera whilst his two scantily-clad backing dancers gyrate along with the music. However, it comes with a slight twist: Ace will be dressed as Michael Jackson from his *Off The Wall* era in a black tuxedo with 'highwater slacks [showing] off sequined silver socks' (Lewis, 2007a, p. 57). Those involved in the project are hopeful that the media will appreciate the 'irony surrounding whitefaced Jackson parodied by a blackfaced minstrel' (Lewis, 2007a, pp. 57-58).

The image of Ace Boon Coon which appears in Lewis's *Dazed and Confused* follow-up article [see figure 23], frozen for ever in comic rigor mortis, achieves a number of things. Firstly, it demonstrates the ultimate fatal consequences of playing with blackface minstrelsy. Secondly, it assassinates the sign of the blackface minstrel, a character so synonymous in popular memory for his assassination of African American image, identity, and culture. And finally, the two aforementioned features combined work to justify the use of blackface minstrelsy in cultural criticism. The safest means of demonstrating that blackface minstrelsy is problematic is to kill it off, and very graphically – 'the wide arcs of blood suddenly staining the sand' (Lewis, 2007a, p. 58).

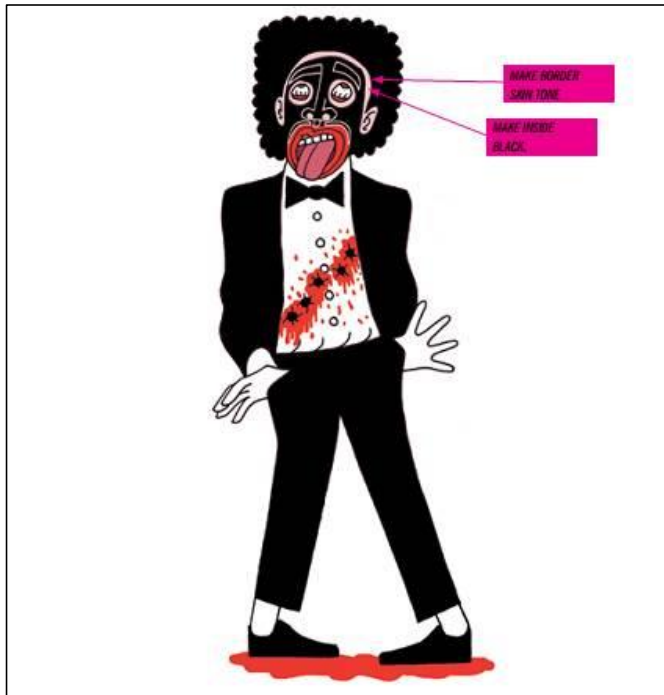


Figure 23: Ace Boon Coon is shot on the set of 'Black and Ugly as Ever' in 'The Wu-Tang Candidate'

Violence is not restricted to that inflicted upon blackface by others. Lewis evokes the concept of suicide in Ace Boon Coon's song lyrics. In one song Ace raps 'I am product for a coroner / on the corner / Gambling my life / willing to throw to die / I got rope burns on my neck from noose / knots I done knotted myself tight' (Lewis, 2007a, p. 43). Although Ace appears nonchalant about his blackface performance throughout the story of *The Wu-tang Candidate*, he is clearly portrayed as one who is abundantly aware of its implied consequences. Lewis brings together a series of troubling concepts in this brief line of rap verse, simultaneously alluding both to suicide and to lynching alongside the ever-present shadow of blackface in Ace's performance. By bringing the notions of lynching (a practice in which many African American men were led to violent deaths) and suicide (the self-inflicted fatal act of a desperate person), Lewis brings together the unwilling and the willing in an ironic turn of events which sees African American men submitting to the symbolic death inflicted on them by America's racist past.

Lewis is not the only voice within hip hop's wider community to articulate associations between blackface, rap culture, and suicide. Rappers Idasa Tariq, Living Proffe, and Jasiri X develop the notion in the song 'Just A Minstrel'. Tariq raps:

to the murder rate, you're a figure / to the cops on the block you're just a coffin with a trigger / chalked out, another body on the side-lines / twenty five for the black man is the timeline / so sad we ain't pleading for help / Sambo Sams damn we just killing ourselves / forget shackle and chain now they supply it / we just walk up in the stores see the bling and buy it / tell our women they got to be sexy and thick and that they only gonna make it as a video chick / really it's sick / how the hell we fall this far? Willing lynching to the rhythm that we bump in our cars / suicide when you're rhyming on ya ring-tone songs / dumb niggers, gold grillz with the blackface on (Jasiri X, 2010a).

For Tariq et al. the commodities of contemporary rap culture such as chain necklaces function as a symbolic substitute for the chains of slavery. Moreover, the theme of early death features as a related concept in a rap of blackface equivalency. Tariq makes three references to suicide which make connections between the notions of blackface performance and rap culture. The first reference connects the African American character-type of Sambo ('Sambo Sams') (so familiar to minstrelsy and wider popular culture of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries) to suicide ('damn we just killing ourselves'). The second reference, which appears in the final two rhyming couplets of the verse, aligns a series of seemingly unconnected concepts: racial and community progress; lynching; forms of rap consumption; rap culture commodities; ignorance and stupidity; blackface; and suicide. Questioning the failures of progress in African American equality and social progress, Tariq introduces the notion of regression ('how the hell we fall this far?'), before connecting this with consented lynching and rap music consumption ('Willing lynching to the rhythm that we bump in our cars'). The suggestion of lynching by consent makes for a particularly problematic and potentially offensive concept. The lynching of African American men (the practice was predominantly inflicted upon men) and supporters of civil rights represents one of the most troubling manifestations of racism and violence against African Americans. To

connect these concepts may serve a rhetorical and socio-political function in this verse, but it also may risk trivialising the violence against African Americans and detract from the genuine issues at the centre of commodified images of black culture in rap. The third reference connects the notion of suicide to contemporary rap culture which exploited the boom in mobile phone ring-tone sales<sup>29</sup> ('suicide when you're rhyming on ya ring-tone songs'), before finally returning to the concept of blackface via ignorance and stupidity ('dumb niggers') and rap culture commodities ('gold grillz with the blackface on').

During the Police Station Protest scene in 'Face Wars', Sarah Silverman (still wearing blackface) addresses a crowd of supporters who have congregated in support of her bold decision to wear blackface in public. During her speech to the crowd she is accidentally shot by her brother-in-law who is, ironically, demonstrating the safety function of a handgun to a fellow police officer. Sarah is struck by the ricocheting bullet and falls to the ground [see figure 24]. The moment parodies Hollywood cliché assassination scenes in which cameras change to slow-motion and judder and shake as if in the hands of an eye witness; a loved one (in this case her sister) leaps to her aid, screaming with anguish; and police officers shout commands into their radios. Although Silverman is only shot in the arm, she appears lifeless on the steps of the police station. Much like *Bamboozled* and 'The Wu-tang Candidate', Silverman assassinates the blackface image in a public execution of the racist sign. However, unlike *Bamboozled* which leaves the viewer with a serious and troubling association with violence, 'Face Wars' maintains the motive of absurd comic parody. At no point in the episode is the viewer intended to seriously reflect on their complicity in the humour or enjoyment of blackface.

---

<sup>29</sup> The reference to ringtones is a veiled attack on artists like Jibbs, whose single 'Chain Hang Low' sold more than 1,000,000 copies in ringtone sales prior to the release of his debut album (PR Newswire, 2006), and Soulja Boy whose single 'Crank That' achieved a number 1 in ringtone sales (Top40charts.com, 2007).





Figure 24: Silverman is shot on the steps of the police station in 'Face Wars'

Unlike the examples discussed above, the play with blackface does not result in the death or injury of Downey Jr.'s character Kirk Lazarus in *Tropic Thunder*. However, the scene in which Lazarus is finally confronted with the truth of his psychological attachment to the range of film characters he has played throughout his career functions as a moment of figurative death. During the removal of the blackface mask (described shortly) Lazarus appears to exorcise each of the characters he has portrayed with the removal of each element of his facial disguise; Lazarus proclaims 'I am not Sargent Lincoln Osiris' as he tears the afro wig from his head (Stiller, 2009). Following his unwavering attempt to keep Osiris alive throughout the film—even when challenged by co-stars and long after they have rejected their own characters—the scene functions as a figurative death in which Osiris is left behind in the jungle of South East Asia and the 'real man' Lazarus leaves the jungle.

### Conclusions

As has been demonstrated through the use of blackface across examples, exploiting the practice as a dramatic or satirical device is not straight-forward and requires some level of engagement with its effects and consequences. Moreover, a level of critical justification must accompany its use. One such method of justifying the use of blackface appears to be showing

or describing it alongside themes of death, violence, and injury. As has been demonstrated by *Bamboozled*, the consequences for Delacroix and Manray are a violent death at the hands of others for their participation in *Mantan: the New Millennium Minstrel Show*. Although *Bamboozled* utilises humour at points, it is not a work of comedy. However, in cases where comedic intentions are clearer, such as in *The Sarah Silverman Program*, scenes of violence and injury take on a more comedic and parodic approach in which the clichés of television and film frame the violent scene. In both cases, however, the scenes of violence work to achieve the same end: the violent assassination of the blackface sign and those who use it. This same effect is achieved in 'The Wu-Tang Candidate' in which Ace Boon Coon pays the ultimate sacrifice for performing in blackface. Although the narrative roots his assassination in a troubled love affair, it is the image of Ace riddled with bullets, complete with blackface mask, which provides the clearest symbol of blackface assassination. Although Kirk Lazarus does not die in *Tropic Thunder* or pay the ultimate sacrifice for his exploitation of blackface, he does undergo a figurative and symbolic death, exorcising the caricature he has tried so hard to maintain throughout the film. Death is used in these examples in two important ways: firstly, as a means of demonstrating the dangers and consequences of using blackface; and secondly, to justify its use through assassination.

As is demonstrated by both Ace's lyrics in 'The Wu-Tang Candidate' and those of Idasa Tariq, in 'Just a Minstrel', an association between blackface minstrelsy and suicide is constructed. Themes of self-inflicted hanging are combined with lynching, rooting the concepts of blackface and suicide in America's troubling history of violence against African American men. In contrast to *Bamboozled* and *The Sarah Silverman Program* the acts of violence are voluntary and work to demonstrate the psychological effects of degrading representations and the burden of blackface on the individual.

#### 5. 4. Showing Process: Burnt Cork Ritual, Application, and Removal

Blackface retains a troubling significance in American culture. The demise of the theatrical minstrel show as a popular form of entertainment did not bring about an end to its use in other theatrical contexts and the mask remained a presence in vaudeville, film, and television. As outlined earlier, the mask is argued by scholars to have had many functions (see 'Terminology and Key Concepts'). The transient quality of blackface—the possibility of application and removal—is often a key feature of its display in the twenty-first century. In the analysis and discussion of the following examples I demonstrate how the processes of burnt cork ritual, the application of the mask, and the removal of the mask feature as devices in the critical use of blackface in popular culture. These three processes are not universal to texts in which blackface appears. However, in the examples that do feature either all or some of these processes they function as an important device for interacting with the psychological challenges that may come with the use of blackface.

##### Showing Process: Burnt Cork Ritual

Ritual can be defined in a sacred sense as 'a religious or solemn ceremony involving a series of actions performed according to a prescribed order' and in a secular sense as 'a series of actions habitually and invariably followed by someone' (Oxford Concise English Dictionary, 2006). It is therefore fair to suggest that ritual may inhabit many areas of life and take on varying levels of importance for the participant. Sacred rituals are perhaps the most visible and clearly definable examples in which ritual practices are associated with belief and worship. However, people engage in secular rituals that are less obvious, but nonetheless important to their lives. We may describe such rituals simply as routine. David and Julia Jary make a distinction between different types of ritual practice. *Ritual behaviour* is described as 'behaviour which is devoid of meaning, rigid and stereotypical' (Jary and Jary, 1995, p. 561). This type of ritual practice may be associated with the seemingly mundane, every day repeated processes. In contrast, *ritual action* 'is imbued with shared social meanings which are culturally transmitted through custom and tradition' (Jary and Jary, 1995, pp. 561-562). It

is in this latter definition that we find use in the context of blackface ritual in twenty-first century cultural texts.

In a number of examples used in this work the burning of corks and the creation of blackface make-up from its ash are depicted or described. Moreover, the three examples discussed in the following pages are from three different types of media: film, music video, and literary fiction. Despite their differences in form, the description of burnt cork ritual is strikingly similar. The three examples are *Bamboozled*, *Bitch Bad*, and 'The Wu-Tang Candidate'. Furthermore, I do not apply the notion of ritual to these processes myself. Two of the examples (*Bamboozled* and 'The Wu-Tang Candidate') use the term to describe the process. I therefore take their lead in designating the process as ritual.

*Bamboozled* depicts three scenes of blacking up by the two primary members of *Mantan: The New Millennium Minstrel Show*, Manray and Womack, each of which will be discussed later. Although a large number of other characters including Pierre Delacroix, Thomas Dunwitty, and anonymous audience members all wear blackface minstrel masks at some point, it is only Manray and Womack who are depicted applying it and participating in burnt cork ritual. The first scene in which blackface is applied by Manray and Womack in the dressing rooms of the television theatre depicts the process of burning corks and provides description of the process in the form of a voice-over narration by Sloane Hopkins, Pierre Delacroix's assistant and confidant. As Manray and Womack go through the stages of burning corks, Hopkins provides this step-by-step guide:

As usual I did my research. We should blacken up like they did back in the day, keep the ritual the same. So, pour some alcohol over the corks and then light it, let them burn to a crisp and when burnt out mash them to a powder. Add water, mix to a thick paste, and voilà you have your blackface. But please put coco butter on you face and hands to protect your skin. And the final detail are the lips [sic]. The redder the lipstick the better. So I suggest fire truck red (Lee, 2000).

The notion of ritual is referenced by Hopkins in her attempt to remain authentic to the practices of true stage minstrelsy. As can be seen in figure 25, the images shown on screen progress with the direction of Hopkins and provide a visual representation of her narrated description. The process is depicted as slow and methodical, with both characters contemplating the action as they go through the stages of burnt cork ritual. The troubling place which blackface retains in American cultural memory, the heavy emphasis that is placed on the process in this scene, and the contemplation of the characters leads to the conclusion that this process can be described as ritual action 'imbued with shared social meanings' (Jary and Jary, 1995, pp. 561-562).



Figure 25: Collected images of burnt cork ritual in *Bamboozled*

Although not shown in visual form—as ‘The Wu-Tang Candidate’ is a short written story—the ritual performed by Ace Boon Coon bares striking similarities to the burnt cork ritual shown and described in *Bamboozled* and mirrored in Lupe Fiasco’s *Bitch Bad* (discussed in more detail shortly). In structure, tone, and content, the process shows particular similarity to that described by Hopkins in *Bamboozled*.

Coon’s ritual-that-isn’t starts with his pouring pure alcohol onto a few wine-bottle corks and lighting them in a large silver ashtray. He mashes the corks into black ashen powder, pouring in tap water to douse the flames. Protecting hands and face with cocoa butter, he spreads the resulting thick paste, slowly covering his own twenty-two-year-old boyish features, until the mask is complete. Lipstick comes last. (Lewis, 2007a, p. 42).

As can be seen, the core details of what is now the ‘ritual-that-isn’t’ are almost identical to those described by Hopkins in *Bamboozled*: the pouring of alcohol; lighting of corks in a silver dish (though not described in *Bamboozled*, the large silver dish is shown in the above screen shots from the film); the addition of water in the production of a ‘thick paste’; the preparation of cocoa butter to protect the hands and face; and the final addition of lipstick. Although the order of the ritual is certainly logical and the methods broadly accurate, the striking similarities suggest it is highly likely that Lewis appropriated the ritual from *Bamboozled*. Such an assessment is reinforced by Lewis’s reference to the film in his *Dazed and Confused* article published shortly after ‘The Wu-Tang Candidate’ in which he outlines his inspiration for writing the short story (Lewis, 2007b, p. 82).

In Lupe Fiasco’s *Bitch Bad* the introduction to the theme of blackface is shown in the first few moments of the music video and just prior to the song’s first chorus, which introduces the song proper. Lupe Fiasco establishes the primary musical refrain first, whilst simultaneously introducing the theme of blackface through burnt cork ritual. Before the beginning of the first chorus the first sign of ritual is introduced with the lighting of the match [see figure 26]. In a rapid-edited sequence the scene quickly cuts to a shot of a pink wig sat upon a wig mannequin [see figure 27], before quickly cutting to the first images of cork pieces in the tin dish ready to be burned in the preparation of burnt cork make-up [see figure 28].



Figures 26-28: Lighting of match; Pink wig on mannequin; Corks in tin dish

In this pre-chorus sequence of *Bitch Bad* themes of burnt cork ritual and pop culture superficiality (the pink wig)<sup>30</sup> are placed side-by-side, firmly establishing the video's primary notion of blackface equivalency with hip hop culture. With the signs of burnt cork ritual initially introduced before the first chorus, the video gradually reveals further steps of the process. Before the end of the first chorus and the beginning of the first verse the process introduced in the above sequence is continued with the burning of the corks [see figure 29]. Once again, this is used as an opportunity to further establish the notion of blackface equivalency with hip hop culture through the placement of a decorative dentil implant (known colloquially as 'grills' or 'grillz') alongside the burning corks in the tin dish [see figure 30].



Figure 29: Burning corks in *Bitch Bad*; Figure 30: Burning corks with 'grills' in *Bitch Bad*.

In contrast to the ritual described in the above examples, the rather functional process of producing blackface make-up from burnt cork is outlined by Frank Dumont in *The Witmark*

---

<sup>30</sup> The pink wig is a likely reference to Nicki Minaj, who is known for toying with superficiality as a theme, and to her alter ego character Roman Zolanski who wears the wig on occasions.

*Amateur Minstrel Guide and Burnt Cork Encyclopedia* (1899), an instructional guide to staging a minstrel show produced for the amateur market:

First, we get a lot of champagne corks, or remnants of cork from a cork stopper factory. These are placed in an o'd tin pail—which serves as a furnace—and then ignited. A few holes in the pail will furnish draft for the blazing corks. When they have been thoroughly burned, they are crushed and reduced to powder by hand. Then this powder is moistened with water, and we run it through a small paint mill to grind it fine. Then we place the paste into tin boxes and it is ready for use. You moisten with a little water the quantity you need as you are applying it to the face (1899, p. 14).

Far from personal and significant, this description shows the process as functional, mundane, and communal. As such, it stands in contrast to the ritual depicted in *Bamboozled*, 'The Wu-Tang Candidate', and *Bitch Bad*. Each of these examples show startling similarities, something likely initiated by the emphasis placed on the practice in *Bamboozled* and the film's subsequent influence on later explorations of blackface minstrelsy in popular culture. In this regard, the burnt cork ritual used in critical and narrative uses of blackface minstrelsy is intertextual, with *Bamboozled* operating as a benchmark of contemporary blackface exploration.

The depiction of burnt cork ritual as a deeply personal and significant practice in these examples represents a commonality that places the individual at the centre of the process and begins the personal engagement with the act of applying blackface. The production of the mask and the engagement in ritual in these examples further implicates the performer in their willing participation in the process; not only do they wear the mask, but it is of their own making.

The likelihood that this process was commonly conducted as depicted in these texts is unlikely. More functional and practical approaches, such as that outlined by Dumont above, are certainly more likely. The significance of and emphasis placed upon the ritual action of burnt cork production may work to further reinforce its almost magical significance rather



than challenge it and may further imbue the process with significance and reinforce its representational power.

#### Showing Process: Application of the Mask

Application of blackface is shown in a number of the examples presented for analysis in this thesis, not all of which depict the process of burnt cork ritual. Some seek to depict the process as it is seen to have been used in minstrelsy and make explicit connections to the genre and its problematic status in American history. Others provide alternative procedures which subvert the process and use it as a satirical device within narratives of ethnic masquerade.

The application of blackface and the demonstration of process was not a feature of blackface minstrel performance in the nineteenth century. Part of the effect was the implicit illusion that the performer was African American. Although it was highly unlikely that audiences primarily believed the performer they were seeing was genuinely African American, a function of the masquerade was to give the impression of blackness. However, this is not to say that performers did not show themselves independent from the mask. Sheet music covers from the nineteenth century sometimes showed performers out of blackface. Early minstrel bands such as the Christy Minstrels depicted both blackface and non-blackface representations of themselves. A sheet music cover from 1844 demonstrates this effect [see figure 31]. Another sheet music cover for the Virginia Minstrels published the same year (shown here as the Virginia Serenaders) features the whole band in both blackface and without blackface [see figure 32]. The practice was not restricted to early minstrelsy and some late era minstrel show artworks of the early twentieth century used the same method. Wm. H. West (1900) and Al. G. Field Greater Minstrels (1907) provide two illustrative examples [see figure 33 and 34].



Figure 31: 'Christy's Melodies' shows absent blackface; Figure 32: Virginia Serenaders shows absent blackface



Figure 33: W. H. West's Big Minstrel Jubilee



Figure 34: Al. G. Field Greater Minstrels

It was during the twentieth century and the dawn of moving pictures that the process of blackface application began to feature significantly within performances and narratives. Michael Rogin describes the popularity of the blackface musical during the early twentieth century and how they 'sustained the tradition of whites playing black as spectacle' (p. 167). Their nostalgic function, portraying a fantasy world of cultural tradition, 'served contemporary political integration in depression and wartime America' (Rogin, 1998, p. 177). Rogin describes how the Hollywood blackface musical fetishised the blackface mask and the process of its application: 'There is a primal scene in every blackface musical: it shows the performer blacking up. The scene lets viewers in on the secret of the fetish: I know I'm not, but all the same' (1998, p. 182). Such scenes of application, which work to

acknowledge the mask as façade, expose the mask's superficiality and, as Gubar describes it, '[draw] attention to its own artifice' (1997, p. 79). It is therefore the act of showing application that displays its artificiality in-process.

For Rogin, the process of application in the blackface musical was symptomatic and symbolic of America's cultural identity; one of individualism, enterprise, and mythicised self-making in which:

blackface joins white power over black to personal mobility and self-expression. But what looks like uncovering origins, exposing how the magic works, is the deepest mystification of all, for it attributes the ability to change identity to individual construction of the self (1994, p. 9).

However, this 'self' was not African American and the mask of blackness functioned in the construction of the 'white' self by using blackface as a vehicle of self-expression and cultural integration.

The process of application is used as a creative feature of a 1950 theatre performance of Glenn Vernon and Edward Ryan captured on film in which the pair reminisce about 'old-time show business' (Ryan in Cinographic, 2007). The theme of nostalgia was a key feature of minstrelsy's appearances by the mid-twentieth century and reflected the place the entertainment occupied in popular culture. The feature film of the following year *Yes Sir, Mr. Bones* plays on the same sense of nostalgia and will be discussed in more detail in 'Framing Blackface: Mise-en-Abyme and Critical Distance'. Ryan introduces minstrelsy as the 'one phase of [old-time show business] you just cannot overlook' (Ryan in Cinographic, 2007), rather tellingly signalling the thesis of this research. As the pair reminisces about the good old days, reciting the names of prominent blackface performers Lew Dockstader, George Primrose, Honey Boy Evens, Bert Williams, Eddie Leonard, and Al Jolson, they begin to apply blackface one smudge and one smear at a time. As the mask is applied, the pair becomes further involved in the masquerade and it is with the recollection of 'those comical endmen' that Vernon and Ryan finally become fully engrossed in the blackface performance. Such performances worked to both show the mask as façade and to imbue it with power.

*Bamboozled* makes blackface application a key feature of the film, showing the process in three separate scenes which become gradually more distraught in tone. During the first application scene Manray and Womack sit down at their make-up tables and contemplate blacking-up for the first time. On this first occasion the process is accompanied by Sloane's instructions of burnt cork ritual outlined earlier. The procedure is both careful and tentative, showing the performers' psychological unease and uncertainty about the procedure [see figures 35 and 36]. During the second blacking-up scene Womack's frustrations with the process come to the fore and his blackface application becomes aggressive as he smears and dabs the make-up onto his face [see figure 37]. In contrast, Manray appears passive and resigned to the process [see figure 38]. In a final sign that the process of blackface application and the exploitation of the minstrel show have taken their toll on his emotional wellbeing, Womack looks into the mirror as the audience chant 'let's go niggers' and a tear runs down his face as he raises his hands and announces 'show time' [see figure 39]. As discussed earlier, the combination of blackface and tears is later mirrored in the death of Delacroix during the final scene of the film.



Figure 35: Womack tentitively applies blackface; Figure 36: Manray applies blackface for first time.



Figure 37: Womack applies blackface aggressively; Figure 38: Manray appears passive and resigned in blackface.



Figure 39: Womack cries as he faces his blackface mask

As can be seen in the final shot of Womack in front of the make-up mirror, he is doubly-reflected. This, Maurice suggests, demonstrates how 'the performers' identities are progressively fractured and confused throughout the scene as the masks appear and the faces multiply' (2012, p. 196). As the process becomes progressively fraught the blacking up scenes become 'increasingly fragmented' and 'reflect the growing pain and inner turmoil associated with the mask for Man Ray and Womack' (Maurice, 2012, p. 196). Far from the mythicized function of self-making for whites outlined by Rogin, the scenes represent the opposite for the African America characters: self-destruction.

Similarly to Lee's *Bamboozled*, *Bitch Bad* uses the make-up mirror as the setting for blacking-up and shows it as a psychologically disturbing process. Early in the music video the male and female cast members, who go on to become the focal characters, both take their places at dressing room make-up mirrors. Blackface has not yet been applied at this point in the video, but the process of burnt cork ritual has been established through the shots outlined earlier in this chapter. Prior to applying blackface, each character adorns themselves with signifiers of hip hop culture which will then feature throughout the video. During the second chorus the male character applies a bandana [see figure 40] and displays the (now fitted) decorative dentil implant [see figure 41] shown in earlier shots positioned next to the burning corks. The

female character is pictured measuring up breast enhancers [see figure 42] and putting on the pink wig [see figure 43], also featured in the earlier sequence which established the concept of burnt cork ritual.



Figure 40: Male performer applies bandana in *Bitch Bad*; Figure 41: Male performer displays grillz in *Bitch Bad*.



Figure 42: Female performer measures-up breast enhancers in *Bitch Bad*; Figure 43: Female performer puts on wig in *Bitch Bad*.

It is during the third chorus (which follows 'Act II' or verse two) that blackface is applied by the performers in front of the dressing room make-up mirror. The female performer is the first to apply the minstrel mask, though the process is somewhat confusingly introduced by her dipping a make-up sponge into a shoe polish tin of dark watery liquid [see figure 44]. This is then followed by the first shot of application in which she wipes the blackface make-up onto her face whilst staring into the mirror [see figure 45].



Figure 44: Blackface in shoe polish tin in *Bitch Bad*; Figure 45: Woman first applies blackface in *Bitch Bad*.

Further shots of application are shown in a rapidly edited sequence which cuts between shots of the two performers applying blackface [see figures 46 and 47] and Lupe Fiasco singing into the microphone. The process is continued until the full mask is complete, including the application of red lipstick and white gloves [see figures 48 and 49]. The process is shown from a variety of angles including direct parallel reflection, from the side, and at a diagonal position to the subject. This process mirrors the multiplicity of angles utilised in *Bamboozled*.



Figure 46: Male performer applies blackface in *Bitch Bad*; Figure 47: Female performer applies blackface in *Bitch Bad*.



Figure 48: Male performer applying red lip-stick in *Bitch Bad*; Figure 49: Female performer puts on gloves in *Bitch Bad*.



Application is shown in *Bitch Bad* as a slow and considered process in which the performers look deeply into the mirror; the process is reluctant and serious. In a similar sequence to the application scenes shown in *Bamboozled*, the performers are faced with the process, forced to watch as they transform themselves into a sign of American racism, exploitation, and misrepresentation. The dressing room mirror acts to confront the performer with their actions and does not allow them to hide from the consequences.

Once blackface is applied the performers are faced with their transformed appearance. During the fourth chorus the performers toy with gestures (waving their hands beside their faces or performing 'jazz hands') and costume (man puts on a top hat and both wear white gloves) in front of the dressing room mirror. The middle eight follows this fourth chorus and introduces a solo minor piano motif. The beat and bass line which have featured throughout are removed, exposing the piano which is supported by string pads and sparse percussion. During this contrasting musical section themes of distress and anguish are introduced. The male performer is shown shouting and becoming progressively distressed until he is finally overcome by sorrow and begins to cry [see figure 50]. The striking image of the single tear running down the blackface mask is particularly significant and mirrors similar scenes in *Bamboozled*.



Figure 50: Images of distress and sadness in *Bitch Bad*

The blacking up scene in *The Sarah Silverman Program* episode 'Face Wars' stands in contrast to *Bamboozled* and *Bitch Bad* in two key ways: it is not emotionally distressing and produces joyous results; and, the application of blackface is hidden from the viewer and the wearer before being dramatically revealed.

Following her encounter with Eugene in the café, Silverman goes to the home of her friend and make-up artist Eddie Pepitone as promised to undergo her transformation and 'make [her] black' (Harmon; Schrab; Silverman, 2007). The scene is set with Silverman sat in a make-up chair with her back to the camera [see figure 51], which slowly enters the room moving gradually across the scene. The moment at first appears to be serious and sincere; an atmosphere supported by the sentimental music and seriousness with which Pepitone takes the procedure [see figure 52]. As in other examples of blacking up scenes, the paraphernalia of procedure litter the table, forming a key feature of the mise-en-scene that helps to set the scene for the viewer [see figure 53]. Showing the various make-up artefacts such as sponges, varnishes, brushes, and liquids reinforces the air of seriousness set up by the camera's movement and accompanying music. However, all is not what it seems and when Silverman is passed a hand mirror to see the results for herself the camera moves to a close-up shot of her in a blackface minstrel mask, complete with white bordering to the mouth. Silverman uses this moment to play with the possibility of her finding the results shocking and unacceptable by making her first reaction one of surprise [see figure 54]. However, this is short-lived and her expression quickly turns to joy at the results of the transformation [see figure 55].



Figure 51: Pepitone applies Silverman's blackface in 'Face Wars'; Figure 52: Pepitone take things seriously in 'Face Wars'



Figure 53: Make-up paraphernalia litters the make-up table in 'Face Wars'



Figure 54: Silverman shocked at the transformation in 'Face Wars'; Figure 55: Silverman overjoyed with the transformation in 'Face Wars'.

This scene stands in stark contrast to other examples such as *Bamboozled* and *Bitch Bad* in which the act of blacking up is harrowing for the wearer of the mask. Moreover, the procedure is protracted and the wearer is forced to watch as they are transformed in front of their very eyes. The joy of Silverman's transformation is certainly not the expected reaction to the appearance of blackface, though as we will see shortly with *Tropic Thunder*, 'Face Wars' is not the only example of blackface application to result in joy.

In *Tropic Thunder* Downey Jr.'s character Kirk Lazarus applies blackface via an unusual and complicated method in which he alters the colour of his skin by undergoing a 'controversial pigmentation alteration procedure' (Stiller, 2008). This is a departure from other examples in this section which adopt a more traditional and less permanent approach to blacking-up. The apparent permanence of Lazarus's procedure highlights the obsessive actor's unwavering approach to authenticity and commitment to performance. Furthermore, Lazarus's change

of skin colour is understood to be an act of 'black body' rather than simply blackface, suggested by his insistence that he is 'head-to-toe legitimate' (Stiller, 2008) and by the similar colour of his hands and other exposed skin. Although *Tropic Thunder* makes no explicit reference to minstrelsy, Lazarus's claims of legitimacy allude to the claims of authenticity made by performers in traditional stage minstrel shows and its subsequent legacy in popular culture. *The Amos 'n' Andy Show*, so indebted to minstrel performance tradition, maintained claims of authenticity to lend credence to their performances. Melvin Patrick Ely describes how radio announcer Bill Hay professed their 'intimate knowledge of the Negro nature' and reassured listeners that 'both men spend as much time as possible among the Negroes, making a study of accents and witticisms and garnering ideas for situations' (1991, p. 127). As will be discussed shortly in 'Framing Blackface: Mise-en-Abyme and Critical Distance', Lazarus also demonstrates a similar commitment to authenticating his performance.

In replacement of a traditional blacking-up scene such as those shown in *Bamboozled* and *Bitch Bad*, *Tropic Thunder* provides a brief glimpse into the operating theatre in the run-up to the filming of movie. This scene functions as a surrogate blacking-up scene and provides three important stages to the viewer: showing process, revealing the results, and the joy and pleasure of transformation. The first of these stages exposes the process of blacking-up. Rather than showing the silver tray, the burning corks, and the blackface make-up, the surgeon is shown handling a liquid chemical in a small bottle. In a parallel with blacking-up scenes, the stained surgical rags and racechange paraphernalia are pictured in the background further exposing the process to the viewer. The bottle is adorned in East Asian language symbols, further reinforcing the illicit and murky illegitimacy of the procedure [see figure 56].



Figure 56: Pigmentation alteration pariphinalia in *Tropic Thunder*

The second stage of the surrogate blacking-up scene is the revelation of blackface to the viewer; the moment in which the bandages are unfurled and the face beneath is revealed [see figure 57]. Much like many of the narrative tropes used in *Tropic Thunder*, this shot is an allusion to similar narrative tropes in American film and television history which show the gradual revelation of surgical procedure to the camera/viewer. This is described as the 'Dramatic Unmask' (TVtropes.org, 2015a). Examples can be found in film, literature, and television including in *Memoirs of an Invisible Man* (1992).



Figure 57: Lazarus's 'dramatic reveal' in *Tropic Thunder*

The final stage of the surrogate blacking-up scene in *Tropic Thunder* is the joy and pleasure of racechange experienced by Lazarus [see figure 58]. Similarly to the scene of Sarah Silverman's blackface revelation, Lazarus is filled with joy when the procedure is complete, embracing the surgeon with a beaming smile on his face. Both examples stand in stark contrast to *Bamboozled* and *Bitch Bad* in which the process of application is anything but joyous.



Figure 58: The joy of transformation in *Tropic Thunder*

#### Showing Process: Removing Blackface

Much like its quasi-blackening-up scene, *Tropic Thunder* contains a scene of quasi-blackface removal in which Lazarus finally comes to terms with his own identity independent of the characters he portrays. The scene is initiated by a confrontation with co-star Tugg Speedman who forces Lazarus to confront his disconnection from 'real-life' and his possession by his *tropic thunder* character Osiris. The two engage in combative dialogue:

**Speedman:** Who are you?

**Lazarus/Osiris:** I know who I am! I'm a dude, playing a dude, disguised as another dude. You're a dude who don't know what dude he is!

**Speedman:** Or are you a dude who has no idea what dude he is? And claims to know what dude he is by playing other dudes?

**Lazarus/Osiris:** I know what dude I am!

**Speedman:** You're scared.

**Lazarus/Osiris:** I ain't scared. Scared of what?!

**Speedman:** Scared of who.

**Lazarus/Osiris:** Scared of who?

**Speedman:** Scared of you.

(Stiller, 2009)

It is at this point in the exchange that Speedman holds a mirror aloft confronting Lazarus with his blackface reflection. Upon seeing his reflection he falls to the ground in a state of anguish. The quasi-blackface removal process is achieved by the gradual removal the wig, facial hair, and contact lenses revealing Lazarus's bright blue eyes and blonde hair [see figure 59]. By showing Lazarus confronting his blackface character and exposing the man behind the mask, *Tropic Thunder* is able to simultaneously expose the lie of the mask which operates in this case as metaphor for the actor's own fabricated persona and detachment from reality, and destroy the sign as a sort of redemptive act. The removal of the mask in *Tropic Thunder* is symbolic of control over the mask and enables its destruction before the viewer. The notion of control, destruction, and destabilisation of the sign is also a feature of other examples discussed here.



Figure 59: Lazarus's stages of blackface removal in *Tropic Thunder*.

Downey Jr.'s character Kirk Lazarus passes through a number of stages as the film progresses, culminating in his acceptance of himself and the removal of the blackface disguise he has maintained throughout the film. Lazarus demonstrates ignorance (of the problems of a white man imitating a black man), denial (of himself and the problems of his immersive method of acting), realisation (of his situation and self), and transformation (from his blackface character Osiris back into himself). This process is important in justifying the use of blackface in *Tropic Thunder* and works to demonstrate that blackface is a problematic practice with psychological implications.

In *The Sarah Silverman Program* episode 'Face Wars' blackface removal works in contrast to that of *Tropic Thunder* and becomes a further comic device with which to return to the narrative's central theme of ethnic marginalisation and 'competitive victimhood' (Sammond, 2015). The removal scene is initiated by her awaking in a hospital bed following her shooting outside the police station.

The hospital bed scene begins with the still lifeless Silverman lying in a hospital bed as her sister pleads with her to survive. Silverman awakes, though now her blackface mask is



smudged and partially removed, presumably through the process of being extricated from the scene of the shooting and conveyed to the hospital (though this is left unsaid) [see figure 60]. Silverman's sister begins to wipe the remaining blackface makeup from her face. However, the interaction is interrupted by the employee from the Valley Village Country Club (who earlier denied her access to facilities). Despite her best efforts, the interruption stops Silverman's sister from completing the make-up removal. In a painfully slow dramatic revelation, Silverman rises up using the electronic reclining function of the hospital bed to reveal only a small patch of blackface make-up remaining on her top lip, immediately beneath her nose [see figure 61]. The sign is abundantly recognisable to the audience as a 'Hitler moustache'. This is ultimately confirmed by the irony of Silverman's statement to the Valley Village employee: 'Well, well, well. If it isn't Valley Village's favourite anti-Semite. Hate any Jews lately?' (Harmon; Schrab; Silverman, 2007). In one swift move, the sign of white racism and subjugation of black culture (blackface) is replaced by a sign of anti-Semitism (Adolph Hitler), swapping one abhorrent symbol of cultural intolerance and race crime for another. This scene achieves a number of important things. Firstly, it shows the removal of the mask; an important and frequently used feature of blackface in cultural texts. Secondly, it uses the messy removal of the mask to draw attention back to the similarities between forms of racism directed at different ethnic groups; the premise that provides the foundation for the episode. Thirdly, it provides a counter-image for the potential offence caused by Silverman's use of blackface throughout the episode. In this sense, this final function of the scene may work to justify or mitigate Silverman's use of blackface.



Figure 60: Sarah Silverman with smudged blackface in 'Face Wars'; Figure 61: From blackface to Hitler Moustache in 'Face Wars'.

In contrast to *Tropic Thunder* and 'Face Wars', the removal of blackface in *Bitch Bad* is not a comic device and performs both contrasting and similar functions. During the fifth and final chorus the blackface mask is removed by the two performers. The final chorus features a guest appearance from MDMA (Jason Boyd) who now performs the chorus vocal refrain in a semi-improvised *ad libitum* form, during which each of the performers goes through the process of removing blackface from their faces. In contrast to the careful and considered approach taken in the application scenes, the removal scenes are messy and disordered following the prior scenes of distress [see figures 62 and 63]. The act of removal has an important function in the video. On the one hand, the messy removal of the mask signals some level of control over it; the performers are able to disrupt its effects by distorting and destroying the sign. On the other hand, the mask is never fully removed and both performers end the video with its remnants on their faces. This effect is indicative of the notion that although the mask has been (partially) removed, it still remains present, its significance and connotation still hang over those who (literally or figuratively) wear it.



Figure 62: Images of woman removing blackface in *Bitch Bad*.



Figure 63: Images of man removing blackface in *Bitch Bad*

## Conclusions

A number of examples which show blackface in popular culture use the concept of ritual to frame the process of producing burnt cork make-up. Scenes imbue the process with significance and show it as 'ritual action' which works to convey notions of tradition, procedure, and importance. However, in ritualising the process users may work to reinforce its importance rather than challenge it in contexts which aim to deconstruct the signs of blackface in contemporary cultural criticism. Furthermore, the similarities in the structure of the process in examples point to the influence of *Bamboozled* as a defining text of twenty-first century representations of blackface minstrelsy. Considering the criticism attracted by *Bamboozled* and the proposals of some critics of its conceptual failure, texts which look to the film for influence may attract similar criticism in their own uses of blackface.

Application is shown in these examples to be a varied and multi-functional device. Although all examples play on the idea of transformation, the functions and effects are shown to be multiple and used to produce differing results dependant on context. In comedic contexts such as *The Sarah Silverman Program* and *Tropic Thunder* the act of application results in surprise and joy. In both these cases the wearers of the mask are white. In the cases of *Bamboozled* and *Bitch Bad* scenes of blacking-up are intended to reflect the process as performed in minstrel shows, both using the make-up mirror in the theatre dressing room as the setting for application. Furthermore, and in contrast to *The Sarah Silverman Program* and *Tropic Thunder*, the process of application is far from joyous and the result is one of sadness and distress.

Removal of blackface also has diverse functions and effects in these examples. Interestingly, *Bamboozled*, so rich in blacking-up scenes (three are shown throughout the film), features no scenes of removal. *Bitch Bad* uses scenes of removal to further demonstrate the psychological distress inflicted upon the wearer by depicting the process as aggressive and messy. Moreover, its remnants remain on the faces of the wearers in a signal of the mask's continued effect and presence. Sarah Silverman uses removal to enact a final joke and to signal the return of the over-arching comic narrative of competitive victimhood established through her trading of places with Eugene. In this context, the act of blackface removal

works to replace one symbol of racism (blackface) with another (Hitler moustache). Lazarus's scene of removal in *Tropic Thunder* works to aid in his own moment of clarity and to enable him to emerge from behind the mask of his blackface character Osiris. Although in the case of Lazarus, it is not blackface which is removed, but the various other elements of his disguise which leave him as a confusing combination of dark skin, blonde hair, and blue eyes.

## 5. 5. Framing Blackface: Mise-en-Abyme and Critical Distance

Cultural texts which use blackface and minstrel imagery often use the method of mise-en-abyme and incorporate post-modern referential practices to frame and interact with the problematic signs, an effect of which is the creation of critical distance from the implications of using blackface in an era in which its appropriateness is questioned. However, this technique is not a new development and, as is shown shortly, the narrative technique of mise-en-abyme has precedent in filmic instances of blackface in the twentieth century.

In the context of literature and theatrical arts 'mise-en-abyme' refers to 'a work within a work, a play within a play, a book within a book, a picture within a picture' (Ronosaurus Rex, 2010). The internal quoted text is most often used to inform or reflect the main narrative of the text in which it appears. At its core mise-en-abyme is reflective and referential. The term mise-en-abyme can also refer to the effect produced through reflection in which the image viewed is repeated seemingly into infinity, such as the effect produced by a hall of mirrors.

Both the former and latter interpretations of the term are useful to this work. Some examples discussed here provide themselves with critical distance from the act of using blackface by positioning it within an internal text or performance and through constructing layers of referentiality. Others use the device of reflection (as was shown in scenes of blacking-up in *Bamboozled* and *Bitch Bad*) which use the multiplicity of reflected images to demonstrate the fragmentary effect of becoming a symbolic racist representation.

**Commented [u1]:** Mention more about use in *Bamboozled*.

Referentiality is a common narrative and structural feature of twenty-first century popular culture. The conditions of postmodernism, the mechanical and digital reproduction of cultural goods, led to the exploitation of repetition and representation via the signs and symbols of past moments, artefacts, and concepts. During the twentieth century Fredric Jameson perceived a cultural condition in which reference formed an integral feature of cultural expression in which 'texts don't just quote other cultures, other historical moments, they actually incorporate them to the point where any sense of critical distance threatens to collapse' (Storey, 2008, p. 168). In the twenty-first century referentiality is a celebrated feature of cultural expression in which pleasure is derived from the recognition, repetition,

and manipulation of narrative tropes and cultural conventions. Take internet memes as an example. The success of memes relies on the common recognition of the signs of which they are comprised and the ability to improvise with signification in continued repetition. This, argues Melissa Beckett, represents 'the playful ironic self-awareness that is prototypical of postmodern culture' (Beckett, 2012). Jerry Palmer describes how 'modern aesthetics readily accepts referentiality, reflexivity and critical distance vis-à-vis other works' (Palmer, 2009, p. 85). In this sense, referentiality can be a method used to provide critical distance in popular culture, a function of particular importance in the exploitation of problematic themes and content such as blackface.

There is precedent for the use of referentiality and mise-en-abyme in films from the twentieth century which feature blackface. The sequel to *The Jolson Story* (1946), *Jolson Sings Again* (1950), once again features Larry Parks as Al Jolson. In a postmodern twist, the sequel depicts the making of the first film and exposes the inner workings of the developing film industry and the capability of new audio and visual synchronisation technologies. In this context, the film-within-a-film technique, according to Michael Rogin, '[calls] attention to the medium' (1996, p. 203). In a sign that by 1950 blackface was becoming increasingly unpopular with a more race-conscious audience and society, Rogin points to the 'distinctly mannerist feel' of the film and its 'infinite regress of self-referentiality' (1996, p. 198). Moreover, blackface is used sparingly in a film produced in the context of increased opposition to the practice 'made too self-conscious by civil rights scrutiny' (Rogin, 1996, p. 198). The self-referentiality described by Rogin is combined with mise-en-abyme to produce an effect of critical distance from the performance of blackface. It is not Larry Parks who wears blackface, but it is Jolson (or Parks as Jolson) who wears the mask. By using this technique, the film references an earlier example which is itself a reference to an earlier example of blackface as part of Jolson's life and career. The hall of mirrors created by the use of self-reference and mise-en-abyme creates reflections of reflections in which blackface becomes one element of a wider referential practice.

The technique of mise-en-abyme was also used in *Yes Sir, Mr. Bones* (1951), produced the following year, to stage a full-blown minstrel show and to reflect nostalgically on a lost tradition, whilst simultaneously providing distance from the staging of a blackface minstrel



show. Actor William E. Green (Mr Green) in *Yes Sir, Mr. Bones* acknowledges the problematic status of the minstrel show in American culture, whilst at the same time extolling its virtues and value to the uninitiated young Billy Crane.

Billy: What's a minstrel man?

Mr Green: A minstrel man, son, is a man who made everybody happy. Sometimes he got in a little trouble doing it, but not big trouble (Ormond, 1951).

The problem for Mr Green, as was argued by Rogin with regards to *Jolson Sings Again*, is by the mid-twentieth century the minstrel show was attracting increasing criticism and was most certainly not making 'everybody happy'. What *Yes Sir, Mr. Bones* does demonstrate is that there was still a market for the nostalgic reverence of blackface performance in American cinema during the mid-twentieth century.

The film is a lavish eulogy to late era minstrelsy and contains an extensive performance of a minstrel show. Much like the authors of early twentieth-century texts on minstrelsy such as Edward Le Roy Rice and Carl Wittke, the film reflects the passing into the history books of a treasured tradition. This is unambiguously signalled by the film's opening epigraph which in part reads: 'Today the Minstrels are nearly forgotten. They have "drifted on down the river", but have left, in their wake, a great American tradition' (Ormond, 1951). To consider the minstrel show 'a great American tradition' today would largely be unthinkable outside of academic scholarship and ethnographic performance practice. By and large, the minstrel show has come to represent bigotry, racism, and exploitation in popular consciousness.

*Yes Sir, Mr. Bones* frames its minstrel show using the narrative device of the inquisitive young Master Crane who, after stumbling across a 'home for old minstrel men', wants to know more about minstrel shows. The old minstrel men then tell Crane all about the old days of riverboat shows which eventually develops into a full-blown flashback of a complete minstrel show. The minstrel show staged in *Yes Sir, Mr. Bones* contains a number of different performance pieces with no identifiable relationship with one another, all of which are introduced by an interlocutor. This unrelated variety format is an accurate reflection of late

era blackface minstrelsy which presented collections of comic routines, popular songs, and dance pieces, examples of which all feature in *Yes Sir, Mr. Bones*. The film features a mixed ethnicity cast of both white and African American performers. In this production only the white performers such as Slim Williams, Ned Haverly, and Cotton Watts appear in blackface, perhaps a sign of the advances of African American performers by the time of production and the increasing distaste with which the mask was viewed by African American performers and viewers.

The film's reflective technique serves an important function. Aside from its usefulness as a narrative framing device with which to provide interest to the viewer, the use of mise-en-abyme allows the full minstrel show to be framed within a nostalgic memory. By the time the film was released the minstrel show was not a going concern in its full form in American popular culture—although its remnants existed in various media such as television, film, and radio. The use of mise-en-abyme on the part of the film's director Ron Ormond, therefore, encourages an acknowledgement of the minstrel show's resignation to a past era (one reflected upon with great reverence and love). Furthermore, it provides a layer of narrative distance between the makers and actors of the film and the audience from the reality of staging a full and un-problematized minstrel show. So when watching *Yes Sir, Mr. Bones* we are not watching a minstrel show, but are watching a film about a minstrel show of a bygone era. Some scenes of blackface are shown in the 'home for old minstrel men', outside of the safety of the nostalgic flashback. However, within the context of the wider reflective narrative these moments are subject to the safety of the film's over-arching structure of referentiality and nostalgia.

Although significantly different in tone and content, *Tropic Thunder* bares some similarities to *Jolson Sings Again* and *Yes Sir, Mr. Bones* in their shared use of mise-en-abyme as a narrative and structural device. *Tropic Thunder* uses the 'film-within-a-film' to expose the farcical inner workings of Hollywood film productions in which overpaid prima donna actors attempt to further their careers by appearing in the ultimately doomed Vietnam war film *tropic thunder*. By casting Robert Downey Jr. as Kirk Lazarus, a method actor willing to do anything to play the part and having Lazarus play the African American G. I. Lincoln Osiris, the makers of *Tropic Thunder* provide a layer of critical distance between Downey Jr. and the

act of wearing blackface. Furthermore, this character formation is positioned within the wider narrative device of mise-en-abyme to provide distance from the problematic (and potentially disastrous) consequences of using blackface. Theoretically, it is therefore not Downey Jr. who blacks up, but Kirk Lazarus. The decision to black-up is deflected onto Lazarus and demonstrates *his* naivety and ignorance rather than Downey Jr.'s and avoids what fictional director Damien Cockburn, describes as the 'pitfalls of casting a white actor to play the part of an African American' (Theroux and Coogan, 2008).

To reinforce the effect of mise-en-abyme and the critical distance provided to Downey Jr. an accompanying mockumentary is produced named *Tropic Thunder: Rain of Madness*, the title of which is itself a parody of *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse* (1991), the documentary of the making of *Apocalypse Now* (1979). *Rain of Madness* outlines the infuriating making of *tropic thunder*, portrays the poor behaviour of cast members, the challenges to filming and financing the production, and the struggle of Cockburn to complete the project. The mockumentary also works to further reinforce Lazarus's absurd and 'borderline unnerving' (Theroux & Coogan, 2008) commitment to film roles and therefore bolster the justification for casting Downey Jr. in blackface.

In *Tropic Thunder: Rain of Madness* Lazarus has the 'real' family of Osiris flown in from Texas to live with him in Vietnam following his skin pigment alteration procedure. He refuses to break character and lives the role of Osiris to 'walk a mile in the man's shoes'<sup>31</sup> (Theroux & Coogan, 2008). During a brief visit back to Texas during production, Lazarus suffers a psychological breakdown or a case of 'Post *Platoon* Stress Disorder' (PPSD) (Theroux & Coogan, 2008) and becomes paranoid and delusional, taking Osiris's family hostage. PPSD, according to therapist Heidi Bivens (played by Janene Garofalo), was first documented in relation to actor Charlie Sheen following the filming of *Platoon* (Theroux & Coogan, 2008). Subsequently, according to *Rain of Madness* director Jan Jürgen, 'the same diagnosis had been given to Colin Farrell after *Tigerland*, Jim Caviezel after *Thin Red Line*, and incredibly even Robin Williams after shooting *Good Morning Vietnam*' (Theroux & Coogan, 2008). There is a distinct attempt to make referentiality a central feature of *Tropic Thunder* and *Rain*

---

<sup>31</sup> This phrase is also used in 'Face Wars' to initiate the trading-places narrative that leads to the use of blackface.

*of Madness*. The multiple references to Vietnam War films and the perception of their effects create a web of referentiality around *Rain of Madness*, the fictional film *tropic thunder*, and ultimately the real film *Tropic Thunder*.

*Rain of Madness* director Jan Jürgen (played by *Tropic Thunder* director Justin Theroux) further reinforces the referentiality of the project in stating his motives for producing the documentary: 'What interested me was making a documentary about the making of a film that led to its own unmaking' (Theroux & Coogan, 2008). The hall of mirrors and repetition created by the seemingly endless chain of references and reflections builds up a wall of allusion that not only draws our attention to the satire of cinematic tropes, but to referentiality itself and away from the potentially destructive practice of blackface.

Much like *Yes Sir, Mr. Bones*, Lee uses the staging of a show-within-a-film as a device in *Bamboozled* to exploit the use of blackface and minstrel show imagery and themes; it uses mise-en-abyme to both stage and to justify the use of such content. The staging of the show-within-a-film format also allows for the exploration of other narrative developments such as personal relationships, industry and company politics, and wider contemporary cultural context to feature alongside images of the minstrel show. Alice Maurice points out that by making the entrenchment of minstrel conventions and stereotypes 'a primary focus, *Bamboozled* adds an additional layer of reflexivity to the already recursive show-within-a-film formula' (2012, p. 192). The staging of a minstrel show in front of a live studio audience also allows Lee to comment on the willingness of viewers to discard any notion of responsibility and to follow the crowd into collective acts of questionable spectatorship. In this case such acts encourage the disregard of consequences and the embrace of racism. Maurice suggests the audience is central to the use of mise-en-abyme in which the film's 'concentric circles of performance are key to its critique, as this structure forces the inclusion of—and in the case of *Bamboozled*, multiple iterations of—the internal audience' (2012, p. 192). Therefore, mise-en-abyme allows for the foregrounding of the audience as a pivotal and visible influence on the success of questionable television and allows for a more effective critique of them as active participants.

Lupe Fiasco's *Bitch Bad* also uses the staging of a show within the narrative of the music video. This concept is established from the outset in which the first shots you see are of a theatre in which the music video and internal show are to be staged. These initial shots have three important functions: to frame the video and introduce the concept of mise-en-abyme; to introduce the exploitation of African Americans by whites for profit; and to demonstrate the interchangeability of past and present. The first concept is achieved by presenting a black and white shot of the theatre in which the performance of *Bitch Bad* takes place. The blotches and scratches of degraded film are applied as an effect to reinforce the feeling of antiquity introduced through the use of black and white film [see figure 64]. To show the theatre at this early point initiates the inevitability of staging as an internal narrative feature. The second concept of white exploitation of black labour is introduced following this initial scene-setting shot of the theatre. A white male suited character is shown outside of the theatre leaning casually against the wall, smiling broadly and chewing on a large cigar. In his hands he counts a large quantity of money, moments before acquired from the ticket booth. Beside him an African American male sets a poster for the upcoming performance of *Bitch Bad* into a promotional poster frame outside of the venue [see figure 65]. Following this brief introduction to the notion of white over black labour the camera returns to a long shot of the theatre which slowly fades into colour, the degradation effects now removed. The clarity of modern digital colour film is now established and remains throughout [see figure 66]. In a moment, the viewer is transported from the past to the present with the concept of antiquity remaining in the background. In the relatively short sequence of shots which introduce the video the fundamental concepts of mise-en-abyme, exploitation, and past and present interchangeability are established.



Figure 64: Black and white theatre in *Bitch Bad*.



Figure 65: White over black labour in *Bitch Bad*.



Figures 66: Theatre now in colour in *Bitch Bad*.

In *Bitch Bad* the stage is used as a platform for the image of hip hop excess that the music video and song seek to criticise. The stage is used as a place in which the scenes of the three 'Acts' which comprise the structure of the video can be played out. With shots of the staging of hip hop excess in the background [see figure 67], Lupe Fiasco is able to both show that which he seeks to critique and distance himself from the nature of their performance. Moreover, the depiction of him in a black suit, white shirt, and tie provides a striking contrast between smart and civilised and crass and pornographic appearance. The use of mise-en-abyme in *Bitch Bad* works to distance Lupe Fiasco from the seemingly negative image of rap culture, a world he himself occupies, and to enforce his status as the figure in a position of moral and intellectual superiority.



Figure 67: Lupe Fiasco and the staged images

### Conclusions

Given the pervasive influence of referentiality in postmodern popular culture, it is perhaps little surprise that it would feature in examples shown here which use blackface. However, referentiality is not merely a consequence of contemporary existence. It works to provide critical distance from the act of using blackface in an era in which it is widely regarded as inappropriate. *Tropic Thunder* provides itself with multiple layers of distance through the use

of both referentiality (Hollywood clichés, Vietnam War films) and mise-en-abyme. The effect is reflective, but also deflective in the sense that it works to deflect responsibility and consequences away from Downey Jr. and the makers of the film. This technique is not dissimilar to other films which feature blackface from the mid-twentieth century.

Mise-en-abyme has other effects. In *Bamboozled*, Lee is able to show the complicity of the audience in supporting degrading racist images. Their display in the film becomes a central feature in showing what audiences are prepared to do collectively when the momentum of success legitimises and propels the racist project forward. However, like *Yes Sir, Mr. Bones*, mise-en-abyme also allows Lee to stage a minstrel show and frame it with a narrative that justifies its use, though *Yes Sir, Mr. Bones* and *Bamboozled* differ significantly in their function and effect. One seeks to mythologise minstrelsy in nostalgic reflection, the other seeks to expose the racism of the entertainment industries.

Mise-en-abyme provides Lupe Fiasco in *Bitch Bad* with a large degree of separation from the acts within the world of rap that he seeks to attack. Furthermore, it allows him to 'look-on' as the vulgar and pornographic acts take place in the background. In this sense he is a spectator and not a participant. Alongside the content of his raps, his attire, and positioning within the video, this technique works to position him as a moral and intellectual figure in contrast to the vulgar spectacle of commercial rap culture. However, much like the paradox of satire discussed earlier, Lupe Fiasco shows the images he seeks to destabilise (vulgarity, violence, exploitation, blackface) and the video—as well as being a critical text capable of social comment—runs the risk of reinforcing the voyeurism of commercial popular culture that it seeks to deconstruct.



## 5. 6. When Private goes Public: Blackface in Social Contexts

Blackface performance is not confined to theatrical, musical, and artistic contexts and a number of public and private instances of the practice, typically captured on camera by audience members, bystanders, and party-goers, have demonstrated both the continued appetite for blackface masquerade in social spaces and the incumbent controversy generated by its exposure to the wider public. Furthermore, what such cases show is the difference in perceived function and effect in contrast to theatrical, musical, and artistic applications in which the use of blackface can be more clearly justified by narrative, structural distance, and critical engagement with the effects and consequences of blackface performance.

The dawn of the camera phone has generated a wealth of images from across sectors of social life. We are now more exposed to captured images, and subjects of their capture, than ever before. Issues of privacy and ethics have been raised by the developments of camera phone and social media technologies in a socio-technological context in which our private lives can be exposed to the scrutiny of the public and media with unforeseen consequences. A recent case in the United Kingdom serves to demonstrate this point. In January 2013 a ten year old Leeds United fan went to his club's football ground, Elland Road, to meet his favourite player, the Senegalese striker El Hadji Diouf. He dressed as his hero in full football kit, shaved head and Mohawk, and (at the centre of the controversy) wore dark make-up to mimic the ethnicity of Diouf. He subsequently posted pictures of the meeting onto his Twitter account and within hours they had been viewed by users across the world. The young boy and his parents were subject to criticism by users who viewed his blackface costume as offensive and defended by supporters who came to his defence (Evans, 2013). Those present at Elland Road including Diouf, other Leeds United players, manager Neil Warnock, and two patrolling police officers expressed no negative feelings about the child's masquerade. In fact, manager Warnock is reported to have found it amusing (Evans, 2013). The controversy stemmed from the exposure of the act on social media site Twitter. It is highly likely, something supported by responses from those present and featured in

photographs, that had pictures of the event not been uploaded to Twitter and exposed to wider public scrutiny there would have been little, if any controversy.

Social media has played a significant role in exposing performances of ethnic masquerade and blackface to a wider audience than the participant necessarily intended or expected. Catherine M. Cole in 'American Ghetto Parties and Ghanaian Concert Parties: A Transnational Perspective on Blackface' (2012) proposes that social media has helped to 'document a widespread practice that may well have been going on during prior decades but just flew under the public radar' (p. 243). So perhaps we are not developing an increased taste for blackface, but rather that taste never went away in the first place; what may have increased are not occurrences of blackface but merely their visibility.

A number of recent controversies involving public and (semi)private performances of blackface have come to international attention through their exposure on social media. Some cases are organised around private individual-led events such as Halloween fancy dress parties, others around institutional contexts such as university fraternity events. Some cases have resulted in significant consequences for the individuals involved and others have resulted in handwringing, soul-searching, and penalties for organisations involved in organising events.

Halloween is a significant event in the United States. Not only is it a chance for people to socialise, masquerade, and consume copious amounts of candy, the event has significant value to the American economy and was estimated by the National Retail Federation to be worth over seven billion dollars in 2014 (Amadeo, 2014). Aside from striking fear into America's dentists,<sup>32</sup> Halloween is regularly followed by the publication of images and accounts of distasteful costumes, a result of a culture in which extreme and offensive costumes are sometimes celebrated and in which party-goers often push the limits of good taste.

---

<sup>32</sup> The Halloween Candy Buy Back scheme was initiated in 2005 and encourages parents and children to donate candy to troops stationed overseas (Halloween Candy Buy Back, 2014). Aside from the charitable gesture, the scheme may also save the children's teeth.

In October 2009, Dallas Cowboys cheerleader Whitney Isleib found herself at the centre of controversy over her appearance—and the subsequent exposure of photographs via social media site Facebook—at a Halloween party dressed as rapper Lil’ Wayne. She wore a vest, baseball cap, bejewelled teeth, tattoos, and darkened her skin to masquerade as the popular rapper [see figure 68]. Isleib’s blackface performance is particularly problematic for the National Football League (NFL) which has a predominantly African American roster of players. In data collected for *The Unofficial 2014 NFL Player Census*<sup>33</sup> African Americans are reported to make up 67.98 percent of NFL players and outnumber other ethnicities in the Dallas Cowboys by more than two-to-one (Powell-Morse, 2014). Moreover, the NFL has attracted criticism for its response to protests over the team name the Boston Redskins, itself paralleled with blackface (Lapchick, 2005), and has been criticised by outspoken players for the atmosphere of racism that sometimes accompanies the game (Pengelly, 2014). To say the NFL has a problem with race would be a claim that would require significantly more research than is possible in this current work. However, with its significant roster of African American players, the recent highlighting of racism from players, and the role of sport in shaping American values it would be appropriate to propose that the organisation is open to wider criticism and scrutiny with regards to issues of race and racism. In this light, performances of blackface associated with the NFL are potentially problematic.

---

<sup>33</sup> Data was collected using ‘the eye test, and clues like last name and birthplace’ (Powell-Morse, 2014).



Figure 68: Whitney Isleib wears blackface make-up to a fancy dress party

### Blackface and Schools

Controversies that arise from social blackface are often the result of the participant's membership of or affiliation with an institution or organisation. Individual and non-affiliated performances of social blackface are frequent—and it can be assumed that many more occur than are recorded and distributed online—though not always subject to criticism and scrutiny. As was outlined above in the case of Dallas Cowboys cheerleader Whitney Isleib, organisations in positions of influence and cultural importance stand to attract the most criticism and exposure from cases of social blackface. A number of recent cases in the American high school system have demonstrated both the continued desire to participate in blackface masquerade and the subsequent impact on the individuals and institutions involved.

In October 2013, Serra High School's head football coach, Brian Basteyns, his assistant coach Harold Seeley, and a teacher were pictured attending a private Halloween party

masquerading as the Jamaican bobsled team [see figure 69].<sup>34</sup> The pictures were subsequently published in regional press (Magee, 2013). In the days that followed, all three staff members of Serra High School were suspended by the San Diego Unified School District which reported that the men were 'very regretful for the incident', expressed their 'deep sense of remorse for the impact of their actions', and 'send their apologies to any person or group of people they have offended, and want to make it clear it was not their intention to offend anyone' (CBS8, 2013). Those involved make clear in their statement that they did not intend to offend anyone. It is not possible to ascertain if this is true or not. However, whether or not they intended to offend is irrelevant as to whether or not the image does offend those who see it; the function of their performance of social blackface does not necessarily bear any relation to its effect. Moreover, the fact they did not intend to offend anyone signals a level of ignorance of the potential of the image to cause offence.



Figure 69: Coaches Brian Basteyns and Harold Seeley attend a fancy dress party dressed as members of the Jamaican bobsled team

In a contrasting case, this time involving students and not staff and taking place on school property and not at a private residence, three Waverly High School students re-enacted the beating inflicted upon pop star Rihanna by her then boyfriend pop star Chris Brown in 2009,

---

<sup>34</sup> The Jamaican bobsled team were made famous by their appearance at the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary, Alberta, and the subsequent feature film *Cool Runnings* (1993).

for which he was arrested and convicted. For the performance at the homecoming rally of the school's Waverly Wolverines football team, students darkened their skin and wore clothes that identified them as Rihanna, Brown, and a friend/bystander [see figure 70]. A picture of the performance was uploaded to Facebook by an audience member and subsequently uploaded to CNN's iReport by a Waverly High School alumnus (Basu & Sashin, 2012).



Figure 70: Waverly High School students re-enacted assault on Rihanna by Chris Brown

The performance was part of a skit competition held at the rally in which the winners, identified by the volume of applause from the audience, are awarded the title of 'Mr. Waverly' (Basu & Sashin, 2012). It is likely that the students aimed to elicit, at least in part, a significant response from the crowd through the severity and risky nature of the performance; spousal domestic violence and ethnic masquerade are particularly problematic themes for a high school pep rally. Furthermore, the popular culture reference was likely to resonate with the young audience.

Students, observers, and local residents were interviewed following the exposure of the performance and provided conflicting views of the appropriateness of the skit and the public fallout that followed. Some were confused by the controversy of blackface. One student interviewed by CNN questions the performance as racist and as an act of blackface: 'I really don't think it's racist and insensitive. I mean, there's a difference. It's like, not even blackface, it was just body paint' (Basu & Sashin, 2012). She makes a clear distinction between using make-up to perform a character or characters and the blackface mask so readily associated with the minstrel show, elevating one to a level of racist representation and assigning the other a more benign position of cosmetic masquerade. A local resident agrees with the student's question over the racist intent of the performance, stating 'I don't think they meant to hurt anybody or show any kind of racial things. I just can't believe they're making such a big thing about this' (Basu & Sashin, 2012). This resident questions critical responses to the event and highlights the notion of intent on the part of the students as a relevant factor in assessing the racism of the performance. In this sense, it is similar to the Serra High School teachers' claims that they intended not to offend.

CNN reports that among the students they spoke with following the performance none knew 'anyone offended by the skit' (Basu & Sashin, 2012). However, this signals something potentially troubling. The fact that no one at the high school was offended says little about the potential of the performance, now captured and distributed online, to offend others. Moreover, the still picture taken of the performance shows a crowd of white smiling faces looking on as the faux-Rihanna is inflicted with a beating by the faux-Brown. Although this research cannot refer to empirical data on the ethnic diversity of Waverly High School, the image of white children, unoffended, looking on with humour as other white children perform a violent ethnic masquerade presents a stark and troubling image, which may stand to offend others who were not at the event itself.

In response to the public fallout following the performance, Waverly Central School Superintendent Joseph Yelich made a public statement in which he said the school would '[e]xamine [their] current activities and [would] develop future activities consistent with the commitment to creating a positive atmosphere' (in Basu & Sashin, 2012). Yelich acknowledges here that although the performance may not have offended students—

though this is not possible to accurately ascertain without further research—it did not contribute to creating a ‘positive atmosphere’. Whether this is in reference to the depiction of domestic violence or the performance of blackface or both, is not made clear by his statement.

### Blackface and Fraternal Organisations

Fraternal Organisations (or fraternities) play a significant role in American college life. They are a rite of passage for some young men, are the subject of movies from across genres, and are a distinctive feature of the American college structure. However, opinion is divided on their value. Caitlin Flanagan, writing in *The Atlantic*, reports that those who support fraternities argue ‘in defense [sic] of a foundational experience for millions of American young men, and of a system that helped build American higher education as we know it’ (2014). However, they also have an association with elitism, hedonism, and ritual and have been subject to criticism and scrutiny for instances of death ‘serious injuries, assaults, and sexual crimes’ (Flanagan, 2014).

Alongside the serious controversies over criminal behaviour, the fraternity of the American college system has attracted censure for the involvement of fraternal houses and organisations in events which feature blackface. In ‘Jim Crow on Fraternity Row: A Study of the Phenomenon of Blackface in the White Southern Fraternal Order’ (2008) Tracey Owens Patton investigates a number of instances in which white Southern fraternal organisations have participated in events featuring blackface masking. Far from a scrutinised practice, Patton argues that ‘racism, specifically anti-Black racism, has been allowed to continue in this situation due to the preservation of White hegemonic patriarchal power as it relates to blackface performativity’ (2008, p. 151). Patton divides cases in two categories based on theme: the master and the slave and hip hop and rap minstrelsy (2008, p. 156). The former feature images and artefacts relating to slavery and violent racism including those of the Ku Klux Klan, lynching, the Confederate flag, and cotton picking (Patton, 2008, p. 159). The latter feature images and artefacts relating to hip hop culture including do-rags (a thin cloth cap, stretched tightly across the head), ostentatious jewellery, large afros, and FUBU clothing (For Us By Us) (Patton, 2008, p. 162). All of the examples also feature blackface make-up. Patton



proposes that through such social practices ‘a white supremacist notion of the black other is recreated and sustained’ (2008, p. 156).

The occurrence of blackface at fraternal events has attracted greater scrutiny in recent years. Catherine M. Cole investigates a type of party that closely aligns with Patton’s second category of blackface fraternity parties: the ghetto party. Such events play upon similar signifiers of rap culture. They stand in contrast to the image of educational and intellectual development seemingly fostered by higher education institutions across America and ‘privatize a performance of racial difference that is otherwise disavowed in contemporary curricula and in polite, politically correct society’ (Cole, 2012, p. 225). One such performance took place at a University of California, San Diego, fraternal fancy dress event entitled the ‘Compton Cookout’. Attendees ‘were invited to attend in costumes that evoked “ghetto” stereotypes’ (Cole, 2012, p. 239). The costuming instructions and the mocking tone of the invitation—proposed as in ‘honour of Black History Month’ (Cole, 2012, p. 239)—exposes in this event, according to Cole, a ‘minstrelsy pedigree’ (2012, p. 239).

The trend for fraternal organisation members’ involvement in blackface masquerade has continued, with a number reaching wider public exposure due to social media. In October 2012, members of the Beta Theta Pi fraternity at the University of Florida were pictured attending a fancy dress party wearing blackface make-up and, according to local news organisation the *Orlando Sentinel*, wore ‘thick gold chains, baseball caps and pants that hang so low they show their boxer shorts’ (Ordway, 2012). The students were widely criticised for their actions and the photos of the event were published by the University of Florida’s NAACP organisation on its Facebook page, leading to an active debate amongst critics and supporters. The president of the Beta Theta Pi fraternity, Ethan McMahon, responded to the incident by stating that ‘[w]hile their actions were not intended with any malice or ill will to any members of our community, clearly they were offensive’ (in The Huffington Post, 2012).

Blackface practice is not restricted to white fraternities. In April 2013, four members of the Asian-American Lambda Theta Delta fraternity at the University of California, Irvine, danced and mimed along with Justin Timberlake’s song ‘Suit and Tie’ (2013) in an amateur video which they uploaded to YouTube. The performance appears to be planned by the

participating individuals and not part of a wider themed event such as those outlined above. Only one of four fraternity members appears in blackface [see figure 71], who is purported to be playing the part of Jay-Z who appears in the original Timberlake song and video. The performance swiftly attracted criticism from students and university organisations including the University of California's Black Student Union. In a sign that the fraternity recognised the volatility of blackface performance, the organisation voluntarily suspended itself as a UCI-sanctioned organization (Dobruck, 2013), stating that '[t]his decision is mainly due to the abhorrent, insensitive and highly offensive "blackface" video created by our members that has been circulated widely on the Internet' (in Dobruck, 2013). Although this action on the part of the fraternal organisation was welcomed by the Black Student Union, they sought to draw attention to wider issues of racism on campus indicating that 'this blackface video isn't the first, nor is it the last, example of racism that's been shown on this campus (Johnson in Dobruck, 2013).



Figure 71: Lambda Theta Delta fraternity members perform 'Suit and Tie'

### Social Blackface and Extreme Distaste

The killing of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman in February 2012 encouraged debate over the application of 'Stand Your ground' statutes and of the disproportionate killing of African American men in American society. In a contrasting example to that of *South Park* which used blackface to facilitate the execution of Zimmerman and to absurdly highlight the double-standards of violent justice, two men from Florida used blackface in 2013 to masquerade as Martin and Zimmerman for a Halloween party [see figure 72]. As was the case in examples discussed earlier, the picture was initially published on Facebook by party-goers and subsequently more widely publicised through conventional news media (Willingham, 2013; The Smoking Gun, 2013; Grenoble, 2013).



Figure 72: Greg Cimeno and William Filene masquerading as Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman.

In the image Greg Cimeno, masquerading as Zimmerman, wears a t-shirt bearing the words 'Neighborhood Watch' and holds his hand in the shape of a gun to the head of William Filene who is masquerading as Martin. Filene is wearing a blood-stained hooded top and a

blackface mask. Considering the national importance and notoriety of the case, and the fact the event took place in Florida, it is likely that Cimeno and Filene were aware of the shock and offence that could be caused by the costumes. Ryan Grenoble writing in *The Huffington Post* suggests that the costume does not balance on the line of good taste attempted by so many Halloween costumes, but '[leaves] that line so far back in the rear-view mirror it might as well have never existed' (Grenoble, 2013). Their costumes simply signal the signifiers of Martin and Zimmerman's public image. However, in doing so, they reduce Martin to a simple collection of signs: a hoodie, bullet hole, and a black face.

Like many of the other cases of social blackface exposed through social media, their appearance in this photo had consequences. In response to the image, The Smoking Gun website published the names of those pictured in the photo, images of them without make-up or costumes, their home-towns, details of their criminal records, and information from their social media pages. In an example of Web justice, The Smoking Gun exposes those pictured in the image to wider consequences most likely unforeseen by them.

### Conclusions

As the examples shown here have demonstrated, the use of social blackface can come with serious consequences. Moreover, those in positions of power and influence, whether as professionals from the world of sport or teachers within America's school system, stand to lose a great deal when their masquerade is exposed. Such exposure is primarily due to the sharing of images on social media, a practice so ubiquitous in twenty-first century life.

As has been shown by the prominence of blackface controversies within the fraternal house system of American colleges, there appears to be a particular problem. The sense of power and privilege that may come from inclusion within such an institution or the expectation of extreme activities encouraged by peer-pressure may contribute to the seeming prevalence of the practice in this context. Moreover, some argue that the legacy of blackface minstrelsy within the fraternal system remains under examined (Patton, 2008, p. 151). Failure to confront this issue could lead to its continued use, the potential for animosity towards

individuals and institutions, the increased alienation and marginalisation of African American students, and may contribute to tensions on campus.

A theme that appears to run through examples of blackface in social contexts is the ignorance of the power of blackface to offend. However, the frequency with which social blackface provokes controversy and the place the minstrel show occupies in cultural memory would suggest that ignorance is a limited justification. Cole proposes that '[w]hen it comes to blackface in America, the forces of selective amnesia are as enduring as minstrelsy's stereotypes' (2012, p. 240). It is unlikely that those who engage in social blackface are in fact, in the main, ignorant of the offence it can cause. What is more likely is that offence is often a key motivation for the function and effect of the masquerade. In a culture in which Halloween is often an opportunity to test the limits of good taste, blackface clearly operates as an offensive device. Certainly in some cases its offence is related to its effects. In the case of the Compton Cookout at the University of California investigated by Cole, a blend of irony and insult ensured an offensive reading. In the case of the Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman masquerade, the prominence of the case in news media, the location of the masquerade (Florida), and the use of blackface all point to a deliberate attempt to provoke reactions, at the very least from fellow party-goers.

Parallels can be drawn between blackface in social contexts and the performances of minstrel shows, aside from the obvious use of blackface. Although the minstrel show is largely recognised as a platform for demeaning images of African Americans—and this was certainly a result of its portrayal of African American culture and life—to suggest that minstrel performers consistently intended to offend and demean would be naïve. As Eric Lott so eruditely proposes in *Love and Theft*, minstrelsy was a 'mixed erotic economy of celebration and exploitation' and 'less a sign of absolute white power and control than of panic, anxiety, terror, and pleasure' (1995, p. 6). The desire to perform blackness through blackface masquerade was by no means a simple practice with simple motives and outcomes. Such a conclusion is recognised by Cole who proposes that blackface masquerade in social contexts is reflective of the 'libidinal economy that has long marked the white love and theft of blackness via minstrelsy' (2012, p. 244). However, it is also clear that its

significance as a symbol of white supremacy may remain a core element of its power as is argued by Patton (2008, p. 156).

## 6. Talking Blackface

### 6. 1. Introduction

*Equivalence*: 'the condition of being equal or equivalent in value, function, etc.' (Oxford English Dictionary).

My 2012 Masters of Philosophy thesis *The Minstrelising Discourse of Twenty-First Century Rap Music* outlined the ways in which the concept of minstrelsy was used in critical discourses of rap music and hip hop culture. It became apparent that far from being a relic of the past, blackface minstrelsy remains a benchmark of racism in the American consciousness and that parallels between hip hop culture and minstrelsy were frequently made by critics who perceived rap music and hip hop culture as often representing the worst of African American life and cultural expression. Moreover, critics often propose that such representations work to sell entrenched stereotypes of African Americans to a market that has changed little since the minstrel show and similarly is predominantly white.

As has been shown throughout this thesis so far, the images and associated themes of blackface minstrelsy continue to represent a recognisable sign system that helps to communicate common ideas such as racism, exploitation, and ignorance. As was outlined in the discussion of representation, semiotics, and discourse, symbolic sign systems are analogous to conventional language and construct a lexicon of concepts as powerful and applicable as any written or spoken language. With this in mind, the presence of blackface and minstrel imagery in popular culture is accompanied by a written and spoken Discourse that uses the concept of blackface minstrelsy in comparative expressions of cultural equivalency. In other words, people are talking and writing about how minstrelsy and twenty-first century cultural practices are similar enough to highlight connections between the two forms. I call this phenomenon the *Discourse of Blackface Equivalency* (where appropriate referred to as the 'Discourse').

It is not my intention in this chapter to investigate in detail whether there are similarities between twenty-first century cultural practices and those of nineteenth and early-twentieth century blackface performance. A number of contemporary sources attempt to account for this potential similarity and seek to identify the remnants of blackface minstrel performance in a range of contexts (Lhamon, 1998; Heaggans, 2009; Manning, 2012). What I aim to do is to map how the concept of minstrelsy is deployed in critical discursive contexts and to identify the common functions and effects of its use. A primary area of investigation is the criticism of hip hop culture which comprises the most concentrated use of minstrelsy as a discursive equivalent concept. However, it is not only hip hop culture which is subject to the application of minstrelsy. Film and television featuring African American performers is also subject to such criticism. Moreover, the general concept of minstrelsy carries weight beyond critical discourses of African American cultural practice. This is shown in 'Blackface Equivalency in Non-African American Cultural Contexts' in which the concept is applied to a range of performance contexts independent of African American culture.

In an attempt to identify the common themes, functions, and effects of applying blackface as a discursive concept, I return to the framework of discourse analysis outlined in the 'Methodology' chapter of this thesis (find below a recapitulation of key terms). Furthermore, in an attempt to map the Discourse across the twenty-first century sources are presented in chronological order (starting in 2000 and ending in 2015).

#### Recapitulation of Key Terms of Discourse Analysis

- *Significance*
- *Activities*
- *Identities*
- *Relationships*
- *Politics (the distribution of social goods)*
- *Connections*
- *Sign systems and knowledge*

(Gee, 2005, pp. 11-13).



### Conditions of inclusion

A number of cultural practices are identified as analogous to blackface minstrelsy. The sources provided in this chapter section predominantly focus on hip hop culture, a primary target for criticism of this nature. Condemnation is a frequent companion to the genre and culture and has been since its beginnings in the early 1970s in New York City. It is not difficult to find scathing accounts of hip hop which criticise its violent imagery, depiction of women, and accounts of criminal behaviour.<sup>35</sup> Many of the examples used in this chapter recall some of these same criticisms in their engagement in the Discourse. However, not all cases shown here are about hip hop, nor are they all related to African American performance practices.

Criticism of cultural practice and its representations of race are not uncommon. Popular culture is often seen as a conduit through which portrayals of life are distributed and consumed, leading to wider social impact. It is therefore important to set some limits on the examples used for analysis in this chapter. Therefore, only sources which make explicit reference to blackface minstrelsy are included. This is signalled by the use of the following terms: blackface, minstrelsy, minstrel, and minstrel show.

Where relevant, contextual information about contributors to the Discourse is provided to further inform a reading of their comments. It should also be made clear that the sample shown in this chapter is precisely that: a sample. Any observations made here may be subject to development upon wider research of a larger sample.

---

<sup>35</sup> In 2007 the NAACP initiated a campaign entitled STOP designed to challenge the negative images that they claim hip hop portrays including the defamation of women, the degradation of community, the denigration of history, and the acceptance of disrespect (Aspringer, 2007).

## 6. 2. The Discourse of Blackface Equivalency

Stanley Crouch has played a significant role in highlighting blackface equivalency in popular culture and is cited in other sources involved in the practice (Lewis, 2006a; Brown, 2008). He is a jazz and cultural critic, author, and columnist and has published a number of books on jazz, race, and popular culture and is a columnist for the *New York Daily News*. He is a long-time friend and associate of Wynton Marsalis, contributing liner notes to a number of his albums<sup>36</sup> and collaborating on other creative and critical projects. Their relationship is noteworthy as both have made significant and similar contributions to the Discourse of Blackface Equivalency with hip hop and rap. Discussion of Marsalis's contributions is presented later in this chapter.

Crouch is an active and divisive voice within the world of jazz. He is described by Dwight Garner of the *New York Times* as a 'jazz purist, rap loather and jumbo-size personality' (2013) and by Robert S. Boynton as someone who 'has fashioned a place for himself as one of America's most outspoken and controversial critics' (1995). In a number of articles across a range of publications, Crouch has espoused the view that there is little, if any, difference between the characters of the minstrel show and contemporary African American rappers.

In a further sign that *Bamboozled* has played a significant role in revitalising the concept of minstrelsy in popular consciousness, Crouch reflects upon the reactions of students at a panel discussion of the film at New York University's Africana Studies Department. Much like other critics of the film, Crouch makes it clear that his experience of *Bamboozled* was not universally positive. However, he is broadly supportive of the film's goals and outcomes. In his account of the panel, Crouch introduces the notion of African American participation in blackface performance following the Civil War and the impact it had on minstrel shows, which he proposes 'gave greater charisma to the idiom' (Crouch, 2000). However, he also suggests an additional effect of this participation which feeds the notion of blackface equivalency:

---

<sup>36</sup> Crouch has written liner notes on *Think of One* (1983), *Black Codes (From the Underground)* (1985), *Live at Blues Alley* (1985), *Live at the House of Tribes* (2005), *From the Plantation to the Penitentiary* (2007).

Because they sang so well, were so funny and danced so brilliantly, the Negroes in blackface helped imprison a people inside coon images. The stereotypes that blacks had inherited from racist presentations of them were made even stronger. That is the deep tragedy of the matter (Crouch, 2000).

Although the blackface performances of African Americans following the Civil War is often regarded as a step towards a legitimate African American performance industry, Crouch sees the legacy of this as lasting and damaging. Like Lee, he is also concerned by the role that modern media plays in perpetuating such stereotypes (Crouch, 2000), a theme that continues into other articles authored by the critic. In this early contribution to the Discourse Crouch proposes the conceptual use of minstrelsy as a metaphorical device in the recognition of stereotyping and issues of representation:

[T]he bottom line of the whole business is that "the minstrel" is a metaphor for all the people who have been reduced to stereotypes - American Indians, Germans, the Irish, Jews, Italians, women, you name it...When we look at "Bamboozled," we are really looking at the dark story of the nation and what all of us must fight through to achieve human recognition (Crouch, 2000).

Crouch identifies one of the key functions of equivalency in the Discourse: minstrelsy as a metaphor for the reduction of marginalised social, gender, and ethnic groups to stereotypes and the struggle of marginalised people to deconstruct them and attain recognition and representation. As is shown later in 'Blackface Equivalency in Non-African American Cultural Contexts' this fundamental notion of minstrelsy as metaphor becomes a broadly applicable conceptual model.

In a 2003 article entitled 'Putting the White Man in Charge' in *The Jazz Times*, Crouch discusses the racial politics of contemporary jazz. Due to its origins in African American culture and prominent interest amongst white fans and performers, Crouch suggests that it 'has always been a junction for color trouble in the world of evaluation and promotion' (2003). Amongst this wider discussion, he introduces the notion of blackface equivalency

with rap via a discussion of *Like Young: Jazz, Pop, Youth and Middle Age* (2002) by Francis Davis:

Even being in the presence of such stuff will do, since Davis points out that rap now allows the young white person to come in contact with the Negro most removed from the white world, which used to be the role of jazz. Is that so? Since the rap Negro is nothing, at his most “street,” than a theatrical version of Zip Coon, a character from the minstrel shows, how is he removed from the white world? Every Negro inferior to a middlebrow white man like Davis fits comfortably in the white world, where black refinement is never expected or is dismissed as pompous (Crouch, 2003).

In this brief excerpt Crouch uses a number of rhetorical effects to strengthen the concept within his criticism: a rhetorical question is used to sarcastically dismiss Davis’s proposal and set up an introduction to minstrelsy (‘Is that so?’); the contemporary rapper or ‘rap Negro’ is reduced to a facile archetype that is ‘nothing, at his most “street,” than a theatrical version of Zip Coon’; the Zip Coon character is used as an analogous concept which represents a significant symbol of blackface minstrel performance; and notions of inferiority and superiority in relationships between subjects are used to manage the distribution of the social goods. Crouch clearly disputes Davis’s suggestion and uses the criticism of his book to deploy the notion of blackface equivalency.

Author and essayist Sanford Pinkster has published a number of books and hundreds of essays on the subject of race and race relations, popular music and culture, and American politics. Amongst his essays is a praising account of Stanley Crouch who he describes as ‘our Black American Mencken’ (Pinkster, 1998). In 2003 he published an article entitled ‘The New Minstrelism, Or Why So Much In Contemporary Black Culture Went Wrong’ in which he proposes the term ‘new minstrelism’ to describe contemporary African American cultural practice, which he claims deploys stereotypes which ‘[reduce] human complexity and social truth to ugly lies’ (Pinkster, 2003). Pinkster proposes that:

The new minstrelism also traffics in stereotyping, but one that turns the old minstrel show on its head. I am referring to hip-hop in general, and gangsta rap in particular...hip-hop creates a treasure trove of information about how to dress and act for many black (and white) adolescents. My point is that gangsta rappers such as Dogg Pound, Dr. Dre, and Ice Cube do not meaningfully represent black life. Instead, they socially construct a world that is little different in kind from that created by the old minstrel show. Far from being the "CNN of the streets," as it is commonly thought, hip-hop music is a consciously ugly distortion (Pinkster, 2003).

**Commented [u2]:** 'Meaningfully represent black life'? What does? I do not suggest or point to an alternative, but question the notion of a meaningful life of any kind.

In naming his observation 'new minstrelism', he gives his opinions of equivalency a material reality and endows the concept with significance. Like Crouch, he too participates in the distribution of social goods by assigning value to his subject, 'gangsta' rappers, by proposing that they do not 'meaningfully represent black life' (Pinkster, 2003). He, unlike in Crouch's earlier statement, anchors his thoughts in real-life, naming successful rappers as examples. He questions the authenticity of rap's apparent portrayal of real-life, challenging claims of social commentary in rap culture and inverts the concept by naming it a 'consciously ugly distortion' rather than a reflection of genuine social practice. Elsewhere in the article, Pinkster develops the concept introduced by Crouch (2000) in which minstrelism operates as a metaphor: '[t]o call them the new minstrels is one way to draw attention to how the new stereotyping worked' (Pinkster, 2003). In acknowledging minstrelism as metaphor Pinkster does something few others do in critical commentaries which apply minstrelism as a discursive concept: he explicitly states its function as a rhetorical device. Finally, Pinkster positions his notion of 'new minstrelism' within a longer-running continuum of unsatisfactory cultural expression. He uses an appeal to the reader or wider audience ('What all of us want is') in an attempt to articulate a relationship with the reader, situating his own opinion as common to theirs. Pinkster dismisses a vast quantity of cultural expression in support of his proposal of 'new minstrelism':

**Commented [u3]:** 'Meaningfully represent black life'? What does? I do not suggest or point to an alternative, but question the notion of a meaningful life of any kind.

**Commented [u4]:** Reasoning and justification.

What all of us want is the most vibrant black culture possible, but for most of the period since the late 1960's what we've gotten is a poor limitation of an

imitation— namely, a new minstrelism that is no more acceptable than the old one turned out to be (Pinkster, 2003).

Stanley Crouch participated in the making of the Todd Williams documentary *The N Word: An In-Depth Discussion* (2004). The film maps the history, usage, and significance of the word 'nigger' through discussion with a range of predominantly African American scholars, activists, actors, and musicians. During one of Crouch's contributions he returns to the notion of blackface equivalency:

That idea, that the guy who's been arrested, who's spent time, who's been out there in the gangs, who's had confrontations with the police, who really doesn't give an 'F', that that's the real brother. That's the *real* black man. That whole phenomenon is connected to this wailing of the word 'nigger', to 'M-F this' and 'M-F that' all the time, bitch, whore, they are all connected. You see 'nigger's just the beginning. See, what we always have to remember is this is product. You got to always remember that this is product. And that there were characters in the minstrel shows in the nineteenth century who were just like these guys today. Because they had characters like Jasper Jack who were full of sass, that didn't put up with this and that, you know, but they were coon figures. And that's what's happening now. These people are like, this is a coon update. And it's not because these kids are monsters it's because they're naïve (Crouch in Williams, 2004).

Crouch establishes connections (now explicitly stated) between the repeated use of the term 'nigger' and the notion of blackface equivalency, drawing connecting lines between contemporary rappers and minstrel show characters ('just like these guys today', 'that's what's happening now'). Like Pinkster demonstrates above, the concept of authenticity, or more specifically authentic African American identity, sits at the centre of the issue ('real black man'). The minstrel show (amongst other things) traded in conceptions of authenticity, sometimes sincerely, sometimes with its tongue in its cheek. Crouch uses the concept of the 'coon' character to suggest a repetition of archetypal figures ('These people are like, this is a coon update'). He suggests that the bravado and braggadocio of contemporary rappers bears

significant similarity to that of minstrel characters who were sometimes boastful and boisterous. For Crouch it is the commodification of this notion (the sale of the defiant authentic African American male as a product) that provides the clearest associations with blackface minstrelsy. Like Pinkster, Crouch uses appeals to the viewer ('You see', 'See, what we always have to remember. You got to always remember', 'you know') to build relationships of common thought and opinion with them. Finally, he manages the distribution of social goods, though this time in the removal of blame, attributing questionable performances to ignorance ('they're naïve').

In 2006 outspoken hip hop journalist Byron Crawford published two articles on his own website *Byroncrawford.com* and on hip hop website *XXL*. In these articles he coins the term 'minstrel show rap' to describe the three songs and videos proffered as examples.<sup>37</sup> In the former of the articles he describes minstrel show rap as 'an actual return of minstrelsy in the form of, primarily, shitty southern hip-hop' (2006b). In his article for *XXL* he further elaborates on the title:

Flush with revenue from the likes of Mike Jones' *Who Is Mike Jones?*, the Ying Yang Twins' "Wait (The Whisper Song)," Three-Six Mafia's Academy Award-winning theme to *Hustle and Flow*, and D41's "Laffy Taffy," record labels are rushing out to sign the most coon-like negros they can find.

Granted, it can be argued that hip-hop became a minstrel show of sorts the first time some jig put on a gold chain and began pacing back and forth gripping his unit. No Richard Simmons. But that was unintentional. The following can only be viewed as an outright and purposeful embrace of minstrelsy (2006a).

Crawford manages the distribution of social goods through the use of the racially charged term 'coon' used to criticise performances he finds questionable. He continues this with the use of the word 'jig', an abbreviation of the racist term 'jigaboo'. Moreover, like others

---

<sup>37</sup> In a follow-up article entitled 'Bol on the Radio' (2006c) Byron Crawford takes credit for coining the term 'minstrel show rap' and criticises others who use the term and examples without citing him as a source.

involved in the Discourse, he further manages the distribution of social goods by placing much of the blame onto the music industry for promoting negative portrayals of African American culture. Crawford seeks to question any unintentional association with minstrelsy on the part of these three examples calling them 'an outright and purposeful embrace of minstrelsy'.

Both of Crawford's articles cited above appear to have introduced the concept of minstrel show rap and resulted in a number of other articles based on the same concept and the same three examples (Louis, 2006; Ollison, 2006). Errol Louis writing in the *New York Daily News* is one such example. He situates the concept of blackface equivalency within the framework of the constitutional right to free speech, arguing that it both enables and allows for the critique of undesirable performances of contemporary rappers:

Like it or not, the precious First Amendment right to free speech gives every one of the hip-hop minstrels currently being hyped by cynical record labels and television execs a constitutionally protected right to act like complete jackasses before a national audience.

It also gives the rest of us the right to speak up and denounce such buffoonery as what it is: a direct throwback to the days of burnt cork and blackface, when fortunes were made from America's seemingly bottomless appetite for demeaning images featuring black folks shuffling, cutting up, dancing jigs and generally behaving like fools (Louis, 2006).

Louis draws connecting lines between hip hop and minstrel performance by describing it as a 'direct throwback'.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, he applies the term 'hip-hop minstrels' with no proposal of an alternative perspective and uses insulting language to ridicule his subject and manage the distribution of social goods ('jackasses', 'buffoonery', 'fools'). Like Crouch, Louis highlights the commodification of African American culture in the minstrel show and its continuation in subsequent culture industry practices. Later in the article he bases his

---

<sup>38</sup> The term 'throwback' refers to 'A sudden reminder of the past...Similar to a flashback' (Urban Dictionary, 2015b).



proposal of equivalency on the illustrative example of Steppin Fetchit whose commercial success led to significant financial gain and criticism from the African American community. Although not strictly blackface performance, the character is widely regarded as indebted to the institution of minstrelsy for its characterisation of a slow and dim-witted African American and appears elsewhere in critical discourses of African American culture. Louis states:

Perry's minstrel act made him a millionaire movie star, but he ended up bankrupt, condemned by black audiences and all but forgotten by the time of his death in 1985.

Today's minstrel rappers are unwittingly racing down that same path - fooled by false financial promises, too lazy to hone their talent and condemned, like all who ignore history, to repeat it (Louis, 2006).

The theme of repetition, most specifically the repetition of what are today perceived as embarrassing, shameful, and racist mistakes of the past, figure in Louis's assessment of contemporary hip hop. The parallel with Steppin Fetchit is apt as Louis is establishing his identity as critic, chastising contemporary African American performers similarly to how Fetchit was censured by the African American press. For Louis, rappers are given little credit for their intelligence or talent in a further management of social good and are described as 'fooled', 'lazy', and ignorant.

In 'Can blackface be far behind?', published in *The Baltimore Sun*, Rashod D. Ollison picks up the baton from Crawford and Louis. Discussing the same examples and deploying the similar terms 'minstrel rap' (Crawford, 2006a and 2006b) and 'throwback' (Louis, 2006), and using the Lee-inspired term 'new millennium minstrel rappers', Ollison suggests a similarity between the examples cited by Crawford ('Chain Hang Low', 'Chicken Noodle Soup', and 'Fry That Chicken') and minstrel performance practice. The similarities between terminology and content suggest that this article has been heavily influenced by the articles of Crawford and Louis:

These ubiquitous urban hits seem to whistle in a disturbing sub-trend in hip-hop. Free of irony or tongue-in-cheek cleverness, so-called "minstrel rap" appears to be a throwback to the days when performers (some black, some white) rubbed burnt cork on their faces and depicted African-Americans as buffoons. Excluding Ms. Peachez, these new millennium minstrel rappers don't sport painted faces. But the music, dances and images in the videos are clearly reminiscent of the era when pop culture reduced blacks to caricatures: lazy "coons," grinning "pickaninnies," sexually super-charged "bucks." (Ollison, 2006).

Crouch returns to blackface equivalency in a 2006 article entitled 'Mtv [sic], Still Clueless After All These Years' (2006a) published in the *New York Daily News*<sup>39</sup> in which he accuses the television station Music Television (MTV) of broadcasting 'the most dehumanizing images of black people since the dawn of minstrelsy in the 19th century. Pimps, whores, potheads, dope dealers, gangbangers, the crudest materialism and anarchic gang violence were broadcast around the world as "real" black culture' (Crouch, 2006a). The commodification of authenticity proposed in earlier statements figures in this article. He also suggests a removal of human identity in media portrayals of African American culture ('the most dehumanizing images of black people since the dawn of minstrelsy'). He stresses the most extreme images that rap depicts and does not attempt to account for the wider body of ideas and practices portrayed in rap music videos.

Journalist, hip hop historian, and radio programmer Davey D. published an article entitled 'Why commerce is killing the true spirit of hip-hop' in 2007 in the *San Jose Mercury News* in which he questions the 'corporate side of the music and the mentality of executives more interested in turning a quick buck than nurturing rap culture' (2007). In a discussion of the

---

<sup>39</sup> Crouch has published extensively for the *New York Daily News*, a national tabloid which ranks within the top five most circulated newspapers in the United States (Associated Press, 2013). The publication is argued by Noah Rothman of *Mediaite* to have 'a solidly left-leaning editorial page' (2012) and recently referred to a group of GOP senators as 'traitors' for their partisan letter to Iran over its nuclear deal with the United States (*New York Daily News*, 2015). The newspaper's political and journalistic perspective should perhaps be considered relevant to its willingness to publish controversial or inflammatory material, such as that written by Crouch and Louis.

changing face of hip hop and the impact of its audience on shaping its themes and content, Davey D. makes the following statement:

We critics, however, were vindicated by a study published earlier this year by the University of Chicago. Data from the "Black Youth Project" indicated that while 58 percent of blacks between ages 15 and 25 listen to hip-hop daily, most are dissatisfied with it. They find the subject matter is too violent, and women too often portrayed in offensive ways.

Such feelings hint at a dirty little secret of the music business: Blacks are used largely to validate musical themes being marketed to the white mainstream. In other words, while 90 percent of commercial rap artists on TV and radio are black, the target audience lies outside the black community.

Paul Porter, a longtime industry veteran and former music programmer at BET and Radio One, is now with the watchdog organization Industryyears.com. He says the University of Chicago findings offer proof positive that commercial hip-hop has become the ultimate minstrel show, and rap artists are pushed by the industry to remain perpetual adolescents (Davey D, 2007).

Davey D. cites a research project conducted by University of Chicago and the views of Porter to inform the notion that commercial hip hop is equivalent to a minstrel show. He uses the findings of the study to provide significance to a connection between hip hop and minstrelsy, though very little information is actually provided about the findings of the University of Chicago research project. Although it may be true that the majority of those surveyed expressed dissatisfaction with hip hop's imagery and subject matter, whether it is sufficient to 'vindicate' the author's view and to provide 'proof positive' of blackface equivalency is another matter. However, the 'dirty little secret' proposed by Davey D. alludes to the same concept of industry promotion and market consumption of marginal culture initiated by the minstrel show and highlighted earlier by Mahar (1999, p. 329).

In 2007 trumpeter Wynton Marsalis released the album *From the Plantation to the Penitentiary* which contains themes of blackface equivalency. Furthermore, interviews in promotion of the album allowed for the further exploration of the concept. Marsalis is a staunch traditionalist and, according to *Guardian* journalist and interviewer John Lewis, 'something of a hate figure in the faction-filled world of jazz' (2007). As co-founder and Artistic Director of Jazz at Lincoln Center [sic] in New York City, some have claimed that Marsalis is responsible for 'actively freezing jazz into a museum music by advocating and preserving older sensibilities about jazz playing at the cost of newer, more exploratory approaches' (Sun, 2014). However, Marsalis is also highly regarded and respected within the world of music receiving a number of awards and accolades including the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 1997 for his jazz oratorio *Blood on the Fields*, nine Grammy Awards, and thirty one honorary degrees from colleges and universities across the United States. His criticism of free jazz has aggravated its advocates within the jazz community, though his defense of traditional jazz and work with the Lincoln Center has also earned him a number of loyal and admiring followers including Stanley Crouch. Despite the differences of opinion, his voice within music and cultural criticism is an important one and Marsalis is described by Francis Davis of *The Village Voice* as 'today's most influential jazz critic' (2007).

Aside from the divisions apparent within the factional world of jazz, Marsalis has spoken publically about his objections to forms of cultural expression outside of the field, reserving particular criticism for hip hop music and culture. Although he denies his public views on the subject are a 'campaign against hip hop', but rather 'a campaign in favour of the best in America' (in Rose, 2007), he has had little positive to say about the genre and culture. He admits as much publically, stating that '[h]ip hop is a form of music for which I don't have much respect' (in Daily News, 2008).

*From the Plantation to the Penitentiary* (2007) 'distills Marsalis' recent observations on our modern American way of life' (wyntonmarsalis.org, 2007), including misogyny in the entertainment industries, the excesses of capitalism, and the failures of African American leadership. Brad Walseth of *Jazz Chicago* describes how Marsalis 'rails against many of the ills facing modern society and especially black youth culture' on an album which equates 'the chains that enslaved their ancestors with the gold chains modern young hip-hoppers sell

their souls for' (2007). The latter point is illustrated by the album's hand painted cover artwork, a composite image of the rapper Method Man and a slave child (Meyer, 2010, p. 421), which displays a head shot image of the young African American male with a large gold chain around his neck [see figure 73]. Alongside the title *From the Plantation to the Penitentiary*, the associations between chattel slavery and the modern day incarceration of African American men are made abundantly clear by Crouch who states in the liner notes that 'far too many of the descendants of those chattel now live in a variation on plantation life that has become a national presence so pernicious that it inspired the title track of this recording' (Crouch, 2007). According to John Paul Meyer, Marsalis 'intends [the] album to be received as a major artistic and political statement' (2010, p. 418). This would certainly appear to be the case in a work that connects such a troubling group of concepts (slavery, incarceration, minstrelsy) with rap culture.

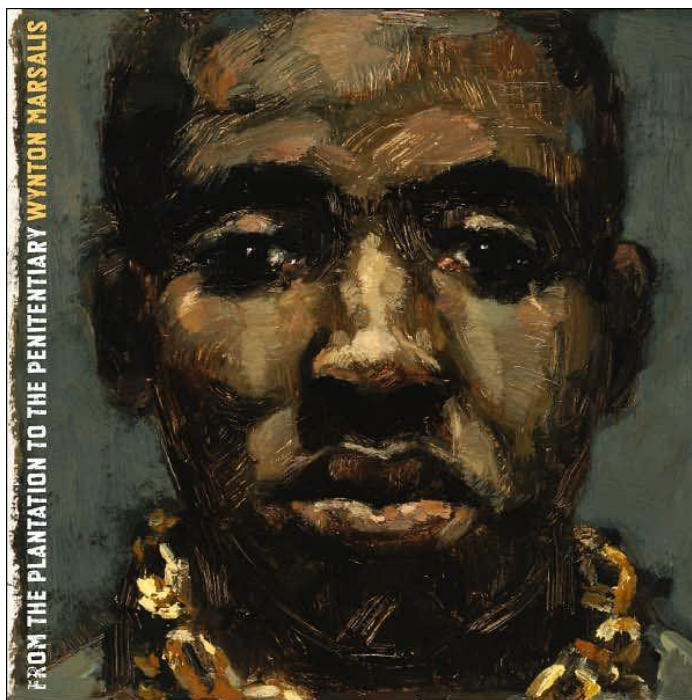


Figure 73: *From the Plantation to the Penitentiary* album artwork

During the promotion of the album Marsalis was interviewed by John Lewis of the UK *Guardian* newspaper. Marsalis states:

I call it 'ghetto minstrelsy...Old school minstrels used to say they were 'real darkies from the real plantation'. Hip-hop substitutes the plantation for the streets. Now you have to say that you're from the streets, you shot some brothers, you went to jail. Rappers have to display the correct pathology. Rap has become a safari for people who get their thrills from watching African-American people debase themselves, men dressing in gold, calling themselves stupid names like Ludacris or 50 Cent, spending money on expensive fluff, using language like 'bitch' and 'ho' and 'nigger' (in Lewis, 2007).

Mirroring the themes proposed by Crouch, Marsalis describes connections between the authenticating narratives of blackface performance and hip hop, repeating the same term of authentication ('real') as Crouch. He establishes a rhetorical connection between the two fields by coining the term 'ghetto minstrelsy', aligning a term and concept so ubiquitous to hip hop culture and urban poverty ('ghetto') with a term synonymous with white exploitation of African American culture ('minstrelsy'). He reinforces this concept by using the analogy of a safari (a practice in which tourists pay to observe the actions of wildlife), to suggest a voyeuristic curiosity of demeaning images of African American life. Furthermore, he censures hip hop for its use of theatrical stage names, themes of consumption, and use of derogatory terms to describe men and women. The identification of the importance of the term 'nigger' mirrors the claims of Crouch cited earlier. Later in the article he belittles the genre's musical value stating 'I don't have to attack hip-hop. Hip-hop attacks itself. It has no merit, rhythmically, musically, lyrically. What is there to discuss?' (Lewis, 2007). John Paul Meyers suggests that Marsalis's feeling about the genre's artistic merit 'is based at least as much on the ideology of difference that hip-hop represents as it is on hip-hop's supposed musical deficiencies' (2010, p. 417). In this regard, Marsalis may be using criticism of rap and an association with minstrelsy to reinforce his own artistic and cultural identity in opposition to contemporary popular culture.

Commented [u5]: Dismissal

The notion of blackface equivalency is introduced in the lyrics of the title track of the album through the use of the term 'ghetto minstrelsy', mirroring his comments in the *Guardian*.

From the Plantation, to the Penitentiary  
From the yassuh boss, to the ghetto minstrelsy  
In the heart of freedom, in chains  
In the heart of freedom, insane  
(Marsalis, 2007)

Slavery is signalled by the use of the terms 'plantation', 'yassuh boss', 'freedom', and 'chains'. The phrases 'From the Plantation, to the Penitentiary' and 'From the yassuh boss, to the ghetto minstrelsy' suggest both a lack of positive progress in African American culture and a negative progression from one form of control to another. In this context, minstrelsy represents the cultural embodiment of control. The theme continues in the song 'Love and Broken Hearts' in which Jennifer Sanon sings:

I ain't your bitch I ain't your ho  
And public niggerin' has got to go  
Oh safari seekers and thug life coons  
You modern day minstrels and your songless tunes  
(Marsalis, 2007)

Similarly to earlier statements shown in this chapter disparaging racist terms such as 'coon' and 'nigger' are assigned to contemporary rappers and represent the management of social goods through insult. Moreover, such criticism is accompanied by a judgement of value, further mirroring his comments in the *Guardian* ('You modern day minstrels and your songless tunes'). His interview with Lewis represents the rhetoric expression of lyric and conceptual themes of the album.

In a 2008 article entitled 'Gangsta Rap Is A Minstrel Show Update' published in *The Tampa Tribune*, Joseph H. Brown mirrors Crouch's expression of analogy between contemporary rappers and the minstrel show character Zip Coon. Similar themes and terms show the

influence of Crouch in this article (the analogous use of Zip Coon, boastful behaviour, criticism of MTV, and the phrase 'Zip Coon updates'). Brown states under the subheading 'Zip Coons On Display':

In the minstrel shows of the past, you had two central figures: Jim Crow, the dim-witted epitome of the plantation slave, and Zip Coon, the razor-toting urban, Northern character dressed in ostentatious clothes who boasted of his knowledge and magnetism among women. The young black men you see in those music videos on MTV and BET are nothing but Zip Coon updates (Brown, 2008).

Under subheading 'Pollution Of Popular Culture' Brown continues, questioning why there is not more resistance to the 'negative images' of contemporary rap, concluding that it is the participation of African American performers that contributes to a lack of opposition. He states:

I've often wondered why there's yet to be the mass protest we're used to seeing by black advocacy groups so concerned about the negative images portrayed in the mass media, but I've concluded that it's because gangsta rap isn't something that can be blamed on white people or "the system." Black artists and producers have now taken the place of the white minstrel performers of the 19th century as they try to outdo each other in ways to depict blacks as depraved and immoral (Brown, 2008).

Brown proposes a competitive system in which African American performers seek to surpass each other in depravation and immorality. Unlike other contributions in this chapter, Brown casts doubt on the blame attributable to the culture industries. It is the impact that negative portrayals have on wider popular culture that is of most concern to Brown who ends his article with a seemingly troubling proposal in which the traditions of blackface minstrelsy are more desirable than twenty-first century rap culture; though it can be assumed that this is a hyperbolic joke used for effect in an article that is deliberately critical of its target:



We can't downplay what a steady diet of this does to our popular culture. And when you listen to some of this crap - as I was forced to the other day at a traffic light - "Swanee River" doesn't sound so bad after all (Brown, 2008).

So far the associations between contemporary popular culture and minstrelsy have focused on hip hop and rap. However, in a 2009 interview on Black Entertainment Television (BET) program *Our World with Black Enterprise* Spike Lee revisited some of the themes from *Bamboozled* in criticism of fellow film-maker Tyler Perry, igniting a public feud between the two directors. Presenter Ed Gordon asks Lee:

There are certain images, whether they be in plays or movies or music, that we flock to whether we like to admit it or not and I'm wondering is that just the Black middle class saying "oh no that's not what we want", but the lot of us wanting it? (in *Our World*, 2009).

Although Lee admits it is a 'complex subject' influenced by notions of artistic freedom, in answer to Gordon's question he proposes that:

'[A] lot of stuff that's on today is coonery and buffoonery. And I know it's making a lot of money, breaking records, but we could do better...We've got a black president. Are we going back to Mantan Moreland, Sleep 'n' Eat?' (Lee in *Our World*, 2009).

To clarify the ambiguity of Lee's claim, Gordon suggests it is the work of Perry to which Lee is referring. Lee offers no challenge to this suggestion. By returning to the charged terminology of minstrelsy and characters that formed its legacy in Hollywood, Lee reintroduces the notion of blackface equivalency. In addition, he roots his claim in the wider political context of African American progress, a theme that appears elsewhere in texts which explore blackface imagery. To deploy the symbolism of blackface and the minstrel show is to reignite the feelings of false representation that it signifies in popular consciousness. But who is Tyler Perry and why has his work attracted such criticism?

Perry is described by Bettina L. Love in 'Tyler Perry Take Over TV' (2013) as 'one of the most powerful and influential black men in Hollywood' (p. 282) who, in 2011, was named the highest paid man in entertainment by Forbes and the only African American actor to appear on the Forbes List (Love, 2013, p. 282). His most successful character is Madea (played by Perry), a boisterous, gun-wielding Southern African American grandmother who appears in a series of films (*Diary of a Mad Black Woman* (2005), *Madea Goes to Jail* (2009), *Madea's Witness Protection* (2012) – selection only) and television shows (*House of Payne* and *Tyler Perry's Meet the Browns*). She is known for her no-nonsense approach to solving conflict and her sage advice, given regardless of whether it is sought. Perry claims to have rooted the character in real life experiences and moulded her on the matriarchal archetype: 'That's why people love Madea so much because she reminds them of real grandmothers back in the day...they loved you, they would knock the hell out of you then pray for you while they take you to the hospital' (Perry in Queen Latifah, 2013). As suggested by Perry's description, she embodies notions of Christian values, wisdom, belligerence, and violence. However, Love suggests that Perry's humour, rooted in the archetypal characters of African American working class culture, has a wider socio-historical function: '[h]is work exploits black life, while at the same time representing elements of black life through humor, a long-time coping mechanism of black folks wrestling with being black in America' (2013, p. 286).

Perry was clearly offended and angered by Lee's description of his work and responded to the comments in various news outlets with a mixture of humour and frustration. Moreover, he positioned Lee's comments of blackface equivalency within the wider practices of inter-community criticism of African American culture claiming that '[i]t's only Black people that do this to each other. I've never seen Jewish people complaining about *Seinfeld*, I've never seen Italian people complaining about *The Sopranos*, it's only us as Negroes that do this to each other' (2011a). In this statement Perry proposes apparent innate self-critical discourses of African American cultural practices unique to African American cultural criticism. There is certainly precedent for this, as was seen in the 'race-conscious attitude' (Regeister, 1994, p. 502) of the African American press during the early-twentieth century towards film actors such as Mantan Moreland and Lincoln Perry. Such a parallel is recognised by Love who refers to Tyler Perry as 'the new and improved Lincoln Perry' (2013, p. 286). However, the similarities between the two Perrys (no relation) points to a wider question asked of Lee

following his initial comment. Gordon asks: 'is that in fact, maybe, what black America wants to see?' (Our World, 2009). The facts would seem to make this a largely rhetorical question: Perry's audience is overwhelmingly African American and, as the Forbes data shows, he is hugely successful.

The concept of inter-community criticism was further developed by Perry in answer to Lee's comments, something he suggests is a long-running and deep-rooted issue facing African American political figures and artists:

It's always black people, and this is something that I cannot undo. Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois went through the exact same thing; Langston Hughes said that Zora Neale Hurston, the woman who wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, was a new version of the 'darkie' because she spoke in a Southern dialect and a Southern tone. And I'm sick of it from us; we don't have to worry about anybody else trying to destroy us and take shots because we do it to ourselves (Perry, 2011b).

Perry alludes to the racism inflicted upon African Americans throughout American history and suggests internalised destructive criticism, alluding to what Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis refer to as a 'system of racist belief at the heart of black culture itself, a form of self-hatred' (2003, p. 284). By phrasing the comment using inclusive terms ('we'/'us'/'ourselves') Perry positions himself as a member of the wider African American community and uses the response to articulate his identity as a member. Moreover, he establishes relationships between himself and the wider body of artistic and political works of African American culture. The weight of his response and the use of charged language ('sick'/'destroy'/'shots') work to endow his comment with a significance and demonstrate his feelings of anger at being aligned with supposedly shameful depictions of African Americans of the past.

Lee and Perry are significantly different film makers. While Lee's films tend to focus on 'the complexities of race and representation' (Massood, 2008, p. xvi) through confrontational narratives and themes, Perry's films portray an amplified picture of working class African American life that is hugely successful within the wider community. By raising the spectre of

blackface minstrelsy, Lee and Perry have engaged in a critical dialogue of self-representation within African American cultural practice and have contributed to a conversation that has been going on for some time.

In a sign that his feelings about hip hop move beyond the promotion of his album, Marsalis repeated a markedly similar assessment of the genre in an interview with the *Telegraph* newspaper in 2012:

Hip-hop for me is a throwback to minstrelsy. After the Civil War, white folks were offered minstrel shows that offered 'real coons from the real plantation', and to me that's like rappers today, with their talk of keeping it real, giving themselves a minstrel name, boasting about how they can degrade their women (in Hewitt, 2012).

Here Marsalis returns to the concept of authenticity through the repetition of the word 'real'. It was Bert Williams and George Walker appearing as 'Two Real Coons' who utilised this name and concept with most effect. However, its use by Williams and Walker was, according to Louis Chude-Sokei, applied 'ironically, controversially, and provocatively' (2006, p. 6). Moreover, Williams and Walker engaged in a 'critique of racialized notions of authenticity' in which they confronted 'various contemporary discourses of race which clustered around identitarian questions such as the "natural" qualities of "the Negro"' (2006, p. 6). It can be assumed that Marsalis applies no such judgement in his assessment of rap culture.

Blogger Jason Cochran extends the notion of blackface equivalency to developments in online media and in particular the role of YouTube in disseminating images of African Americans in his blog post 'The Modern Minstrels' (2013). He states:

True minstrelsy died out with civil rights equality. But it's not gone. Now we use "documentary" moments or "reality" shows to revel in amusing and dehumanizing stereotypes, and the performers exclusively belong to the

minority itself. We don't need minstrel shows or vaudeville now. We have YouTube (Cochran, 2013).

Cochran sees the new media platforms provided by the internet as a twenty-first century home for modern minstrel practices. In similarity to comments made by Brown (2008), Cochran emphasises the shift in performance dynamic from whites masquerading as black in minstrelsy to the participation of African Americans in negative representations in entertainment. In similarity to Crouch and Marsalis, Cochran signals the role of a perceived authenticity in such portrayals through the questioning of stereotypes:

What are we laughing at now, exactly? A stereotype of poor Americans? A stereotype of poor Americans who happen to be black? The old minstrel shows are not replicated, of course, but many of the derisive elements are still there...These modern minstrels even sing for our amusement. Antoine Dodson's "Bed Intruder" segment (below) was translated into the modern analog [sic] to a Post-Millennial Coon Song with a spate of auto-tuned clips which giddily trumpeted the announcement that someone was running around the projects raping everyone (Cochran, 2013).

Cochran develops the comparison between portrayals of African Americans and minstrelsy into the contemporary field of online media in which news clips, interviews, and social media video are published, manipulated, and widely distributed online. The example cited by Cochran has been subject to further criticism for its perceived exploitation of the distress of a family following the attempted rape of a family member and the exhibition of African American misfortune in which 'Dodson fulfilled multiple stereotypes in one short news segment' (Baratunde in Carvin, 2010).

Up until this point, the Discourse of Blackface Equivalency represented in cited examples has focused on the performances of African Americans. However, with the recent success of white rappers the Discourse has developed to include the performances of them as well. One such contribution comes from Amer Rahman, an Australian stand-up comedian and critic of

popular culture. In an article entitled 'WHITE RAPPER FAQ' he answers a number of questions relating to the role of white performers in hip hop. He states:

Blackface was all about white people acting out caricatured, fetishised depictions of black people for the entertainment of white audiences. Iggy Azalea, Kreashawn<sup>40</sup> etc. are all about... well, you get the picture. Their entire careers rely on them perpetually acting, talking and behaving like college students at an ironic-not-racist-but-actually-racist 'Ghetto Fabulous' themed frat party (Rahman, 2013).

Rahman highlights the ways in which blackness appears to be represented by the performance of white (and in this case female) rappers. A discussion of one of these examples, Iggy Azalea, is presented shortly. Drawing on the controversies of social blackface outlined earlier, Rahman positions the performances of these rappers within the ill-feeling associated with social blackface and the questions it raises about representation, privilege, and personal freedom. Rahman seeks to provide context and justification for his comments. Presented in capitals to amplify the statement's significance, Rahman elaborates on the reasons why the desires of hip hop's white fan-base is intrinsically linked to the content of commercial hip hop, mirroring the perspective of Crouch, Davey D, and Marsalis outlined earlier. He states:

COMMERCIAL HIP-HOP IS DESIGNED FOR WHITE PEOPLE. WHITE PEOPLE ARE THE VAST, OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF HIP-HOP'S CONSUMER BASE...HIP-HOP IS ONE OF WHITE AMERICA'S FAVOURITE FORMS OF ESCAPE, WHERE YOU GET TO PROJECT AND LIVE OUT FANTASIES ABOUT SEX AND VIOLENCE THROUGH PEOPLE OF COLOUR. YOU ARE NOT 'OUTSIDERS' TO HIP-HOP, YOU ACTUALLY CONTROL ITS PRODUCTION, FORM AND DISTRIBUTION JUST BY BEING WHITE (Rahman, 2013).

---

<sup>40</sup> Kreashawn (real name Natassia Gail Zolot) is a white female rapper from Oakland, California.

Rahman's comments bare significant similarity to the description of the minstrel show provided by Eric Lott in *Love and Theft* in which he describes it as 'less the incarnation of an age-old racism than an emergent social semantic figure highly responsive to the emotional demands and troubled fantasies of its audience' (1995, p. 6). It is certainly reasonable to propose that commercial industries seek to satisfy the demands of their consumer base. To ignore them would be commercially disastrous. However, Rahman's comments are not out of place within wider commentaries of hip hop's troubling imagery and the troubling questions raised by audience demand.

The final and most recent example is provided by Detroit-born rapper Angel Haze who wrote a guest article on cultural appropriation for *Noisey*, the musical edition of *Vice*, in January 2015. Haze positions her proposal of blackface equivalency within the history of America and the social and political landscape in which the appropriation of African American culture has featured prominently. Moreover, her comments come in a developing atmosphere of tension around the subject of race (something discussed in more detail in the conclusions of this thesis) and the racism that persists in American society. She states:

In America, it's still not ok to be black. People have created this sort of caricature of black people. It's like fucking Jim Crow all over again. People say they want everyone to be seen as an equal, but they still want to call us niggers. There seems to be this hypocrisy, because people want to appropriate black culture but only when it's cool or beneficial to them. Like, they want to do it but they don't want to be in it. And that's the reason that people don't have a right, to some extent, to use black music to their own gains (Haze, 2015).

For Haze, the appropriation of African American culture is profoundly contextual and rooted in the collective and personal experiences of African American communities out of which hip hop grew and continues to grow. Moreover, she suggests a process of selective appropriation and a lack of consideration of the wider context of struggle that informs aspects of hip hop's development, content, and value. It is at this point that she compares the dynamic proposed above to blackface:

For anybody to try to take ownership of that, acting like it's their history too, is sort of like blackface. You wanna put it on but you can't handle the stigma and shit that comes with it, and you don't want that stigma (Haze, 2015).

Key to the notion of blackface equivalency is the visibility and increased awareness of the practice of appropriation. When we see a blackface mask it is impossible to ignore. Its historical uses scream its significance to us. Although less visible, Haze perceives the processes as markedly similar. Moreover, the possibility of the adoption and adornment of the signifiers of cultural expression is comparable to the mask in its ability to be 'put on' without transferring the social and cultural issues which affect a community. Haze's final comments, which round off the article, signal the centrality of struggle at the heart of both the rights of African Americans in twenty-first century America and what cultural expression may represent to members of marginalised communities who are invested in its development:

[R]ight now, there's such a focus on race in the world that it feels like a punch to the gut when someone who isn't part of a culture dominantly takes it and runs with it. It's fucking disrespectful...In a way, the type of music a person makes is irrelevant. Make all the rap music you want, but don't appropriate the culture and then distance yourself from its most negative aspects (Haze, 2015).

### Conclusions

From the contributions to the Discourse of Blackface Equivalency presented above, the following conclusions can be drawn: the Discourse has been represented continually throughout the twenty-first century; contributions come from a range of people and areas of cultural and professional life; a number of observable themes appear throughout contributions; and the Discourse can be seen to articulate the 'seven building tasks' of language (Gee, 2005, p. 11).



The sample of contributions shown in this chapter demonstrates that the Discourse is not represented in one area of cultural life or by one type of person and contributions are provided by journalists, pop and jazz culture critics, film directors, comedians, and hip hop performers and the Discourse is articulated by people both inside and outside of the target cultures and professions. Moreover, contributions appear in different formats including conventional news articles, articles from culture-specialist publications (hip hop magazines), interviews on television and in news media, and appearances in documentaries, suggesting that it has the potential to reach a wide and varied audience.

The sample shows common themes in function and effect and can be used to help inform an understanding of what the concept of blackface minstrelsy means to those who use it in critical discursive contexts. Key themes include:

- Questioning narratives of authenticity;
- The repetition of historical patterns of representation and consumption;
- The role of white audiences in determining content;
- The promotion and perpetuation of archetypes and stereotypes;
- Issues of appropriation;
- Acknowledgement of minstrelsy as metaphor;
- Use of racial slurs and ridiculing language.

Examples attribute *significance* to the concept of minstrelsy in critical discursive practices and subsequently bring greater significance to their act of cultural criticism through the evocation of such a provocative symbol of American racism.

The concept of minstrelsy applied in critical contexts works to enforce the user's participation in the *activity* of cultural criticism. Rather than representative of a single act of criticism, evocation of the concept of minstrelsy works to demonstrate their participation in the wider activity of the Discourse of Blackface Equivalency and to make a contribution to a growing conversation of comparison and equivalency.

The concept of minstrelsy in critical discursive contexts works to establish an *identity* for the participant as one who is aware of history and one who is not ignorant of its influence on contemporary cultural practice (a subject position most often not afforded to their target individuals or groups). Moreover, to apply the concept of minstrelsy is to establish their identity as oppositional to the focus of their criticism, an effect that is related to the type of relationship they establish with their audience and target individual or group. Furthermore, by establishing oppositional positions to popular culture, figures from the world of jazz (Crouch and Marsalis) reinforce their own identity as profoundly different to that of their target.

The concept of minstrelsy and the type of language used in statements often works to establish particular types of oppositional *relationships*. Critics often seek to establish themselves as antithetical to the negative culture they highlight. By evoking minstrelsy as a concept it works to devalue the target of criticism. For those in the jazz world, this serves both a critical and cultural purpose to elevate their forms of cultural expression above those of their targets. It further highlights the differences in cultural and artistic value attributed to the different forms of art.

A primary theme of the Discourse of Blackface Equivalency is the *distribution of social goods*. This is manifested in a variety of ways. The concept of minstrelsy is a shameful one; it is not deployed in critical contexts as a compliment. Rather, it functions as a discursive short-cut in the application of notions of shame and ignorance. The use of provocative racist and insulting terms like coon, buffoon, nigger, pickaninnies, and bucks works to assign to targets deep-rooted feelings of inferiority and historical misrepresentation.

Fundamental to the Discourse shown in the examples above is the use of language to make *connections* between minstrelsy and the author's target, be it a person or a whole music culture, body of works, or genre. The use of characters such as Zip Coon as an analogous figure works to connect contemporary performers with the largely reviled form of blackface. The absence of an acknowledgement of the potential manifestation of minstrelsy in other forms of cultural practice may also work to break connections that may exist elsewhere.

The Discourse of Blackface Equivalency, as represented in the above samples, appropriates the *sign system* of minstrelsy represented by the terminology and ideas associated with the entertainment form. In the use of this sign system, users are able to evoke feelings and concepts in a similar way to those evoked by visual signs shown in examples from the earlier chapter 'Showing Blackface'. Their application in discursive contexts builds new value into minstrelsy as a concept in cultural criticism whilst simultaneously recalling its historical value and function.

The effect of applying minstrelsy in critical discursive contexts may be varied. The application of such a historically toxic concept may work to portray targets in a suitably negative light (presumably a desired effect in some circumstances) and draw attention to the opinion or wider issue that the user seeks to address. To use minstrelsy as a metaphor (highlighted by the contributions of Crouch and Pinkster) acknowledges its signifying function as a surrogate concept, allowing the user to appropriate it as a representational short-cut to more complex notions of racism, exploitation, stereotyping, and appropriation. This is an understandable process. For a long time blackface was used to represent African American life and culture (largely though not exclusively) by those from outside of that wider community and lived experience. In a similar way that derogatory names are adopted by marginalised groups, the appropriation of minstrelsy as a concept may allow for the partial reversal of the power it represents and the ability of users to take ownership of the concept. However, it may also have other consequences. It may work to distort—through its potency as a symbol of racism—genuine issues of concern including: the stereotyping of African Americans in popular culture; the marketing and consumption of stereotypical and archetypal portrayals; the impact that popular culture depictions of African American life and culture have on individuals and wider communities; and the concerns of cultural appropriation.

### 6. 3. A Case Study in Blackface Equivalency: Iggy Azalea

'@iggyazalea do you know what a minstrel is? Because that's what you are.....'

(Banks 2014b).

This brief, but pointed Twitter post from rapper Azealia Banks is directed at fellow rap star Iggy Azalea. It forms part of a long-running feud between the rappers in which comments and insults have been traded on social media and through other forms of broadcast media. However, it is not only Banks who has raised the spectre of minstrelsy in criticism of Iggy Azalea and a number of other critics have drawn upon the comparison.

Iggy Azalea was born Amethyst Amelia Kelly in Sydney, Australia. At the age of sixteen she moved to Miami to pursue a career in rap music. Following some time performing and releasing music as an unsigned artist, she was signed to record label Grand Hustle in 2012. Her debut album *The New Classic* (2014) was released through Def Jam Records in 2014. It was nominated for Top Rap Album at the Billboard Awards 2015 and Best Rap Album at the Grammy Awards 2015, and Azalea became the first recording artist since the Beatles to have her first two hits occupy both the number one and number two position on the Billboard Hot 100 singles chart simultaneously (Christgau, 2014). Alongside her commercial and critical success, however, has come criticism of her adoption of Southern hip hop which has raised questions of the cultural appropriation of music styles derived from African American cultures, the mimicry of performance style and accent, and the subsequent commercial success that has accompanied her adoption of these cultural practices.

Broadly speaking, 'appropriation' is the act of taking for one's own use and the term may be applied in a range of contexts and circumstances, from the taking of physical objects to the taking of concepts. However, here we are primarily concerned with the appropriation of cultural practice, or 'cultural appropriation'. In this regard, cultural appropriation can be understood as the adoption, integration, and exploitation of the forms of expression of cultural groups other than one's own. This is a far from simple concept and can be argued to be a common feature of cultural expression and exchange in which no culture lives in isolation or remains uninfluenced by other cultures. Shuker describes how, in the domain of

popular music, the term is 'applied primarily to musical reworkings, including borrowings by individual performers of musical sounds, accents, and styles' (2005, p. 11). Moreover, Simon Frith points out that musical appropriation is a key feature of musical development in which 'musical styles develop through a constant process of borrowing and quotation' (2007, p. 310). It is certainly apparent that new musical styles develop out of the hybridisation of existing styles. This process has been amplified by the availability of cultural goods through mass-production and distribution. Such musical appropriation has become particularly pronounced in the light of the proliferation of mass media and the promotion and dissemination of cultural goods via the internet. Such technological and communicational developments have allowed for the widespread consumption of cultural goods by peoples geographically and contextually distant from the source of origin.

Although the concept of appropriation may be viewed neutrally, it very often adopts a moral or ethical parameter in which one group is seen to take from another in an act of cultural theft. This, Shuker argues, is especially relevant to 'musical borrowings from marginalized genres and relatively disempowered social groups' (2005, p. 11). This is clearly represented by the minstrel show in which one of the most marginalized and disempowered groups in American society had its forms of cultural expression adopted and exploited by people outside of the socio-ethnic group. In the case of the minstrel show, such appropriated cultural expression became a significant commercial enterprise and initiated American popular culture as we know it. To return to a notion cited in the 'Literature Review' of this thesis, Mahar proposes that 'antebellum minstrelsy established a now familiar pattern in American popular culture. Musical material borrowed from the cultural periphery establishes itself as a viable commercial product and develops into a respectable mainstream entertainment' (1999, p. 329). It is certainly true that hip hop initially existed on the cultural periphery and eventually became a viable commercial product. Moreover, it too represented the culture of 'disempowered social groups' (Shuker, 2005, p. 11). This notion sits at the centre of the debate over Iggy Azalea and the problems of cultural appropriation in blackface equivalency.

Far from an old and out-of-date concern, a number of claims of cultural appropriation have been highlighted in recent popular culture, initiating a discussion of its functions and its

moral parameters. Miley Cyrus's 2013 MTV Video Music Awards performance attracted strong criticism from those who found the performance to be overly sexually graphic for its time of broadcast, with the Parents Television Council claiming MTV was guilty of 'marketing sexually charged messages to young children' (in Derschowitz, 2013). However, much of the disapproval levelled at Cyrus was for her use of African American backing dancers and her appropriation of hip hop style. Hadley Freeman of the UK *Guardian* newspaper described her MTV VMA performance as 'not of a homage but of a minstrel show, with a young wealthy woman from the south doing a garish imitation of black music and reducing black dancers to background fodder and black women to exaggerated sex objects' (2013). It is clear from this comment that the association between whites appropriating hip hop culture and blackface minstrelsy are far from uncommon and Freeman's comments mirror those of Haze shown earlier.

However, Azalea's performances and career have come under sustained attack from critics<sup>41</sup> who cry foul of her appropriation of African American cultural expression. A number of issues have been raised by critics including the adoption of accent and dialect; her perceived failure to acknowledge the origins of hip hop and to publicly recognise its relevance to the music culture and wider African American communities; and, her subsequent commercial success and ascent to the top of hip hop.

In interviews, Iggy Azalea speaks with a clear Australian accent with some Southern American inflections, likely acquired from her time living in the Southern States. Her rapping voice, however, is considerably different to her speaking voice and incorporates dialectic traits, slang terminology, and the accent of the Southern States. This feature of rhetorical and dialectic appropriation has been noted by critics. Langston Wilkins describes the 'distinctly inner-city African-American female vocal style' adopted by Azalea which he describes as the portmanteau 'blaccent' (Wilkins, 2015). Notes From the Ghetto Side refers to her voice as a 'fake hood accent [that] is reminiscent of the stump speech' (2013) (alluding to the rhetorical practice of monologues delivered from the minstrel stage), and by David Morris in *Creative Loafing Tampa Bay* as 'a comically exaggerated Southern black twang'

---

<sup>41</sup> In a sign that it has taken its toll on the performer, she briefly ceased using Twitter after describing the internet as 'the ugliest reflection of man kind' (in Kaufman, 2015).

(2015). There are similarities in the adoption of African American dialect in Azalea's performances and the process in minstrel performance, which lends credence to critics' observations.

The concept of blackface equivalency has emerged as a common theme in criticism of Azalea. Some point to the familiarity of the pattern of appropriation, earlier observed by Mahar and developed by Haze. Morris reports that 'white artists have been co-opting black sounds since the late 19th century at least, and [have turned] those stolen innovations into gold that should have gone into darker hands' (2015). Jeff Chang of the UK *Guardian* newspaper roots his similar observation within the academic study of minstrelsy, recounting Eric Lott's observation of the 'overarching themes in an American popular culture born in minstrelsy and built, in large part, from the promethean creative labor of black people' (2014). However, other criticism has taken a more vitriolic tone, such as the comments of Baldwin on *Allhiphop.com* in which he states: 'what I AM saying is Hip-Hop belongs to us – Black & Brown People –PERIOD.' (2015). Here the concept of cultural ownership comes into conflict with acts of appropriation of 'a deep rooted culture that has unwritten terms and conditions, especially when it comes to white participation' (Baldwin, 2015). An awareness of these 'unwritten terms and conditions' are seen by some to be absent from Azalea's conversation about her own participation in hip hop and rap culture. Rapper Macklemore, who has himself been the subject of comparisons with the minstrel show, (McFarlin, 2014) publicly acknowledged his awareness of them in an interview discussion of Iggy Azalea's (and his) participation in hip hop culture. He states:

This is what it comes down to. You need to know your place in the culture. Are you contributing or are you taking? Are you using it for your own advantage or are you contributing to the culture?...This is a culture that came from pain, that came from oppression, that came from white oppression. It was the by-product of that...You can't disregard that...you cannot disregard where this culture came from and our place in it as white people (Macklemore in Hot 97, 2014a).

Iggy Azalea's public handling of accusations of appropriation and of the subsequent criticism have been censured by figures within the industry (Hot 97, 2014a). In a reflection of Macklemore's comments, journalist and writer Derrick Clifton connects Iggy Azalea's apparent lack of cultural awareness to minstrelsy, proposing that 'there's a difference between appreciating an artform and adding to its richness and appropriating a minstrel-like caricature that's composed of various tropes' (Clifton, 2014).

Azealia Banks, mentioned at the beginning of this section, is a particularly vocal critic of Iggy Azalea and has deployed the notion of minstrelsy on a number of occasions via Twitter. In one comment published in June 2014 she speaks generally about the state of hip hop, mirroring the long-established Discourse of Blackface Equivalency: 'Hip-Hop is turning into a Minstrel Show. It's really really sad' (2014a). Later that year in December she addresses Iggy Azalea directly, stating: '@iggyazalea do you know what a minstrel is? Because that's what you are.....' (2014b). This tweet was quickly followed by the posting of a picture of Wm. H. West's Big Minstrel Jubilee<sup>42</sup> [shown in figure 33, p. 118] with the caption: '@iggyazalea this is you' (2014c). Banks phrases her first sentence as a rhetorical question. This rhetorical device is used to signal that Iggy Azalea maybe ignorant of blackface history and therefore unaware or unable to recognise the potential repetition of its themes of appropriation in the twenty-first century. Moreover, Bank's second sentence is used to demonstrate her own awareness of this history and therefore tip the balance of power in her favour. By demonstrating her ability to identify a connection between Azalea and minstrelsy, Banks is able to demonstrate her knowledge through the use of a belittling statement and insult.

However, Banks's genuine feelings of anguish generated by a perceived cultural theft should not be ignored and it is during an interview with New York City hip hop radio station Hot 97 that she most clearly articulates her feelings on the issue which, far from being a throw-away notion of equivalency, relate to deep-rooted and deeply emotive feelings about appropriation, exploitation, and ownership:

---

<sup>42</sup> A quick search of 'minstrel show' on Wikipedia shows this image amongst some others including the Virginia Minstrels, Dandy Jim From Caroline, and Jim Crow.



I feel just like in this country...whenever it comes to our things, black issues or black politics or black music or whatever, there's always this undercurrent of a kind of 'fuck you', always like a 'fuck y'all niggas', like 'y'all don't really own shit, you don't have shit (Banks in Hot 97, 2014b).

For Banks, the notion of theft is primary in her view of Iggy Azalea's (and others') appropriation of American hip hop. She speaks of the music and culture as a possession, deploying language which gives it a tangible presence: 'So this little thing called hip-hop that I've created for myself, that I'm holding onto for my dear fucking life...I feel like it's being snatched away from me or something' (in Hot 97, 2014b). Finally, Banks expresses her feelings on the role of hip hop in shaping her own identity and the impact of white appropriation: 'At the very fucking least y'al owe me the right to my fucking identity' (in Hot 97, 2014b). It is at this point in the interview that Banks breaks down and begins to cry, signalling the extremely emotive potential of cultural appropriation and its impact on personal and collective identity.

Although Frith highlights the view of some that 'musical creativity always involves cultural borrowing; changes in musical tradition don't mean the loss of cultural identity but articulate the way it changes with circumstance' (2007, p. 312), many critical of Azalea disagree, not least Banks whose emotional comments on Hot 97 demonstrated a strong articulation of loss of cultural identity that may come with acts of cultural appropriation. Associations with blackface minstrelsy are common in criticism of Iggy Azalea and many of the traits of her performance can be seen as similar, such as the adoption of musical style and dialect in performances. It is this similarity that has seen her accused of sharing 'some essential genetic code with the old-school American minstrel show' (Zimmerman, 2014). But in a turning of tables, Ben Westhoff of the UK *Guardian* newspaper points out that with Iggy Azalea 'race remains her primary identifier' (Westhoff, 2015). She is the outsider and faces exclusion and stigmatisation from the hip hop community, partly as a result of her ethnicity. However, it may also be her ethnicity that is central to her success. As Langston Wilkins points out in *The Washington Post*, '[h]er ascent is a result of the increasing whiteness of hip-hop's consumer base. It's a commercial response to the tastes and demands of the audience that's driving hip-hop sales' (Wilkins, 2015).

**Commented [u6]:** What is this 'essential genetic code'? Clearly we are talking about mimicry, imitation, appropriation (and perhaps parody and pastiche).

## Conclusions

Appropriation is a common feature of musical development. Musical cultures rarely exist in a vacuum and hybridity is a central feature of cultural exchange and development. This is not a new concept in American culture and the popular music industry has been fed by the music of African American cultures from minstrelsy to jazz, from rock and roll to hip hop. However, appropriation has become a dirty word, particularly in the context of the adoption by whites of African American culture. This is no more apparent than in the case of Iggy Azalea. Her adoption of accent, slang, and dialect and her success in the American rap industry has come with accusations of cultural theft and, for some, a perceived loss of cultural identity. However, it is not strictly her involvement in the rap world that has attracted the notion of blackface equivalency. As has been highlighted by a number of commentators, it also comes down to her failure to acknowledge the culture from which she draws. Much of this stems from the value that rap still possesses as a symbol of the disempowered and the sensitivity of cultural appropriation in American society. However, there is a slight contradiction at work here. Appropriation has been at the centre of hip hop from its very beginnings and forms a significant part of its production and appeal as a musical practice. To return to Shuker's description of musical appropriation, hip hop was—and to a large extent still is—based on 'musical reworkings' of existing material which is then repurposed for a new social and performative context. This is not a bad description of what Iggy Azalea is doing with her music. However, as is shown by the discourse that surrounds her, cultural appropriation is not perceived as an equal exchange.

Rap culture is certainly not out-of-bounds for white performers. A number of successful white rappers have shown this to be the case, such as Eminem and Macklemore. However, it appears that there are conditions for membership, namely the acknowledgement of the context out of which hip hop and rap emerged and recognition of what being white within the rap world may mean to African American fans and performers. This condition was made abundantly clear by Macklemore in his interview on Hot 97. In a twist of privilege, it is Iggy Azalea's race which becomes her defining feature in criticism of her appropriation of African American culture. However, attacks on her are rarely viewed as racist.

#### 6. 4. Blackface Equivalency in Non-African American Cultural Contexts<sup>43</sup>

As was demonstrated through earlier examples, the minstrel show has become a contemporary analogy of racist representation and the exploitation of demeaning stereotypes of African Americans in popular culture. However, blackface minstrelsy as an analogous concept has moved beyond the confines of discourses of African American cultural practices and into wider applications of blackface equivalency. In the following examples the concept serves largely similar functions. However, in these cases it becomes an analogous or equivalent model that can be applied out of its normative context, one that can be redeployed, and its socio-cultural role re-imagined in a range of situations largely independent of African American cultural experiences.

This section focuses on two debates within the entertainment industries (disabled and differently-abled characters portrayed by able-bodied actors and the representation of gay male characters in popular television and film) and two case studies (*Jersey Shore* and *The Big Bang Theory*) onto which the notion of blackface equivalency has been applied.

##### Blackface Equivalency and Disability

The notion of blackface equivalency with disability masquerade appears to focus on three key themes: methods of imitation and masquerade; issues of self-representation; and matters of equality in the industry. Fundamental to this notion is that the functions and effects of blackface performance are sufficiently similar (and sufficiently troubling) to warrant the deployment of the concept of blackface minstrelsy in a discourse of equivalency. However, some critics show an awareness of the implications of evoking such a toxic concept.

Key to blackface performance was the practicalities and pleasures of masquerade. The blackface mask allowed for white actors to experience through mimicry and masquerade the

---

<sup>43</sup> In using the term 'non-African American cultural contexts' I do not seek to entirely exclude African Americans from the social groups represented in this section. Rather, the term is used to identify the use of blackface as an analogous concept in contexts in which the concerns specific to African American cultural practice, history, and treatment are not central to its application.

music, dance, and rhetorical practices largely outside of their socio-cultural experience. It also allowed for them to engage with taboo subjects and themes from behind the safety of blackface disguise (Mahar, 1999, p. 1). This central theme is redeployed in comments which highlight equivalency with the portrayal of disabled and differently-abled characters, primarily in film. Speaking of minstrel performers, Scott Jordan Harris states: 'Those actors observed black people and Asian people, and they tried to walk like them and talk like them. They used make-up and prosthetics to imitate their physical characteristics' (Harris, 2014). A similar expression of equivalency is articulated by Frances Ryan who describes how '[i]n both cases, actors use prosthetics or props to alter their appearance in order to look like someone from a minority group. In both cases they often manipulate their voice or body to mimic them' (Ryan, 2015). Both Harris and Ryan seek to highlight equivalent practices of mimicry, in doing so drawing attention to the transformative practices associated with theatrical ethnic masquerade and performances of disability.

Connections between blackface performance and disability are not without precedent. From its earliest phases of development blackface performance also depicted disability. 'Jump Jim Crow', a solo blackface act performed by Thomas Dartmouth Rice during the late 1820s, simultaneously depicted blackness and disability. Rice's Jim Crow was reported to have been modelled upon the song and dance of a physically disabled African American stable-hand observed by Rice one day while taking a break from a theatre rehearsal. The song and dance routine of 'Jump Jim Crow' acquired Rice significant international success and acclaim and remained a milestone and chief character of blackface performance. In the years that followed Rice's initial success with Crow, numerous accounts of the genesis of the performance were circulated and repeated by various publications. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of June 1881 the *New York Times* published an article recounting the origins of Jims Crow:

[Jim Crow] was very much deformed, the right shoulder being drawn high up, the left leg stiff and crooked at the knee, giving him a painful but at the same time, laughable limp. He used to croon a queer old tune with words of his own, and at the end of each verse would give a little jump, and when he came down he set his "heel a-rockin'." He called it "jumping Jim Crow" (C. L., 1881).

An anonymous 1889 article entitled 'THE FOUNDER OF ETHIOPIAN MINSTRELSY – SY', also published in the *New York Times*, describes the genesis of Crow in strikingly similar terms. However, now Crow's disability has moved from 'laughable' to 'ludicrous' and his 'little jump' has become 'peculiar'.

He was very much deformed – the right shoulder was drawn up high and the left leg was stiff and crooked at the knee, which gave him a painful but at the same time ludicrous limp. He was in the habit of crooning a queer old tune to which he had applied words of his own. At the end of each verse he gave a peculiar step "rocking de heel" in the manner since so general among the long generation of his delineators (Anon., 1889).

Although such authenticating narratives sought to root Rice's performance both in reality (character copied from real life) and disability (crooked posture and 'laughable limp'), their veracity is questioned by more recent scholarship of blackface minstrelsy.<sup>44</sup> Regardless of Crow's questionable origin, disability was a comical feature of his persona and vital to the success of his act.

To support the notion of blackface equivalency with disability masquerade, Ryan transforms the largely recognisable minstrelsy-derived phrase 'blacking up' into 'cripping up' (Ryan, 2015). In this act of terminological adaptation Ryan achieves two things: firstly, she redeploys the emotive and problematic notions associated with the phrase—the connotations of exploitative masquerade, the notion of the (mis)representation of Others in societies with issues of alienation and marginalisation, and the lack of self-determination for marginalised social groups; secondly, she deploys a derogatory and outdated term for disabled people ('cripple'). The latter may have a number of functions. On the one hand its use may reflect similar reclamations of derogatory terms by marginalised social groups;

---

<sup>44</sup> Lhamon proposes that '[n]o single man authored Jim Crow; no single stable hand made up or taught the song' (1998, p. 181). Rather, 'Jim Crow' was a meeting of various features of both African American and European American folklore. But authentication of this kind functioned more as a social panacea than as an ethnographic or historical exercise. Eric Lott points to how tales that attempted to establish origin in African American life disclose 'white guilt or anxiety about minstrelsy as a figure for the plundering of black culture' (1995, p. 59). Moreover, such accounts begin to lean towards willing participation, further reinforcing the effect.

'queer' by some gay people and 'nigger' by some African Americans provide two illustrative examples. However, it may also be for more practical reasons. The phonemes provide a memorable and rhythmic feel to the phrase. It is, however, most likely a combination of both these reasons.

Alongside other contentious issues in early nineteenth American society, blackface performance sought to manage the fear of black male sexuality, miscegenation, and eventually, African American free labour through mimicry, caricature, and mockery. The fear and suspicion of white Americans was reflected in performances invested in 'demystifying and domesticating black power in white fantasy' (Lott, 1992, p. 36) and in turn managing white Americans' comfort in their own skin. Playwright and amputee Christopher Shinn describes how portrayals of disability by able-bodied actors perpetuate the 'fear and loathing around disability' (in Ryan, 2015). Moreover, mimicry and theatrical portrayal provide a sense that disability can be 'magically transcended' through masquerade (in Ryan, 2015). However, such transcendence may risk masking the realities of disability and, according to Tobin Siebers, render 'disability invisible because able-bodied people substitute for people with disabilities' (Siebers in Wilson, 2013, p. 21). Such a notion is mirrored by Emily Sullivan Sanford who proposes that performances of disability masquerade give the impression that 'all minorities are opaque, mystical people only geniuses could dare to understand' (2012). Although blackface used the very visible blackface mask as a performative device, African Americans were largely invisible, instead represented by those able to translate and represent their life and culture through masquerade.

The controversy of blackface equivalency with disability in the entertainment industries was further ignited over the casting of average-height actors in the feature film *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012). Actor Warwick Davis (who has dwarfism) described the choice to give the roles to average height actors as akin to the practices of blackface: 'It is not acceptable to 'black up' as a white actor, so why should it be acceptable to 'shrink' an actor to play a dwarf?' (Davis in Finn and Rosenbaum, 2012). However, blackface equivalency does not remain unproblematised within disabled and differently-abled communities. Sanford, who has achondroplasia (a common form of dwarfism), does not 'believe digitally generated dwarfism is on par with blackface and all that evokes', but does propose 'a long tradition in

cinema and theater of socially privileged actors portraying socially marginalized characters' (Sanford, 2012). Harris acknowledges that 'comparisons with blackface...may seem inflammatory or outlandish' (Harris, 2014), but argues that they are ultimately justified. For Harris, 'those of us who make them...do not do so lightly or in order to bring cheap attention to our cause. We do it because the analogy is exact. To argue that it isn't is to argue that disabled people are less equal than others' (Harris, 2014).

#### Blackface Equivalency and Homosexuality

The history of the representation of gay characters in popular entertainment has not been without its debates and criticisms. Ron Becker writing in *Gay TV and Straight America* (2006) argues that 'throughout its first four decades, television virtually denied the existence of homosexuality' (2006, p. 3). Moreover, 'as recently as the early 1990s...even the most astute viewers could likely spot only a handful of openly lesbian, gay, and bisexual characters in an entire year of network television' (2006, p. 3). However, Becker argues that in the years that followed, this trend changed and the appearance of gay and bisexual characters and storylines in American television became far more frequent. With the increased visibility of gay characters and narratives came increased scrutiny of the depiction of same-sex relationships and questions of the exploitation of amplified character traits and stereotypes. Much like the other examples presented in this section of the thesis, such stereotypes have drawn parallels with blackface minstrelsy in criticism of films and television programs that feature portrayals of gay (predominantly male) characters.

Online gay magazine and newspaper *Queerty*, evokes the concept of minstrelsy in its criticism of feature film *He's Just Not That Into You* (2009), which it describes as a 'minstrel show of homosexuality' (Queerty, 2009). The film portrays the social lives and romantic endeavours of nine heterosexual people living in Baltimore, Maryland. Mary Harris (played by Drew Barrymore) works for a fictional gay newspaper called the *Baltimore Blade* and has a circle of gay male friends who take an active interest and advisory role in her love life. Following the release of the film *Queerty* published an article entitled 'The Gay Steppin' Fetchits of *He's Just Not That Into You*' (2009) in which they draw parallels between the movie's gay characterisation and the stereotyped portrayals of African Americans in early

American film<sup>45</sup>. The *Queerty* article proposes that whilst heterosexual characters are afforded a wide range of romantic and social characteristics, the gay characters 'have no basis of love, longing, passion or relationships [and are] just relentless fuck machines' who '[sashay] out of the way for the real people to have real relationships' (Queerty, 2009). Moreover, the gay male characters are described as 'flameyest, lispigest, "fiercest" stereotypes imaginable' (Queerty, 2009). Suggesting that to portray Italians, Mexicans, or Asian characters in overtly stereotypical ways would be viewed as unacceptable, *Queerty* asks 'why do gays have to slap on the gayface... just to get some screen time?' (Queerty, 2009). However, as is shown in this section, similar criticism does stem from the Italian American community in relation to *Jersey Shore* and there certainly are stereotyped depictions of other ethnic and national groups in film and television.

In 2013 blackface equivalency with media depictions of male homosexuality appears in a discussion of the reunion of television show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. The show features five gay men of varying professions and specialisms (wine expert, hair and grooming expert, interior designer, personal stylist and fashion expert, and cultural and social advisor) who are called in by a frustrated girlfriend to perform a lifestyle makeover on their boyfriend or husband. Jerry Portwood proposes that although '[t]his was the first time gay men saw such bright and shiny representations of themselves on TV', this was accompanied by stereotypical portrayals of homosexuality (2013). In an acknowledgment of the potential duality of such portrayals, Portwood asks: '[w]as it just gay minstrelsy' or did the show have a positive impact on American perceptions of homosexuality? (2013).

The problematic consequences of claims of blackface equivalency in this context were highlighted in a recent social media exchange between actors Tuc Watkins (*Desperate Housewives*) and Jesse Tyler Ferguson (*Modern Family*). In a 2014 Facebook post, Watkins describes how, whilst he finds *Modern Family* 'clever, hilarious, [and] even terrifically subtle...It feels a little bit like the gay equivalent of "blackface."' (in Hernandez, 2014). This is not an entirely new and unique parallel. Two years earlier in 2012, Kera Bolonik writing for

---

<sup>45</sup> Although Stepin Fetchit was not primarily known as a minstrel performer, he is commonly remembered for his slow-witted, lazy, and ill-educated performances in early American cinema which attracted significant protest from African American media (Register, 1994, p. 502).



Salon.com described the show as ‘all jazz hands and bed death and gay minstrelsy’ (Bolonik, 2012), referring to the show’s apparent exploitation of exaggerated stereotypes and absence of sexual intimacy between its lead characters. *Modern Family* lead character Ferguson responded to Watkins’s evocation of minstrelsy, claiming that the show ‘can’t be expected to represent every gay person’ (in Queerty, 2014). This comment raises questions over the representational power of characters and stereotypes to portray entire communities and the potential expectations of such characterisations to provide positive depictions of the portrayed minority group.

### Blackface and *Jersey Shore*

*Jersey Shore* is an MTV reality television program broadcast for six seasons between December 2009 and December 2012 and depicts the lives of eight ‘Italian Americans’<sup>46</sup> living together in the Jersey Shore area of New Jersey. The show attracted significant criticism from community groups for its apparent exploitation of stereotypes. Ed Pilkington of the UK *Guardian* describes the cast as ‘[l]oud, foul-mouthed, hyper-groomed, spray-tanned and constantly looking for sex’ (2010). Rick Ellis of the *TV Examiner* reports that ‘[e]very cast member exhibits every bad habit you’d find in a New Jersey Italian, and every stereotype is pounded into the head of the viewers on an almost minute-by-minute basis’ (2010). A problem of stereotyping is the wider potential impact of portrayals beyond the confines of the theatrical context in which they are depicted, a factor acknowledged by Linda Stasi writing for the *New York Post*. She argues that *Jersey Shore* ‘by extension’ promotes the perception of real Italian Americans as ‘gel-haired, thuggish, ignoramuses with fake tans, no manners, no diction, no taste, no education, no sexual discretion, no hairdressers (for sure), no real knowledge of Italian culture and no ambition beyond expanding steroid-and silicone-enhanced bodies’ (Stasi, 2009).

Italian American community and advocacy groups also attacked the show for its use of the term ‘guido’ in MTV promotional materials and as a self-descriptive term between cast members. President of Italian American service organisation Unico National, Andrew DiMino,

---

<sup>46</sup> Although the majority of the cast are Italian American, some members of the cast are of mixed and non-Italian American origin (Access Hollywood, 2010).

describes 'guido' as an insulting term, which (mirroring the perspective of Stasi) implies 'we are all uneducated people without social graces' (in Pilkington, 2010). Questions have been asked by critics as to whether there is a case of double standards at play in the production and promotion of *Jersey Shore*. Stasi asks '[w]ould that programming ever have been allowed if the group were African-Americans, Asians, Hispanics, Jewish people?' (Stasi, 2009). This perspective is mirrored by New Jersey state senator Joseph Vitale who proposes that '[i]f this were the same with African-American or Hispanic or Polish kids, there would be hell to pay' (in Pilkington, 2010). However, as has been shown throughout this work, the perception of blackface equivalency in African American cultural practices is alive and well in critical discourses of popular culture. Moreover, the perceived damage of stereotyping to African Americans is widely represented in such critical accounts.

The notion that *Jersey Shore* and MTV participate in the commercial exploitation of ethnic stereotypes has led to the popular television programme being aligned with the minstrel show in a Discourse of Blackface Equivalency. Ellis states that '[w]hen it comes to modern-day minstrel shows, it [sic] hard to top...[*Jersey Shore*]...which does for Italian-Americans what Charlie Chan<sup>47</sup> did for Asians' (Ellis, 2010). By making reference to another contested depiction of an ethnic minority in American television history, Ellis situates *Jersey Shore* in a wider continuum of ethnic masquerade and ethnicity representation in American popular culture. Debbie Schlüssel mirrors the notion of equivalency proposed by Ellis and draws a connecting line into historical blackface representations, stating '[b]ack in the day, we had a name for this crap: minstrel shows' (2009). In a less dismissive tone, Jennifer Pozner suggests that *Jersey Shore* performs 'the same function that minstrel shows did when they were at their prime' (Pozner in Banerjee, 2010).

Some critics question the analogous application of blackface minstrelsy onto *Jersey Shore*. Tiny Jump argues that the show is not fairly and directly comparable to minstrel shows because '[u]nlike minstrel shows, "Jersey Shore" [sic] is not influential in terms of educating

---

<sup>47</sup> As a fictional characterisation of a member of an ethnic minority group, Charlie Chan has split opinion. Charles McGrath points out that to 'many Asian-Americans, Charlie Chan is an offensive stereotype, another sort of Uncle Tom' (McGrath, 2010). Yunte Huang, author of *Charlie Chan: The Untold Story of the Honorable Detective and His Rendezvous With American History* (2010), argues that Chan was 'both the racist heritage and the creative genius' (Huang in McGrath, 2010).

the public on the realities of Italian-American life' (Tiny Jump, 2010). This comment stands in contradiction to the comments of Stasi and DiMino who both perceive a real-world impact from stereotyped portrayals in the show. Moreover, Tiny Jump argues that the show 'isn't intentionally derogatory in that they actually glamorize their caricature' (Tiny Jump, 2010). However, Tiny Jump assumes that the representations of African Americans in minstrel shows were exclusively and intentionally derogatory, a notion widely questioned by the scholarship of minstrelsy.

#### *The Big Bang Theory: The 'Nerd Minstrelsy' Equivalency*<sup>48</sup>

In a further extension of the blackface and minstrel show metaphor, the CBS show *The Big Bang Theory* represents a somewhat unexpected target. It does not rely primarily on ethnic stereotyping, nor does it provide portrayals of an obviously marginalised social group as its chief focus. In summary, the show portrays the lives of a group of university scientists living in Pasadena, California, who are unashamed fans of comic books, science fiction, and anything generally regarded as geeky. The core characters, bar one (Penny – struggling actress and waitress), are largely highly educated and qualified, of above average intelligence, and all have suffered some form of social marginalisation due to the above features of their personalities. The character-types portrayed in *The Big Bang Theory* exploit stereotypical features of what would commonly be regarded as 'geek' or 'nerd' culture: an obsessive taste for comic books, science fiction and their associated artefacts; social awkwardness, romantic ineptitude,<sup>49</sup> obsessive behaviour, and largely timid personalities; and non-athletic physiques and a lack of fashion-sense. It is the exploitation of such stereotypes that has found *The Big Bang Theory* the subject of comparisons with blackface minstrelsy. This notion of comparability prompts 'geek blog' The Nerduary to describe the show as a 'Geek Minstrel Show' (2013) and Dmytrewycz to describe it as 'nerd minstrelsy' and 'nerdface' (2012). However, it is not merely the exploitation of stereotypes in and of itself that is the primary reason for blackface equivalency in this case. Dmytrewycz writes that '[t]he biggest complaint overall is that this show does not celebrate geekery, as it claims,

---

<sup>48</sup> *The Big Bang Theory's* episodes are named in a manner akin to scientific hypotheses. Examples include 'The Bad Fish Paradigm', 'The Peanut Reaction', and 'The Griffin Equivalency', the final example providing a most appropriate coincidence in the context of this work and providing the inspiration for this chapter section title.

<sup>49</sup> The character Raj is physically unable to speak to women unless he has consumed alcohol.

but rather lampoons it. The show's jokes are nearly always at the *expense* of the geeks' (Dmytrewycz, 2012). Such a perspective is supported by The Nerduary who proposes that the show 'isn't *for* geeks and nerds' [my italics] (The Nerduary, 2013) and prompts CitizenBot to ask 'how much of this is done to be laughing with us, and how much of it is laughing *at* us?' (CitizenBot, 2013). Such comments and questions point to the importance of agency and self-representation that has accompanied other expressions of blackface equivalency outlined in this chapter. Moreover, they highlight the potential mismatch between the audience and the representations on screen, positioning the target market as an important factor in justifying social group portrayals.

It appears that at the centre of the blackface equivalency of *The Big Bang Theory* is the notion that the show exploits stereotypes of nerd culture for an audience outside of that cultural experience. In a similar manner to that of the minstrel show, *The Big Bang Theory* is seen to pander to an audience that finds humour in the peculiarities of an outsider culture. The show often plays on this notion of insider/outsider cultural identity. In a scene from the episode 'The Proton Transmogrification', the characters seem to acknowledge the exploitation of stereotypes and the ability of community or group members to engage with stereotypes as 'insiders'. During the scene Howard, Leonard, Penny, and Raj reflect on the performances of Jar Jar Binks in *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace*.<sup>50</sup>

**Howard:** Some of the physical comedy of Jar Jar is tough to watch.

**Leonard:** At least they toned him down in the second one.

**Penny:** Yeah, he is pretty stupid.

**Raj:** Hey, we can say it, you can't.

---

<sup>50</sup>The character Jar Jar Binks has himself come under scrutiny for the perceived exploitation of racist characterisation and similarities with minstrelsy. In her article 'Racial Ventriloquism' published in *The Nation*, Patricia J. Williams calls attention to the ethnic stereotype-derived character of Binks whose 'pratfalls and high jinks' she claims 'borrow heavily from the genre of minstrelsy' (Williams, 1999). Drawing attention to Bink's voice, Williams assesses Binks's dialect as 'weird pidgin mush of West African, Caribbean and African-American linguistic styles' (Williams, 1999) in a film 'filled with the hierarchies of accent and class status' (Williams, 1999) in which the use of dialect pits intelligent and powerful characters against comic and weaker characters. For Williams, the result of presenting simple, comic or unintelligent characters with particular ethnic traits perpetuates associations of inferiority between ethnic groups 'bearing prejudices at least as complex and pervasive as those of generations past, if somewhat more subtle' (Williams, 1999).

In the punchline to the joke Raj alludes to the permission granted to 'insiders' of a social group or community to engage with self-critical discourses that highlight social and character flaws of its members. In this regard, this passing joke alludes to a wider issue of self-representation demonstrated by the critical attacks on both Lincoln Perry and Tyler Perry described earlier.

There are a number of similarities between *The Big Bang Theory* and minstrelsy: both exploit stereotypes of a marginalised group and both do so for entertainment and commercial success; both deploy a range of visual and linguistic signifiers of said social group (in the case of *The Big Bang Theory* this includes clothes, artefacts and ephemera, posture, gesture, and mannerisms; the use of technical and scientific terminology, accent and dialect); both play on the characters' perceived levels of intelligence and its role in significantly shaping their social status and personality; and both have raised questions over self-representation of marginalised social groups in mass entertainment (Dmytrewycz, 2012; Nerduary, 2013; CitizenBot, 2013). However, *The Big Bang Theory* presents significant differences from minstrelsy's exploitation of African American culture, which calls into question the appropriateness of blackface equivalency in this case. Although marginalised, 'nerds' have not suffered physical and cultural exploitation in American history comparable to African Americans; 'nerds' are not ethnically specific and therefore not subject to the same conditions of mass-marginalisation; although questions of self-representation may arise in both cases, the disproportionate representation of African Americans by white Americans in minstrelsy for such a sustained period of time makes it difficult to maintain such a comparison with any credibility.

### Conclusions

Some key themes emerge in the Discourse of Blackface Equivalency across these four examples which goes some way to developing a clearer picture of what blackface means in popular consciousness. These themes have wider value to this research. By observing how the concept is applied in relation to these examples it is possible to (at least partly) remove the associations with race and locate the wider conceptions of minstrelsy and its relevance to the twenty-first century cultural experience.

The issue of stereotyping is key to the relationship of equivalency claimed by critics. In the cases of the portrayal of gay characters in television and film, Italian Americans in *Jersey Shore*, and geeks in *The Big Bang Theory*, the outlandish portrayal of the depicted group through the accentuation and amplification of cultural characteristics in the form of stereotypes draws parallels with the minstrel show. There is some concern as to the role this plays in the promotion and success of television and film portrayals, the social make-up and reactions of audiences, and the real-world impact portrayals can have on the group or community depicted. Moreover, there is an over-arching evaluation in critical comments shown here that these portrayals are negative representations. In contrast, the depiction of disability is rarely represented as negative, but often as a symbol of struggle and transcendence. In further contrast, the criticism of the casting of able-bodied actors in the roles of disabled characters raises issues over the subsequent exclusion from acting roles and industry marginalisation. Such exclusion is manifested in proposals of inequality and a lack of self-representation, seemingly granted to other groups within the industry (Harris, 2014; Ryan, 2015). In both the cases of the casting of able-bodied actors in the roles of disabled characters and the portrayal of geek culture in *The Big Bang Theory*, there is a perception amongst critics that it is outsiders to the portrayed community who are engaging in acts of masquerade to depict social groups marginalised in American popular history and culture. In both cases the adoption of physical, behavioural, and linguistic characteristics form a significant feature of the masquerade.

The appearance of a Discourse of Blackface Equivalency in these four contexts raises some important questions. Firstly, is the perception of blackface equivalency justified? There are certainly similarities with minstrelsy in terms of the use of exaggerated stereotypes; members from outside of a social group masquerading as members of a group other than their own; industry exclusion and incumbent issues of self-representation; and the marketing of portrayals of marginalised cultures to a wider audience. However, those who identify these similarities and apply the concept of minstrelsy should consider the impact of such a comparison. This raises a second question: what is the effect of blackface equivalency in these contexts? It is certainly a shocking concept and one that may help to attract attention for the cause of marginalised groups in society and to raise further questions of media representation. As has been shown throughout this thesis, minstrelsy is a concept that holds

significant weight in cultural criticism. However, there may be some unexpected or unintended effects of its use in these four contexts. Minstrelsy in popular discourses is most closely associated with African American cultural criticism. Therefore, adopting the concept in settings outside of this context may risk trivialising minstrelsy as it relates to African American cultural history. Moreover, overusing the concept in cultural criticism may dilute its impact and ability to provoke discussion and lessen its potential for critical and artistic use.

## 6. 5. Minstrel Show Rap: Three Case Studies

As was outlined earlier in 'The Discourse of Blackface Equivalency', it was Byron Crawford's identification of what he termed 'minstrel show rap' that initiated a number of subsequent articles in critique of the three examples he identified: 'Chain Hang Low' by Jibbs; 'Chicken Noodle Soup' by DJ Webstar; and 'Fry That Chicken' by Ms. Peachez (Crawford, 2006a; Crawford, 2006b). But what are the reasons for applying the title? Do the examples really bare significant similarity to minstrelsy to warrant such a title? What follows is an analysis and discussion of each of the examples with the aim of investigating the legitimacy of the title and the responses of critics.

### 'Chain Hang Low'

'Chain Hang Low' is the debut single for St Louis rapper Jibbs and achieved Billboard chart positions of 6 and 7 in the Rap and Hot charts respectively (Billboard, 2011a). The song typifies the 'snap' subgenre of hip hop which is identified by its simple arrangement, emphasis on rhythm, prominent use of Roland TR-808 drum sounds, a primary groove, and a vocal track (Rap World, 2015). In snap music socio-political lyric themes are typically sidelined for simpler and more party-derived subject matter.

A primary hook of the song is its main synthesiser melody (introduced on the first beat of the song and repeated during choruses throughout), which is supported by the voices of children in the chorus refrain. This melody would almost certainly be familiar to most Americans, most likely recognised as the melody of the popular children's song 'Do Your Ears Hang Low?' or from its use in the traditional fiddle song 'Turkey in the Straw'. Other lesser-known uses of this melody or its variants appear in the traditional folk songs 'Natchez Under The Hill', 'The Old Bog Hole', 'The (Bonny) Black Eagle' (Bayard, 1982, p. 279), and the English morris song 'The Forester' also known as 'The Forestry Keeper's Daughter' and 'The Royal Forester'. The little-known detail highlighted by Sanneh is that the melody was also used in the hugely successful early blackface minstrel song 'Zip Coon', first published in 1834. The



similarity of the many variants of this melody classifies them as members of what Samuel P. Bayard calls a 'tune family' which he defines as:

[A] group of melodies showing basic interrelation by means of constant melodic correspondences and presumably owing their mutual likeness to descent from a single air that has assumed multiple forms through processes of variation, imitation, and assimilation (1950, p. 33).

The performers and songwriters of minstrelsy were prolific appropriators. According to Mahar, blackface minstrelsy 'was a populist product that commodified the art of excerpting, condensing, and recasting easily assimilated hits from all forms of American culture' (1999, p. 6). 'Zip Coon' serves as an illustrative example of minstrelsy's appropriation of popular song in which materials were put to alternative uses in the development of its repertoire.

According to Bayard, 'Turkey in the Straw' and its variants are 'composite' songs 'made up of parts of already existing popular Scots melodies' (1982, p. 279). Constructed of two contrasting sections, 'Turkey in the Straw' and 'Zip Coon' are, according to Bayard, a combination of 'The Rose Tree' and 'The (Bonny) Black Eagle' (the former half from 'The Rose Tree' and the latter from 'The (Bonny) Black Eagle' (1982, p. 279)). 'Chain Hang Low' uses the former part of the 'Turkey/Zip' melody and discards the latter half making its source of origin undoubtedly 'Do Your Ears Hang Low?', which also only uses the former half of the 'Turkey/Zip' melody.

Jibbs's interest in this melody may have been for a number of reasons: its simplicity, catchiness, lack of copyright protection, or its deep-rooted place in American cultural memory. The melody is already familiar to the listener and therefore assists its easy consumption and recollection. In this regard, it differs little from the intentions and effects of traditional folk song from where it draws its source material. However, the material is not simply taken, but is adapted and developed for its new context. Bayard proposes that over the course of time musicians would alter melodies 'to another function' such as dancing or marching 'by deliberately recasting it...by the elaboration or drastic simplification of its melodic line' (Bayard, 1950, p. 32). Jibbs has 'condensed' and 'recast' this old melody in

'Chain Hang Low', simplifying it and removing any syncopation associated with earlier versions. Furthermore, Jibb's has rephrased the melody on modern synthesised instruments, positioning it into the technological and stylistic context of its era. In this act of melodic appropriation, Jibbs has joined a long line of songs dating back hundreds of years, interacting with a tune 'that has assumed multiple forms through processes of variation, imitation, and assimilation' (Bayard, 1950, p. 33). With this in mind, we could argue that 'Chain Hang Low' has become the newest member of this ancient tune family and has contributed to a process that will continue well into the future.

From the discussion of melody, it is likely that 'Chain Hang Low' drew its primary influence from 'Do Your Ears Hang Low?'. This is reinforced by the similarity in lyric structure and thematic framing. Below are excerpts from each example for comparison.

'Chain Hang Low'

Do your chain hang low, do it wobble to and fro  
Do it shine in the light, is it platinum is it gold  
Could you throw it over ya shoulder, if you hot it make you cold  
Do your chain hang low  
(Campbell, 2006a)

'Do Your ears Hang Low?'

Do your ears hang low?  
Do they wobble to and fro?  
Can you tie them in a knot?  
Can you tie them in a bow?  
Can you throw them over your shoulder like a continental soldier?  
Do your ears hang low?  
(Scout Songs, 2015)

The similarities of syntax, terminology, phrasing, and rhyming structure are clearly apparent across both examples. However, Jibbs has used the original structure of ‘Do Your Ears Hang Low?’ to produce an idiomatic rendering of the lyrics.

- In the first phrase of the refrain the plural verb form ‘do’ is retained rather than being replaced by the singular verb ‘does’ (required by the use of the singular noun ‘chain’ and the present simple verb ‘shine’) in an example of dialectic mispronunciation. This is then repeated elsewhere where the word ‘do’ is used.
- In the phrase ‘if you hot’ the abbreviated and contracted form ‘you’re’ or the words ‘you are’ are replaced with the pronoun ‘you’.
- In the phrase ‘make you cold’ the present simple verb ‘make’ is used in replacement of the grammatically accurate ‘makes’.

In a genre such as rap, where word replacement and manipulation are often central to its lyric construction, this is not unexpected. Rhetorical and lyric traits such as these can be used to express any number of factors, including regionality, class background, social identity, and slang and colloquial knowledge. ‘Chain Hang Low’ uses a stylised non-standard English which is reflective of hip hop culture and rap styles which ‘[take] delight in undermining “correct” English usage while celebrating the culturally encoded phrases that communicate in rap’s idiom’ (Dyson, 2004, p. 74).

It is clear from the analysis shown above that ‘Chain Hang Low’ is most likely derived from ‘Do Your Ears Hang Low?’ So why are we discussing ‘Zip Coon’? Kelefa Sanneh writing in the *New York Times* proposes that ‘[p]erhaps without meaning to, Jibbs has updated one of the most popular melodies of the blackface era, reprising a song that has been stuck in American heads for a few centuries’ (2006). Although Sanneh acknowledges some of the melody’s other uses (‘Turkey In The Straw’ and ‘Do Your Ears Hang Low?’) he specifically establishes a connection to its use in blackface minstrelsy in the song ‘Zip Coon’. In the days that followed the publication of Sanneh’s article, Byron Crawford published his thoughts on ‘Chain Hang Low’ which build on the observation of Sanneh. However, Crawford ups the ante, describing the song as an example of an ‘Insidious new trend: Minstrel show rap’ (2006a). In contrast to

Sanneh, Crawford questions the unintentional melodic appropriation and proposes that someone at his record label Geffen knew of the melody's historical use and connections with minstrelsy (2006a). Whether or not Gibbs or employees of his label knew of the melody's use in 'Zip Coon' is a question that cannot be conclusively answered here. More significant, however, is the connection made by Sanneh and Crawford between 'Chain Hang Low' and the minstrel show staple 'Zip Coon' as opposed to focusing on the version that clearly provided the germ of inspiration: 'Do Your Ears Hang Low?'. What their connection demonstrates is a willingness to establish associations between the problematic concept of minstrelsy in popular memory with contemporary examples of African American cultural expression. In this case, the melody's relationship with minstrelsy trumps its use elsewhere. Blackface minstrelsy taints the melody with a problematic significance many years after the song ceased to be a relevant version in American culture. But this example poses a wider question: can African American performers ever engage with material with any relationship to minstrelsy without establishing a connection? It is apparent that Gibbs's ethnicity plays a defining role in the willingness of critics to draw connecting lines between the two examples. The melody appropriated by Gibbs may signify minstrelsy in the context of its use in 'Zip Coon', and by association, notions of racism, exploitation, and appropriation. However, the melody itself has no meaning aside from when placed into the context of African American performance. Moreover, the melody's use in all other cases does not provoke the same connotations as when remembered as 'Zip Coon'. In this context, the memories of minstrelsy, slavery, and racism are evoked alongside Gibbs's performance regardless of its clear genesis in 'Do Your Ears Hang Low?'.

### 'Fry That Chicken'

The second example identified by Crawford is the music video 'Fry That Chicken' by Ms. Peachez, which was uploaded to the video hosting website YouTube on September 13<sup>th</sup> 2006. To date the video has received over 6,200,000 views and has generated significant debate on its comments page, a detail demonstrated by its 21, 843 'likes' and 2,198 'dislikes' (DesignMami, 2015).<sup>51</sup>

The following discussion outlines some of the key features of the song and music video and how 'Fry That Chicken' has been received by critics and viewers. With the aim of shedding further light on responses to the video, I review a selection of the statements published in the comments facility that accompanies the music video on YouTube.

The video to 'Fry That Chicken' is shot in an outdoor location surrounded by tall trees. Positioned around the site are temporary railings, wooden pallets, a bicycle, and picnic tables. Crawford introduces an association with minstrelsy when he describes the setting as 'what appears to be a plantation' (Crawford, 2006a). The association with a plantation is tenuous and aside from its rural character does not conform to depictions of the locale typically described and shown in minstrel shows, songs, and sheet music covers, which tended towards a pastoral romanticism. Ms. Peachez stands in front of a cooking station, which includes a barbeque upon which sits large pan of boiling oil. To one side is a preparation table upon which sits a range of condiments and raw chicken. Sat at the picnic tables are between 15 and 20 children, mostly of African American origin, who bang their hands upon the table and sing the song's title refrain 'fry that chicken, fry that chicken.'

Former *Washington Post* writer and former editor-in-chief of NAACP magazine *The Crisis*, Jabari Asim, describes the imagery in 'Fry That Chicken' as 'nightmarish' and compares it to D. W. Griffith's notorious early silent movie *Birth of a Nation* (1915). Although it made use of blackface, the film was a departure from some of the conventions of blackface minstrelsy and relied less on the characters, comedy, song, or stylised blackface mask of the minstrel

---

<sup>51</sup> Data on views, likes, and dislikes recorded on 27/06/15.

show. Blackface make-up was instead used as theatrical ethnic masquerade through which African Americans are characterised within its narrative of the Civil War and Reconstruction. The film is described by Douglas Tallack as portraying 'black slaves as happy, respectful and loyal' and 'northern free blacks as upstarts, trouble-makers and a danger to the honour of white women' (1991, p. 43). The use of blackface and the characterisation of African Americans in *The Birth of a Nation* staged something troubling in early American cinema: a dramatic depiction of white supremacy and black inferiority that worked to excuse slavery and justify the subordinate social status of African Americans.

As has been shown earlier in this thesis by Dave Chappelle's 'Racial Pixies' sketch, fried chicken has a problematic significance in stereotyped portrayals of African American culture. Such significance is highlighted by Crawford who describes the association of the food-stuff with African American culture as having 'racist (if mostly true) connotations' (Crawford, 2006a). In further criticism, Asim describes the role of children and chicken in the video as 'disturbing' (2006) and reports how the young cast members 'cavort to the beat while deliriously stuffing themselves with chicken flesh and sucking rapturously on the bones' (2006). Such images, according to Asim, do not merely engage with racial stereotypes but are an 'embrace' of them (2006) and his reflections on the video prompt him to ask the question: 'how can anyone explain black performers willingly — and apparently joyfully — perpetuating such foolishness in the 21st century?' (2006).

However, critical reactions to 'Fry That Chicken' have not been universally one-sided. Ashley Martin, writing for arts, media and politics website *seeingblack.com*—although not outrightly defending the music video—questions some of the fundamental assumptions at the centre of the controversy surrounding 'Fry That Chicken'. Pointing out that fried chicken is a staple food of African Americans, Martin states: 'it's amazing how racism can distort symbols of cultural relevance into something that we [become] ashamed of' (Martin, 2006). For Martin, the video highlights the 'the eternal battle of high versus low culture' within African American cultural discourses which pits the 'racial uplift school of thinking' against Ms. Peachez: 'a representative of chicken-eating tradition and keep-it-reality, unashamed that the realness easily fits into stereotype' (Martin, 2006).

The comments facility that accompanies YouTube videos can be an illustrative insight into the opinion of users and has helped online video streaming move from 'an object of passive consumption into an object of social exchange' (Schultes; Dorner; Lehner, 2013, p. 659). Moreover, Peter Schultes, Verena Dorner, and Franz Lehner propose that through this facility 'users perceive an added value in additional information, entertainment and social exchange' (2013, p. 660). However, the potential for anonymity and physical distance between fellow users and video publishers sees the comments facility play host to a mixture of sincere expression and juvenile trolling<sup>52</sup> and is described by Stuart Dredge of the UK *Guardian* as 'an infamously troll-ridden Wild West of abuse, ignorance and spam' (2013). This makes the comments facility a mixed blessing for discerning reliable opinion. What the comments facility does allow us to do is to generate an understanding of the types of comments which are attracted by the video. Whether sincere or sarcastic, abusive or supportive, comments nonetheless show the types of discursive interaction encouraged by the video and the balance of opinion generated by its potentially divisive content.

Since the video's publication it has attracted 12, 061<sup>53</sup> comments which range in tone, perspective, and content. Discussion here does not attempt to account for the full range of comments that accompany the video; such a task is beyond the scope of this thesis. What follows is a review of 'top comments' displayed on the first page of the comments facility.<sup>54</sup> Analysis does not include discussion of comments outside of the first page and focuses solely on 'top comments' and not replies to the top comments. As a result, the sample is of twenty 'top comments' which have been anonymised. Analysis aims to identify the central themes and perspectives expressed through the comments facility that accompanies 'Fry That Chicken' to discern the types of discursive reactions generated by the video. Eight of the 20 comments make specific reference to race through the use of the terms 'black', 'race', 'racial', 'racist', and 'European'. The remaining 12 comments make no direct reference to

---

<sup>52</sup> Internet 'trolling' has come under increased scrutiny in recent years, through its widespread confusion with cyberbullying. However, trolling is a distinct internet social practice. According to *Know Your Meme* '[t]rolling is an Internet slang term used to describe any Internet user behavior that is meant to intentionally anger or frustrate someone else' (knowyourmeme.com, 2015). Uses of the term in this context date back as far as the early 1990s (knowyourmeme.com, 2015).

<sup>53</sup> Data acquired on 27/06/2015.

<sup>54</sup> The comments facility adopts a system that shows a combination of the most recent and most popular comments on its first page. The user can then review older comments by clicking the 'show more' button at the end of the initial comments page.

race. Of the 12 remaining comments a range of comment-types appear including the following themes:

- **Nostalgia** ('I haven't watched this in YEARS!!'; 'Lmao brings back memories of high school very ignorant but oh so hilarious');
- **Guilt, displeasure, and embarrassment** ('Is it wrong that I laughed at this?'; 'This depresses me...');
- **Humour and sarcasm** ('Nikki Minaj is so talented! Love this song!'; 'this should be the worlds [sic] anthem');
- **Comparisons with other music artists** ('Ms. Peachez > Lil Wayne'; 'Nikki Minaj is so talented! Love this song!');
- **Desire for further material** ('2015 Peachez NEEDS to drop a mixtape. The world is ready');
- **Comments on video features** ('Bay bay kids lol').<sup>55</sup>

Analysis now focuses on the eight 'top comments' that make specific reference to race. Discussion is presented in the order in which they appear on the YouTube comments facility.

**Comment 1:** This set black people back 50 years and chicken 5000 years

By stating that 'Fry That Chicken' has 'set black people back 50 years' the publisher of comment 1 proposes that the video has negatively impacted the image of African Americans and has reversed the progress achieved since the Civil Rights Movement. However, the comment is balanced with humour through the use of hyperbole in the latter half of the comment. The combination of extreme exaggeration and a pointed comment on African American social progress means that the comment has the potential to be read as both sincere and humorous.

---

<sup>55</sup> The term 'Bay bay kids' refers to 'Children that are usually the offspring of hood rat chicks. These children are usually unkempt and seen running around impoverished neighborhoods with little or no clothes on, although it is usually a diaper. Their hair will be either half done or not done in weeks, and the first word out of their mouths is usually a curse word. This is the beginning [sic] of the phase of becoming a thug' (Urban Dictionary, 2015c).



**Comment 2:** In celebration of #blackhistory this #throwback is fitting. Lmao!

🤔🤔🤔🤔 +Sean Baker +William Russell

Comment 2 makes reference to Black History Month, a United States government sanctioned national awareness campaign which aims to pay ‘tribute to the generations of African Americans who struggled with adversity to achieve full citizenship in American society’ (Scott, 2015). Describing it as ‘fitting’ suggests the comment is sarcastic and mocking in tone and mirrors the ironic dedication of the social blackface of the Compton Cookout described earlier by Cole. Moreover, situating the video within the context of Black History Month draws the reader/viewer’s attention to the blackness of the performers, positioning their ethnicity as of primary importance.

**Comment 3:** I love this video! I'd rather see a black kid in Alabama with a chicken leg in their hands, than a black kid in Chicago with a 9MM pistol in theirs.

Although the publisher of comment 3 professes to ‘love this video!’, the comment can be read as sarcastic and provocative. The statement goes onto establish an ‘either/or’ model of racial profiling between images of African American children holding either chicken or hand guns (as if these are the only two options available to them). The comment works to reinforce the concept of guns and chicken as signifiers of African American cultural identity. Moreover, it also introduces a geographical dimension to the video by creating a North/South divide between Alabama and Chicago.

**Comment 4:** So it's OK for white people to be racist? But you are going to defend yourself when someone is standing up for other races that YOU made fun of? What the f&\$# is wrong with people?? Racist people exist because there are people that have made them feel bad about themselves., because this world is full of hate and ignorance, separation.... Foolishness....Everyone is equal, when are people going to realize this.... When are people going to realize that the only real separation in this world is being forced upon us.. the media, these giant corporations, THEY want us to hate each other... They profit from separation, They profit from wars... Religion... Violence... All a misconception of the truth, that we are all one, we are all equal... We feel the need to hurt others because we don't understand them, or their cause, or their beliefs.... But if you were to get the chance to talk and explain yourself to them, to everyone, you would realization that we are all the same!! No matter what race, skin color or religion... We are all people wanting to be loved and believed in... Wanting to be accepted and honored in this cruel world.... Please think about this....Please stop hating one another.... We all have our struggles... and gifts... You are all very loved and appreciated.

In a rather lengthy and detailed statement, the publisher of Comment 4 appears to plead for unity, equality, and respect for one another and questions the racist attitudes of others commenting on the video. The use of rhetorical questions in the opening sentences of the post shows the publisher's attempt to engage in discourse with other YouTube users. In contrast to other contributors to the comments facility shown here, the publisher of comment 4 does not intend their statement to be humorous or to evoke racist connotation. Rather, they seek to challenge many of the comments which accompany the video, utilising the facility as a means of engaging in conversation with others in an attempt to alter racist beliefs and perceptions. Rather than focusing on the details of the video, the publisher connects the YouTube comments discussion to far wider issues of racism, equality, and the exploitation inflicted by institutions and organisations that benefit from social division. They end their post with an appeal to other YouTube users (or perhaps even a wider call to humanity) calling for unity, equality, and love.

**Comment 5:** you all know that this is an example of the degradation of my people often perpetuated in rap music but present in other forms as well. you people of european ancestry would not hold the "its all in fun, lighten up" attitude if the situation were reversed. This is wrong and all you know it but let me guess ...you will call me militant and angry. I wish my people woke up

The publisher of Comment 5 uses possessive language ('my') to signal their own ethnicity and cultural membership and to profess their concern for the representation of African Americans in popular culture, in particular 'rap music'. Seeing 'Fry That Chicken' as a form of degradation of African American cultural identity, the publisher proposes the potential for hypocritical standards through a hypothetical role-reversal in which 'people of european [sic] ancestry' are exposed to equivalent effects. They end the post by restating their disagreement with the video ('This is wrong') and attempt to connect their seemingly rational and common-sense opinion to those of other viewers ('all you know it'), which they follow with a prediction of other viewers' perceptions of them ('you will call me militant and angry'). This final proposal predicts a belittling of their opinion and a dismissal of their accusations of racism through connotations of Black militancy.<sup>56</sup>

**Comment 6:** i really don't get why black people eating fried chicken is seen as racist or a racial stereotype. everybody loves fried chicken regardless of your skin. is more of a southern thing than a racial thing

The publisher of Comment 6 uses their statement to address the association between African Americans and fried chicken. More specifically, they question the association and its existence as a stereotypical feature of African American cultural identity. Although they legitimately acknowledge the fact that many people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds eat the food-stuff, the association and entrenched stereotype is nonetheless a feature of American discourses of race and has been for a very long time. The institution of blackface minstrelsy made use of the chicken as a thematic device and it featured in a great

---

<sup>56</sup> The emergence of the Nation of Islam during the early twentieth century shook the American establishment. Its growth under the stewardship of Elijah Muhammad and its promotion and popularisation by charismatic figures such as Malcolm X and Louis Farrakhan informed a fear of 'black power' that continued into the 1960s and 1970s with the emergence of the Black Panthers.

number of songs and performances. It appeared with particular frequency in the popular song style of 'coon songs' in which it was identified as a signifier of blackness. Examples include Thomas Logan's 'The Coon's Trade-Mark: A Watermelon, Razor, Chicken and a Coon' (1898), A. Ross Weeks's 'Oh Lor! gib dis Chile a Chicken' (1898), and Sidney Perrin's 'Dat's the Way to Spell Chicken' (1903). The association, reinforced by the coon songs entered various areas of popular culture and advertising. The Coon Chicken Inn, opened by Maxon Lester Graham and Adelaide Burt in 1925, used the theme to sell chicken products and adorned the front of its restaurants with a giant grinning blackface character (a representation of which is seen in *Bamboozled*). The association has persisted and still remains significant in discourses of race in America. Dave Chappelle engages with the association in his live stand-up show *Killin' Them Softly* (2000) in which he states: 'all these years I thought I liked chicken because it was delicious, turns out I am genetically predisposed to liking chicken' (Chappelle, 2000).

**Comment 7:** This was made in Shreveport, LA I think in Hollywood heights (or just Hollywood for us that lived there) nothing racist about this video but the derogatory racial comments posted here on YouTube in general. this was all in fun nothing more nothing less

The publisher of Comment 7 seems to sincerely question the potential racism of the video and rather, in similarity with comment 4, draws attention to the racism of the comments posted in response to it. They question the validity of responses that identify the music video as racist, but rather place the emphasis onto the racist discourse initiated by the video. Their post appears to defend the video, describing it as merely 'fun' (mirroring the claim of the publishers of the video DesignMami).

**Comment 8:** 6 million views. This is treasonous behavior. Certain people have lost the right to be called Black. No man would ever put on a dress. You people will be slaves in another 20 years. Coons

In an angry comment, the publisher calls the behaviour of those who have contributed to the video's six million views 'treasonous', evoking the notion of betrayal in performances that show African Americans in a bad light. Furthermore, they use the post to manage a sense of

African American identity by placing a limitation on the parameters of blackness and the rights of some African Americans to be considered members of the wider community. The publisher ends their post with a provocative reference to the reinstatement of slavery and the identification of viewers with the racist slur 'coons'.

In an acknowledgement of the video's potential for controversy, video publisher DesignMami subtitled 'Fry That Chicken' with the phrase 'Its [sic] all for fun ppl.. chill' (DesignMami, 2015). However, the calls for viewers to 'chill' have only partially been heeded and the comments facility provides an illustrative insight into opinion of the video. But is 'Fry That Chicken' an embrace of stereotypes (as indicated by Asim) or an engagement with them (as indicated by Martin)? Does it destabilise meaning or reinforce it? Perhaps it achieves both. What 'Fry That Chicken' certainly does achieve is to demonstrate the sensitivity that surrounds representations of African American culture, particularly when the food-stuff chicken is concerned. As was shown earlier with Dave Chappelle's 'Black Pixie' performance the signifying power of fried chicken runs deep in African American culture, a notion compounded by the association between African Americans and the food-stuff that has long been exploited in American advertising and popular culture.

### 'Chicken Noodle Soup'

The Chicken Noodle Soup dance emerged in Harlem in 2006 and constitutes one part of a larger group of styles called 'Lite Foot', 'lite feet' or 'getting Lite' which focus on rapid footwork in an upright standing position and is a combination of the dance moves the Harlem Shake and the Toe or Tone Wop. It gained international and commercial recognition in September 2006 with the release of 'Chicken Noodle Soup' by DJ Webstar featuring Young B and Voice of Harlem. However, the 'Chicken Noodle Soup' was already strutting in the streets, playgrounds and basketball courts of Harlem and was merely brought to wider attention by the video. The exact origin of the dance is unclear, as is so frequently the case with underground and vernacular cultural practices, and it is difficult to isolate the precise point of creation. However, this is of little concern, as the 'Chicken Noodle Soup' dance has roots that stretch back beyond hip hop culture.

In the article 'New Dance or Old Cooning?' Marc Lamont Hill asks: 'is this dance, with all of the shuffling and light footing, nothing more than new-school minstrelsy?' (2006). Shortly after, Crawford expanded on Hill's question and proposed distinct similarities between the street dance and the dances of minstrelsy:

[!]t was a group of jigs in Harlem, New York who were the first to cross that line into actual minstrelsy. If you notice, there's hardly a difference between the Chicken Noodle Soup dance...and the actual dances performed in 19th century minstrel shows (Crawford, 2006a).

Neither Hill nor Crawford provides much support for their claims. However, their suspicions raised some questions. Firstly, do elements of minstrel dance appear in 'Chicken Noodle Soup'? Secondly, what role, if any, has New York City and its history of minstrel shows played in shaping 'Chicken Noodle Soup'? And finally, what are the consequences of evoking the memory of blackface minstrelsy in critical assessments of the song, dance, and video?

Dance was at the centre of early blackface performance in New York with the song and dance 'Jump Jim Crow' of New Yorker Thomas Dartmouth Rice and the energetic

performance of contemporaries such as John Diamond and William Henry Lane (Master Juba). Rice's distinctive act was a novelty that excited New York's theatregoers and remained popular for a number of decades. Paul Oliver describes how '[b]efore much serious attention was paid to the songs of black Americans, their dances were the subject of white interest and mimicry' (quoted in Riis, 1989, p. 14). Over the following decades, more performances featuring African American dance appeared on theatre stages in combination with European dance forms.

The minstrel show was responsible for bringing together a number of musical, theatrical and dance traditions from various social and ethnic groups; New York provided an ideal blend of cultural influences. During the early 1800s New York City was fundamentally important to American trade and immigration. Minstrelsy's development in New York was a result of the wealth, developing class system, and cultural mixing brought about by its status as a trading and disembarkation point for immigrants from around the world. The flow of people and goods in and out of New York provided a supply of various cultural influences that mingled together in spaces such as markets, saloons, and theatres. New York's large Irish, British and African American communities contributed significantly to minstrelsy's styles of dance. A scan of New York's antebellum minstrel playbills provides a picture of the dances that appeared in shows. Hornpipes, quicksteps, jigs, polkas, and, what was often simply described as 'negro dance', were performed alongside theatrical and musical performance.

One important performer of 'negro dance' was New Yorker William Henry Lane [see figures 74-76], described by Marian Hannah Winter as the 'most influential single performer of nineteenth century American dance' (quoted in Johnson, 2003). Lane was a rare example in early minstrelsy of an African American performing alongside white performers. Stephen Johnson in *Juba's Dance: An Assessment of Newly Acquired Documentation* (2003) claims that Lane, 'provided integrity to a developing indigenous dance idiom, based on his direct links with an African-American folk culture' (2003). Lane's performances included 'shuffles, double-shuffles, hops and steps' and included aspects of the 'highland fling, sword dance, Lancashire clog, hornpipe, minuet [and] polka' (Johnson, 2003). Performing as 'Master Juba' or 'Juba', Lane performed Juba dancing, a very physical and rhythmic dance style consisting of handclapping, foot tapping, and body slapping. Juba dances could play out complex cross-

rhythms as partnership with another musician or dancer, which according to W. K. McNeil writing for *Grove Music Online* was 'sometimes accompanied by a rhymed chant' (McNeil, 2011). Dances of early minstrelsy such as Juba were often spectacular. Rapid movement of the upper and lower body was common in routines which, according to Lott 'relied on vigorous leg – and footwork, twists, turns, and slaps of the toe and heel' (1995, p. 117). Juba dance may well have its origins in the ceremonial slave practice of the 'ring shout' which involved group participation and an emphasis on rhythm. According to Samuel Floyd the 'ring shout' was characterised by "'jerking," "hitching" motions, particularly in the shoulders' (2002, p. 50). Performances of the 'Chicken Noodle Soup' dance include 'jerking', 'hitching' motions of the shoulders as described by Floyd, 'slaps of the toe and heel' [see figure 77] as described by Lott and, rapid movements of the upper and lower body.



Figure 74: 'Boz's Juba'

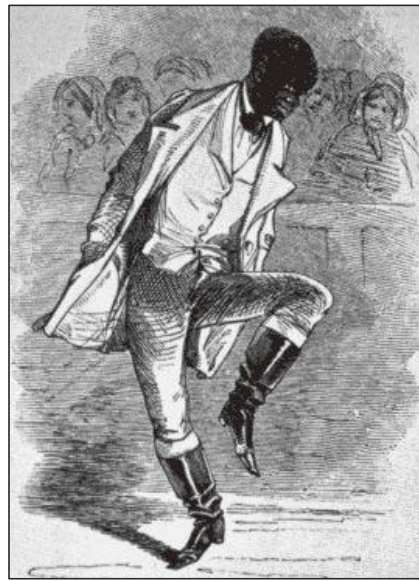


Figure 75: 'Jube in Dance'



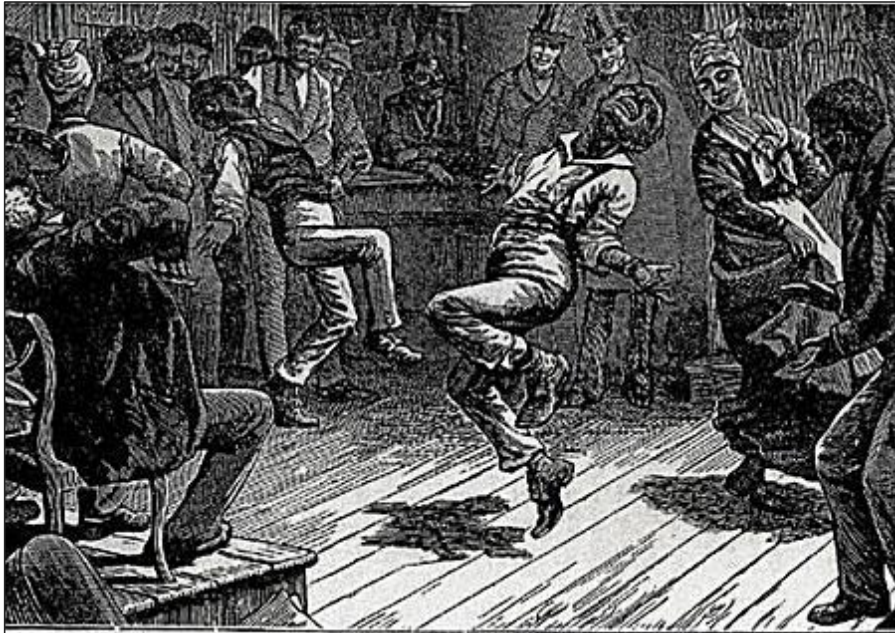


Figure 76: 'Juba in Charles Dickens's *American Notes*'.



Figure 77: Slaps of the foot in 'Chicken Noodle Soup'.

A number of other dance styles and gestures can be observed in the 'Chicken Noodle Soup' dance. According to Clements and Rady, '[t]he Harlem Shake [one part of 'Chicken Noodle Soup'] originated in the 1980s in Harlem, in New York City. The dance is based on an East African dance called Askista, and it is believed that early African immigrants contributed to its development' (2012, p. 132). The Harlem Shake consists of the raising on one shoulder (often with some aggression) and then a rapid shimmy of the shoulders until the opposite

shoulder is raised. This process is repeated over and over and embellished by individual performers. The shimmy, a key ingredient of the Harlem Shake, according to Rebecca Bryant in 'Shaking Things Up: Popularizing the Shimmy in America' (2002), was '[d]eveloped from African American roots [and] was not really a dance [but] was defined by a rapid horizontal shaking of the upper body, especially the shoulders [and] sometimes...included shaking of the torso and hips' (2002, p. 168). Bryant explains that during the early-twentieth century the shimmy travelled North with Southern African American migrants who had seemingly performed them as an antidote to the rigid and inflexible moves of European dance. The shimmy grew in popularity over the first decade of the twentieth century in Northern urban settings (Bryant, 2002, p. 169) such as New York.

The 'tone or toe wop', the second component of the 'Chicken Noodle Soup' dance, involves the twisting and crossing of the feet in standing position with the leg periodically raised or swung out to the side. The knees are presented bent. The Toe Wop provides the footwork of 'Chicken Noodle Soup' dance which I will return to shortly.

If we look to the essential moves of the 'Chicken Noodle Soup' dance we find that the movements and body shapes of performers have their roots in wing and jig dances which with 'buck dances' constitute what Thomas DeFrantz describes as the 'trilogy of dance forms' in black social dance of the nineteenth century (DeFrantz, 2012). The wing dance is a rather literal term for this move in which arms and legs are flapped like wings. The general posture adopted by performers of the wing dance presents the legs and arms open. DeFrantz asserts that wing dances have 'a lot more visibility in the twentieth and into the twenty-first century', citing the Charleston dance as an example (DeFrantz, 2012). The wing forms a major structural feature of the 'Chicken Noodle Soup' dance, with the bent raised arms and bent open-leg posture of performers. Variations of the jig dance also appear in 'Chicken Noodle Soup' with its light-footed style incorporating hops, skips and the flicking out of the feet.

There is little doubt that elements of buck, wing, and jig of African American social dance would have been performed as part of minstrel show dance routines, most likely in the plantation breakdowns or frolics that purported to demonstrate the social dances of slave

culture. Moreover, the jig, with origins in British and Irish folk dance cultures, is a style recorded in antebellum minstrel play bills and in the performances of William Henry Lane and other early minstrel dancers such as John Diamond and T. D. Rice. So returning to the comments that initially prompted this discussion, it is fair to say that Crawford's statement that 'Chicken Noodle Soup' contains 'the actual dances performed in 19th century minstrel shows' (Crawford, 2006a) may have some validity.

In *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop*, W. T. Lhamon described three recurring dance gestures from blackface minstrelsy that appeared in, amongst other places, the hip hop dances of MC Hammer in the 1990 music video 'U Can't Touch This!'. For Lhamon, the gestures of late twentieth-century African American street dance can be traced to those performed in the markets, saloons, and theatres that first staged minstrelsy. Hip hop dance in the 1990s demonstrates 'the recurring attempt to play out on popular planes the charismatic moves of African American street dance' (1998, p. 220). Lhamon's analysis refers to three specific dance moves performed by the dancers of New York's Catherine Market in the early 1800s and MC Hammer and his dancers in the late 1990s: the Run step, the Wheel step, and the 'knees open, heel-to-toe rock' or 'Market Step' (1998, pp. 221-222). Variations of the 'Run Step' and the 'Market Step' appear in the 'Chicken Noodle Soup' dance. The essential shifting of weight from foot to foot that constitutes the 'Chicken Noodle Soup' dance resembles the 'Run Step', which appeared in Catherine Market in shingle dances, in minstrel show dance as the Virginia Essence (Lhamon, 1998, p. 222), and has continued to appear in various forms ever since, from the running man to the moonwalk. The 'Run Step' features throughout 'Chicken Noodle Soup' in forward, side and backwards running motions. Lhamon describes how the 'Run Step' in nineteenth-century African American dance portrays the '[r]unning in place—but never arriving that those performers on the cusp between worlds would emphasise. It grows more and more poignant as the cusp stays there and so do the runners' (1998, p. 222).

The 'Market Step' plays a defining role in the body shape of dancers. The 'Chicken Noodle Soup' dance shows a posture with legs open, knees bent and pointing outwards. Some dancers' legs are spaced far apart, others around shoulder width, although most adopt this essential leg position [see figure 78]. Lhamon argues, as do Malone and Wood (cited in

Lhamon, 1998, p. 217), that 'the chief distinguishing gesture of African American body retentions in New World dance is the bent knee' which, according to Lhamon, is an 'African American posture teaching nimble motion' (1998, p. 217). According to Lhamon, in late twentieth-century performances of MC Hammer we find a 'distinctive Atlantic dance dialect' that can be traced to those gestures emerging from the mingled cultures of New York City and other urban centres. It appears that 'Chicken Noodle Soup' embraces the city's mingled past in the creation of something new, although, like the melody appropriated by Jibbs in 'Chain Hang Low', the crimes of minstrelsy as a whole have tarnished African American dance that appeared on its stages.



Figure 78: Market step in 'Chicken Noodle Soup'.

## Conclusions

We can observe through analysis of 'Chicken Noodle Soup' that it does enact dance moves similar to those performed on the minstrel stages and in African American social dance. However, this alone should not really be a surprise. The minstrel show was an all-consuming commercial enterprise that appropriated any aspects of culture likely to be popular with audiences. African American dance was just one of them. The Harlem Shake and the Tone Wop are not new dances. Rather they are variations of dances that have appeared in some form for centuries.

In a sense Lite foot dance and performances of 'Chicken Noodle Soup' can be seen as a form of physical and gestural sampling which appropriate elements of existing moves and repeat them within the context of contest and exhibition. Critics do, however, face a potential problem when using minstrelsy as a point of comparison with contemporary cultural practices. Blackface minstrelsy represents a troubling chapter in American history, which when evoked, carries a host of connotations to its modern day comparative example. With terms such as 'minstrelsy' and 'coonin'g' are clustered ideas of shame, embarrassment and guilt for people of many ethnicities. These associations are not easily forgotten and the terms still hold significant power when mobilised in critical discourses.

Crawford's designation of 'minstrel show rap' is a provocative act by a provocative voice from the world of hip hop and rap. However, he was not the only voice to observe potential similarities between these three examples and minstrelsy. From analysis it is apparent that there are similarities in terms of dialect use and musical appropriation and repurposing in the case of 'Chain Hang Low'; the thematic use of chicken in 'Fry That Chicken'; and the resemblance of some of the dance moves from 'Chicken Noodle Soup' to minstrel and African American social dance styles. But are these similarities significant?

Jibb's appropriation of the melody and structure of 'Do You Ears Hang Low?' would seem to suggest that associations with 'Zip Coon' are part of the wider associations between rap and minstrelsy, as outlined earlier in 'The Discourse of Blackface Equivalency', and represent attempts by critics to minstrelise a performance of rap music. Moreover, Jibb's ethnicity

plays a fundamental role in determining the association, demonstrating the continued significance of minstrelsy in relation to African American cultural practices. Ms. Peachez and 'Fry That Chicken' signify on the association between chicken and African American culture, an association reinforced through stereotyped depictions of African Americans in popular culture from the minstrel show onwards. This association still has powerful symbolism in American culture. It is therefore understandable that the exploitation of chicken may be viewed with some caution by critics. However, at what point does Ms. Peachez performance become a justifiable work of satire or an unacceptable exploitation of stereotypes? The similarity of the dance moves and gestures in 'Chicken Noodle Soup' and those of minstrelsy shows that vernacular dance gestures stand the test of time and old moves find new life in contemporary dance practice. However, it is also worth recognising that it is unlikely that the children and young people performing the 'Chicken Noodle Soup' dance have any awareness of the existence of their dance moves in blackface, nor, I imagine, would they care.

## Conclusions: Findings in Contemporary Context

We just need to open our eyes, and ears, and hearts, to know that this nation's racial history still casts its long shadow upon us. We know the march is not yet over, the race is not yet won, and that reaching that blessed destination where we are judged by the content of our character – requires admitting as much.

United States President Barack Obama, Selma, Alabama, March 7<sup>th</sup> 2015<sup>57</sup>

This research has focused on the functions and effects of representations of blackface minstrelsy in twenty-first century popular culture: theatrical, artistic, and social uses of blackface and minstrelsy imagery in 'Showing Blackface'; and discursive uses of minstrelsy in critical discourses in 'Talking Blackface'. The aim of these conclusions is to bring together key findings and position them within the wider context of race and racism in twenty-first century America, a setting fundamental in understanding the function and effects of blackface minstrelsy in contemporary performative and discursive applications.

The election of Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States of America in 2008 was seen by some as a signal of the emergence of the condition of post-race: a society free of racial prejudice and discrimination. Writer, journalist, and cultural critic Touré suggests that the notion of post-race was 'born benignly from the hope that Obama's electoral success meant that the racial problems that have long plagued America were over' (2012). The symbolism of an African American man occupying the highest position in American politics and leadership engendered in some the notion that race is no barrier to progress. However, the concept that America is post-racial has been challenged by critics who question its validity and function in society. Baptist minister and civil rights activist Al Sharpton dismisses

---

<sup>57</sup> During his speech on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, United States President Barack Obama recounted the scene in which over five hundred civil rights activists organised themselves for a march on Montgomery in what would become one of twentieth-century America's defining moments. Fifty years ago to the day, America witnessed a scene that would force it to acknowledge both its African-American population's place as free citizens, subject to the same fundamental rights as other ethnicities, and to face down the still entrenched prejudice within areas of its white population at both a civilian and institutional level. With prior warning of the march, local law enforcement organised to stop the protesters from crossing the bridge into Dallas County. This was achieved with the use of violence and intimidation, scenes of which were broadcast across the country. The day became known as Bloody Sunday.

the concept and suggests that racism persists in myriad ways in American society. Furthermore, he suggests that the concept of post-race, perhaps born out of a sense of optimism, social progress, and perceived equality, may present more problems than it solves: '[i]f we act as if something that is festering isn't there, it only grows and manifests itself in a multitude of ways' (Sharpton, 2015). Touré also recognises this paradox and proposes that prevalent use of the term may '[lend] credence to the idea that [claims of post-race are] true' (Touré, 2012). Tim Wise, author of *Colorblind: The Rise of Post-Racial Politics and the Retreat from Racial Equity* (2010), suggests that rather than demonstrating a shift away from racism the election of Barack Obama 'might signal a mere shape-shifting of racism, from Racism 1.0 to Racism 2.0' (2010, p. 15). According to these reflections, what may have emerged as a hopeful proposal of racial equality and progress may function as a panacea for the ignorance and dismissal of still-entrenched racism at social, cultural, and institutional levels.

The tensions raised by recent incidents of race-related violence, problems of community relations, and the deaths of African American men at the hands of police and civilians have brought the concept of post-race into further question. The deaths of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, and most recently, the shooting of nine African Americans at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, have signalled the still-simmering tensions between African Americans and the police and the existence of white supremacist ideologies in the Southern States which Joanne Braxton and Michael Sainato describe as 'simultaneously representative and starkly indicative of the rampant racism structurally embedded in America' (2015).

The death of Michael Brown during an attempted arrest in Ferguson, Missouri, and subsequent social unrest led to a Department of Justice report investigating criminal justice and law enforcement which identified the 'unlawful bias against and stereotypes about African Americans' and the 'disproportionate burden [of law enforcement] on African Americans' in the city (2015, p. 5). In a public statement Obama described the 'woefully familiar' narrative emphasised by the death of Brown and suggested that the Department of Justice report 'evoked the kind of abuse and disregard for citizens that spawned the Civil



Rights Movement' (Obama, 2015a). It is therefore reasonable to suggest that far from a relic of the past, race is at the forefront of the twenty-first century American experience.

It is not the goal of these conclusions to attribute direct causality to blackface in tensions around issues of race and marginalisation, but to position its use as both a reflection of continued feelings of racial disharmony and as a means of challenging it. This decision is not taken arbitrarily; examples shown throughout this work encourage such an assessment, rooting the use of blackface in satirical and creative explorations of race-relations and racism and in critical discourses of primarily African American cultural expression.

Blackface and the images and themes of minstrelsy comprise a system of visual and linguistic signs capable of symbolising complex and deep-rooted concepts relating to racism, marginalisation, exploitation, and representation. The historic role of blackface minstrelsy and its subsequent legacy in popular culture makes it a potent repository of feeling that goes beyond the mask itself and reaches back into American history. To borrow from Roland Barthes, blackface and minstrelsy are 'ballasted by a prior culpability' (2009, p. 88); weighed heavy by their socio-cultural role in portraying and commodifying African American culture and life and perpetuating the myths of slavery.

The blackface minstrel mask represents the most frequently used and available visual legacy of the minstrel show in popular culture. As was shown in 'Showing Blackface', the mask is used in film, television, music video, and social practice with different functions and effects. However, its potency as a symbol of American racism remains as a primary feature of its power in these contexts. In satire the mask operates as a device for the exploration of themes of race in which satirists aim to navigate the boundary between offence and critical function, often raising questions over the appropriateness and effect of using blackface and minstrel themes. However, strategies are employed to mitigate the potential for the signs to offend. One strategy is making the wearer of the mask the focus of ridicule, highlighting their ignorance and prejudice and not the supposed 'other' that the mask may be seen to represent. This can be most clearly seen in *The Sarah Silverman Program* episode 'Face Wars' and in the *American Dad!* episode 'An Apocalypse to Remember'. Another strategy is to directly confront the potential of blackface to offend. This is most clearly shown in

*Bamboozled*, *Tropic Thunder*, *30 Rock*, *The Sarah Silverman Program*, *American Dad!*, and *Family Guy* in which cast members verbally confront the wearer of blackface or the wearer's actions are challenged through implied offence and social consequences.

To return to Ellison's proposal cited earlier in this work, beginning with the minstrel show, popular culture reduced African Americans to a 'negative sign' which appeared in a 'comedy of the grotesque and the unacceptable' (1964, p. 48). Satire which utilises blackface typically seeks to reverse this model, representing the mask as the negative sign and making it function in oppositional ways to what it is seen to represent. In this sense, the satirist seeks to significantly destabilise the meaning of the sign, inverting its perceived historical function. However, even in satirical applications where the aims of critical use are primary to the author, blackface can operate as a poison chalice. This is acknowledged by Lee in *Bamboozled* in which the combined power of blackface and the entrenched racism of the culture industry override any satirical potential, a paradox the film itself faced in its use of blackface. In a case of life imitating art, Dave Chappelle's use of blackface made him question the critical role it was playing and how audiences reacted to blackface and the exploitation of African American stereotypes. For Chappelle, rather than functioning as an oppositional critical device it reverted to its original perceived ridiculing function.

A range of other strategies in narrative, theme, and textual structure coincide with the use of blackface and minstrel imagery in the examples used in this work. Death and violence provide opportunities to further destabilise the signs of blackface minstrelsy. The violence inflicted upon the wearers of the mask in *Bamboozled*, *The Sarah Silverman Program*, and 'The Wu-Tang Candidate' work to show the consequences of toying with blackface. In these contexts, however, violence and death also work to destabilise the sign by destroying it through the assassination of the mask wearer. The problems of complicity in the negative portrayal of African American culture are signalled by the juxtaposition of minstrelsy and suicide seen in the lyrics of Ace Boon Coon and 'Just a Minstrel'. In both cases the concepts of minstrelsy, suicide, and lynching combine with references to rap culture to connect contemporary cultural practice with the particularly troubling racist violence of American history.

The processes of burnt cork ritual, application of the mask, and its removal provide opportunities to engage with individual psychological effects of blackface and the wider significance of the practice. The notion of ritual is used to frame the process of burning corks and producing blackface make-up through which the 'shared social meanings' (Jary and Jary, 1995, pp. 561-562) of the ritual action can be exposed and explored. The process of ritual implicates the wearer of the mask in the degradations that it represents and positions them as a culpable (if reluctant) party in the process. The stages of ritual allow for the contemplation of the act and provide opportunities to show the psychological impact the process has on the individual. This is most clearly shown in *Bamboozled* and *Bitch Bad*. However, if uses of blackface so often seek to destabilise the meaning of blackface minstrelsy, ritualising the process may have a contrary effect by further imbuing the process with significance, endowing burnt cork ritual with quasi-magical power, and reinforcing its representational function rather than challenging it.

As with burnt cork ritual, the process of application shows the psychological effects of applying the mask and personifying all that it signifies in popular culture. Examples which show self-application explicitly, demonstrate the damaging effect the process has on the individual. The wearer is faced with their complicity in applying and wearing the mask and watches as it gradually appears before them. If a function of the mask in minstrelsy was to 'shield [white performers] from any direct personal and psychological identification with the material they were performing' (Mahar, 1999, p. 1), blackface for African Americans in these examples has the opposite effect. However, showing application may work to deconstruct (or reconstruct) the image and expose it as façade. The act of showing the mask to be 'put on' foregrounds its superficiality or as Gubar describes it 'draws attention to its own artifice' (1997, p. 79). By exposing the mask as artifice and taking control of its application those who use blackface application as a device take control of the mask itself, whilst calling upon the historical narratives of social control and misrepresentation that the mask implies. In cases of blackface applied by white performers (*Tropic Thunder* and *The Sarah Silverman Program*), application functions in contrasting ways: as a surprise revelation leading to a comic punchline; and as narrative development. In both cases it has a joyous outcome, demonstrating contrary effects between white and African American performers.

Removal of blackface provides further opportunities to take control of the mask and to deconstruct and manipulate its meanings. In the case of *Bitch Bad*, removal is a messy and disordered process in which the wearers appear to claw the mask from their faces, which feeds into the sense of anguish and sadness elicited by the process of ritual and application. In *Tropic Thunder* removal acts as an accompaniment to epiphany in which the wearer comes to his senses and piece-by-piece removes his facial disguise, gradually exorcising the multitude of characters he has played throughout his career. *The Sarah Silverman Program* uses removal to substitute a sign of American racism against African Americans with a sign of the Jewish Holocaust, simultaneously ridiculing both signs and showing them in parallel as symbols of racist oppression.

The post-modern acceptance of referentiality has enabled the exploration of blackface in reflective and critical ways and has allowed authors of texts to frame the use of blackface and other signs of minstrelsy, providing critical distance from the implications of its use. In films such as *Tropic Thunder*, which is so rich with filmic tropes and allusions, blackface becomes one of the many references within a wider text built on the signification upon existing themes and practices in Hollywood history. By its nature, using blackface in the twenty-first century is an act of appropriation and therefore is intrinsically referential. However, the self-aware and self-conscious use of blackface within a text such as a film or music video allows the performers to peer through the lens and observe the problematic acts rather than simply re-perform them.

Providing distance from the implications of wearing blackface and using techniques to navigate its functions and effects is a common feature in texts which exploit the practice. This is one of the outcomes provided by the narrative technique of *mise-en-abyme*. By positioning the act of blackface within a text or performance within a contemporary text—whether in the form of a full-blown stage production as in *Bamboozled*, in the form of a Vietnam war epic within *Tropic Thunder*, or in the staging of a rap performance within *Bitch Bad*—the makers of the contemporary text and the performers within are afforded a level of distance from the act of wearing blackface, the exploitation of minstrelsy's signs and themes, and the implications of its use. Like Larry Parks in *Jolson Sings Again*, Robert Downey Jr. portrays an actor wearing blackface and theoretically, therefore, does not wear the mask

himself, avoiding direct association with the act and deferring the ignorance of the practice onto his character Kirk Lazarus. The technique also allows for the interaction with themes of audience, spectatorship, and voyeurism. Such themes are exploited by Lee in *Bamboozled* in its restaging of a minstrel show, self-consciously signalled by the involvement of audience as a participating party in the success of the racist portrayals on stage. However, questions are raised by the practice. Whilst providing physical and theoretical distance from the seemingly shameful acts the song and video seeks to criticise, Lupe Fiasco's *Bitch Bad* also re-performs the pornographic and degrading images at the centre of its critical practice engendering questions of spectatorship, voyeurism, and viewer titillation.

In contrast to the uses of blackface in satirical, comedic, and theatrical contexts, social blackface demonstrated in fancy dress and informal performance contexts tends to generate controversy with little obvious mitigation of offence. Like satire in conventional media contexts, the use of blackface as a feature of fancy dress often plays with notions of good taste, offence, and spectacle. However, unlike cases of satire and outwardly critical uses of blackface, social blackface is rarely justified by critical interaction with its controversy nor is it provided with the distance offered by narrative positioning.<sup>58</sup> Theoretically, the wearer of blackface in a social context may have satirical or critical motivations behind their masquerade. However, as the exposure of such instances is most often a single photograph or brief video clip it is very rarely possible to ascertain any critical function.

The evidence appears to show, however, that the function of blackface in social contexts is not to critically engage with notions of race and racism or to destabilise the meaning of the mask as has been shown in satirical applications. Rather, it largely appears to reinforce the sign, particularly in cases where the intention of offensive effect is most clear such as in the event at the University of California in 'honor of Black History Month' (Cole, 2012, p. 239) and in the masquerade of Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman in Florida. What such examples may point to is the continued desire of Americans to appear in blackface and

---

<sup>58</sup> Such methods of justification and mitigation include those discussed earlier such as: acknowledging its problematic status; providing layers of narrative or structural distance using devices such as *mise-en-abyme*; using it as a tool of pop culture justice; corrupting the sign; showing the process of application and the psychological impact it has on wearers of the mask; and aligning it with death and violence.

represent African American culture through masquerade, mimicry, and parody. Such a prospect is concerning as it may suggest that some of the same functions of historical blackface still exist in American society, expressed in private contexts. The role of technology in exposing social blackface is significant and makes the concept of 'private performance' an increasingly problematic notion. The pervasive influence of image capture and instant publication technologies in the form of smart phones has shown itself to not just raise questions of general privacy, but of how we perceive and portray race behind closed doors. The effects of social blackface and their exposure to an often unintended and vast audience are not just damaging to the public that may take offence to the masquerade, but also on the individual who wears the mask. As was shown in many of the cases in 'When Private goes Public: Blackface in Social Contexts' the controversy of masquerade (or rather the controversy of exposure) often results in significant real-life consequences for those captured in blackface. Although ignorance of the potential for blackface to offend is often a feature of the subsequent debate over its use in social contexts, such a defence is difficult to maintain in the light of such significant criticism of blackface in American culture.

Equivalence is the 'the condition of being equal or equivalent in value, function, etc.' (Oxford English Dictionary). It is, therefore, in the Discourse of Blackface Equivalency that contemporary cultural practices are argued to be equivalent in value and function to blackface minstrelsy. Blackface minstrelsy is largely unvalued in cultural consciousness, a notion that many scholars of the subject seek to investigate and in some cases undo in 'minstrelsy's rehabilitation' (Smith, 2013, p, 211). To defend the minstrel show as a valuable cultural phenomenon is rare and conceptions of the form tend to focus on the particularly negative aspects of its portrayals of African Americans and its wider social influence, largely ignoring any potential valuable features that it may present.

The discursive examples shown in this work highlight a number of core themes that help to identify what blackface minstrelsy means in twenty-first century culture. Moreover, through the use of Gee's seven building tasks of language it is possible to more clearly identify how these observations are manifested in discursive practices. Key themes of the Discourse of Blackface Equivalency in African American cultural contexts include the identification of narratives of authenticity; proposals of the repetition of historical patterns of representation,

commodification, and consumption; the role of the white audience of African American culture in shaping its themes and content through consumption to their own desires and expectations; the promotion and perpetuation of archetypes and stereotypes; parallels of appropriation and subsequent issues of cultural ownership and self-representation; the acknowledgement of minstrelsy as metaphor; and the use of racial slurs and ridiculing and belittling language.

Gee's seven building tasks of language are useful in identifying the function and effects of the Discourse of Blackface Equivalency. Discursive practices which evoke blackface minstrelsy work to both endow the concept with *significance* by redeploying it in a critical context and endow significance to their own criticism by association with a largely reviled historical practice. Those who use the concept of minstrelsy are recognised as engaging in particular *activities*, in this case in cultural criticism as a general practice on the one hand, and as an actor in the developing processes of blackface equivalency as it is manifested across representational practices. Blackface often works in discursive contexts to aid in the articulation of particular *identities*. By highlighting ignorance and buffoonery, the recognition of history and culture, and the flaws of modern cultural practice, the participants in the Discourse are able to show themselves as antithetical to that which they seek to criticise. This may be used to establish oppositional artistic, professional, or political subject positions. Examples shown often work to forge and break *relationships* with readers, viewers, and subjects of criticism. By evoking minstrelsy as a comparative concept, users often break potential relationships between them and the targets of criticism whilst forging relationships with like-minded readers and viewers who can relate to their identity as critic, cultural insider, or informed observer. As has been shown prominently in examples, the *distribution of the social goods* of shame, disgrace, blame, and guilt is a significant feature of the Discourse. The targets of criticism are rarely portrayed in a positive light and are argued to be best naïve or ignorant of their actions. Fundamental to articulating a relationship of equivalency is the ability to establish *connections* between minstrelsy and contemporary cultural practice. Merely by evoking minstrelsy in critical discursive contexts, the process of connection is initiated. Beyond this point, those who deploy the concept use various strategies to establish further connections, including through the use of simile and analogous concepts, the identification of repeated patterns, and the use of comparable archetypes and

characters. Rather than being entirely separate from the visual and thematic uses of blackface presented in 'Showing Blackface', the Discourse of Blackface Equivalency serves many of the same functions and should be considered related to the signifying practices of minstrelsy as a *sign system* and mode of representation.

The Discourse of Blackface Equivalency in non-African American cultural contexts has demonstrated that the concept of minstrelsy and its ability to represent notions of marginalisation, inequality, mimicry, and misrepresentation functions beyond African American cultural criticism and clearly reinforces the function as metaphor for 'all the people who have been reduced to stereotypes' identified by Crouch (2000). This appears to be a clear manifestation of that concept and the recognition and articulation of similar patterns seen in the representation of African Americans in minstrelsy.

Similarities between minstrelsy and contemporary rap music represent a significant point of focus in expressions of blackface equivalency. This is shown explicitly in the designation of 'minstrel show rap' (Crawford, 2006a; Crawford, 2006b). In each case, parallels can be drawn whether in the appropriation and repurposing of melody in 'Chain Hang Low'; the thematic use of chicken in 'Fry That Chicken'; or the repetition of dance moves and gestures seen in minstrelsy and wider African American social dance in 'Chicken Noodle Soup'. However, critics who seek to identify associations often apply the comparison with little regard for the implications that an identification of equivalency may bring. In the current context of race-relations such critical observations may work to reinforce racist perceptions of African Americans and not work to challenge the representational power of minstrelsy.

Minstrelsy as an academic area of study has changed significantly over the course of the twentieth century, moving between fairly distinct stages of study. Although the seemingly separate areas of academic study and popular culture differ in significant ways, there are some similarities between them in their engagement with blackface and minstrelsy. Both agree that blackface minstrelsy remains relevant and its influence as a commercial and performative practice was lasting. Both tend to concur that minstrelsy played a significant role in misrepresenting and marginalising African Americans through masquerade. However, whilst academic literature often seeks to rehabilitate minstrelsy—arguably instigated by



Hans Nathan's proposal to 'return an indigenous, sinewy popular art to the American consciousness and tradition' (1962, p. v)—and explore the nuances of its formation, development, and legacy, popular culture and criticism seems to seek to redeploy it and develop its problematic significance in equivalency with twenty-first century cultural practice. In this respect, although the two fields are revisiting blackface and minstrelsy, it appears to be for different reasons. Rather than attempting a possible rehabilitation, popular culture and discourse seeks to repurpose minstrelsy as a negative system of signs.

Despite any potential concerns over the use of minstrelsy as a discursive critical equivalent, this should not mean that the genuine concerns of critics over patterns of cultural appropriation, negative representation, commodification, and exploitation are not valid. Moreover, although minstrelsy may have contributed positively to American culture in some ways, it also significantly contributed to the marginalisation and misrepresentation of African Americans that had a lasting impact on notions of race and social status in American society. It is therefore understandable that it may now function in oppositional ways, that it may be appropriated by people who relate to the historically marginalised targets of its ridicule, fascination, and appropriation.

#### Further Research

Key to proposing further research is the question of whether blackface will continue to be used in critical, artistic, and social contexts. The short answer to this question is that as long as race, racism, and race-relations continue to figure as part of American life, blackface will continue to remain relevant to American culture. The recent case of the passing<sup>59</sup> of Rachel Dolezal shows that sensitivities surrounding ethnic masquerade, blackface, and misrepresentation continue to run high in American culture.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, as has been

---

<sup>59</sup> The term 'passing' refers to the act of pretending to be an ethnicity other than one's own. Although similar to ethnic masquerade, passing usually connotes a more permanent transformation and the practice may be used to live a different life as a result of one's ability to masquerade as a different ethnicity.

<sup>60</sup> Rachel Dolezal's brother Ezra described his sister's portrayal of herself as 'Black' as a 'slap in the face' to the wider African American community. He also identified the similarities with minstrelsy: 'She puts dark makeup on her face and says she black...It's basically blackface' (Dolezal in Nashrulla, 2015).

demonstrated by recent violent events in the United States of America and subsequent soul-searching, race is unlikely to retreat from American life anytime soon.

Although some research into blackface in social contexts has made a valuable contribution to the area of study (Patton, 2008; Cole, 2012), it represents a subject with significant potential for further investigation, particularly in the context of the increased pervasion and influence of technology and social media and the continued occurrence of blackface despite negative public and media responses. Furthermore, in the light of recent tensions around race and race-relations in American society, the significance and volatility of blackface remains a potential flashpoint for offence and provocation. However, its ability to raise questions of personal freedom and free speech—enshrined in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution—places it at the heart of the American experience.

## References

- Access Hollywood. (2010). "Jersey Shore" cast all Italians? Fuggedaboutit! *NBC News: Today*. Retrieved 02 March, 2015, from [http://www.today.com/id/35448025/ns/today-today\\_entertainment/t/jersey-shore-cast-all-italians-fuggedaboutit/#.VPQ\\_OeF30tw](http://www.today.com/id/35448025/ns/today-today_entertainment/t/jersey-shore-cast-all-italians-fuggedaboutit/#.VPQ_OeF30tw)
- Adler, S. (2008). 'Tropic Thunder' Director/Star Ben Stiller Says Disability Advocates' Planned Boycott Is Unwarranted. *MTV*. Retrieved 16 June, 2015, from <http://www.mtv.com/news/1592544/tropic-thunder-directorstar-ben-stiller-says-disability-advocates-planned-boycott-is-unwarranted/>
- Aleem, Z. (2010). Is *30 Rock* Racist? *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved 22 March, 2015, from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/zeeshan-aleem/is-em30-rockem-the-most-r\\_b\\_637300.html?](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/zeeshan-aleem/is-em30-rockem-the-most-r_b_637300.html?)
- Amadeo, K. (2014). Halloween Retail Spending Trends and Statistics. *About News [US Economy]*. Retrieved 25 April, 2015, from <http://useconomy.about.com/od/demand/f/Halloween-Retail-Spending-Trends.htm>
- Anon. (1889). THE FOUNDER OF ETHIOPIAN MINSTRELSY – SY. *The New York Times*. Retrieved 29 November, 2011, from <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archivefree/pdf?res=FA0F10FE3F5E1A738DDDAF0994DE405B8984F0D3>
- Aoki, G. (2001). Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher [video online]. *YouTube*. Retrieved 30 March, 2015, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VsNoO8xMs04>
- Aoshima, J. (Director). (2007). An Apocalypse to Remember. [Television series episode]. In S. MacFarlane; M. Barker; M. Weitzman (Creators). *American Dad!*. 20th Century Fox Television
- Aronofsky, D. (Director). (2010). *Black Swan*. Los Angeles: Fox Searchlight Pictures
- Associated Press. (2013). Top 10 Newspapers By Circulation: Wall Street Journal Leads Weekday Circulation. *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved 16 April, 2015, from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/01/newspaper-circulation-top-10\\_n\\_3188612.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/01/newspaper-circulation-top-10_n_3188612.html)
- Asim, J. (2006). Fry That Chicken. *Truthdig*. Retrieved 08 November, 2011, from [http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/200601006\\_jabari\\_asim\\_fry\\_that\\_chicken/](http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/200601006_jabari_asim_fry_that_chicken/)
- Aspringer. (2007). NAACP Says STOP To Hip Hop. *Hip Hop DX*. Retrieved 23 June, 2015, from <http://hiphopdx.com/news/id.5156/title.naacp-says-stop-to-hip-hop>
- Attenborough, R. (Director). (1982). *Gandhi*. Culver City: Columbia Pictures

- Bahr, F; Hickenlooper, G; Coppola, E. (Directors). (1991). *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse*. Hollywood: Paramount Pictures
- Baker, S. M; Motley, C. M; Henderson, G. R. (2004). Despicable To Collectible The Evolution of Collective Memories for and the Value of Black Advertising Memorabilia. *Journal of Advertising*, vol. 33. no.3 (Fall 2004), 37-5
- Baldwin, T. B. (2015) .Who Owns Hip-Hop?: Of Iggy Azalea, Black And Brown Folk. *All Hip Hop*. Retrieved 31 March, 2015, from <http://allhiphop.com/2015/01/13/who-owns-hip-hop-of-iggy-azalea-black-and-brown-folk/>
- Banerjee, N. (2010). Is Reality TV a Revolution for Race or the New Minstrel?. *Color Lines: New for Action*. Retrieved 30 March, 2015, from [http://colorlines.com/archives/2010/10/is\\_reality\\_tv\\_a\\_revolution\\_for\\_race\\_or\\_the\\_new\\_minstrel.html](http://colorlines.com/archives/2010/10/is_reality_tv_a_revolution_for_race_or_the_new_minstrel.html)
- Banks, A. [Azealia Banks]. (2014a, 11 June). Hip-Hop is turning into a Minstrel Show. It's really really sad. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/AZEALIABANKS/status/476937192762134528>
- Banks, A. [Azealia Banks]. (2014b, 19 December). @iggyazalea do you know what a minstrel is? Because that's what you are..... [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/AZEALIABANKS/status/545876600869629952>
- Banks, A. [Azealia Banks]. (2014c, 19 December). @iggyazalea this is you. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/search?q=azealia%20banks%20%40iggyazalea%20this%20is%20you&src=typd>
- Barlowe, J. (2003). "You Must Never Be a Misrepresented People": Spike Lee's Bamboozled. *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 33, No. 1, 1-16.
- Barthes, R. (1964). *The Elements of Semiology*. New York City: Hill and Wang
- Barthes, R. (2009). *Mythologies* (originally published in English 1972). London: Vintage
- Basu, M. & Sashin, D. (2012). Students in blackface re-enact Chris Brown beating Rihanna. *CNN*. Retrieved 22 April, 2015, from <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/10/16/us/new-york-blackface-skit/>
- Bayard, S. P. (1950). Prolegomena to a Study of the Principal Melodic Families of British-American Folk Song. *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 63, No. 247, 1-44.
- Baum, L. F. (1899). *The Wizard of Oz*. Chicago: George M. Hill Company
- Bayard, S. P. (1982). *Dance to the Fiddle, March to the Fife: Instrumental Folk Tunes in Pennsylvania*. London: Pennsylvania State University Press

- BBC (Broadcaster) (14 June 1958 – 21 July 1978). *The Black and White Minstrel Show*. [Television programme]. London: British Broadcasting Corporation
- Bean, A; Hatch, J. V; McNamara, B. (1996). *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy*. London: Wesleyan University Press.
- Bebber, B. (2013). Till Death Us Do Part: Political Satire And Social Realism in the 1960s and 1970s. *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 253–274
- Becker, R. (2006). *Gay TV and Straight America*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press
- Beckett, M. (2012). The Internet Meme. *Postmodernism in a Nutshell*. Retrieved 19 January, 2015, from <https://postmodernisminanutshell.wordpress.com/2012/05/29/the-internet-meme/>
- Beecher Stowe, H. (1852 ). *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. John P. Jewett and Company
- Biggers, E. D. (Director). (1931). *Charlie Chan Carries On*. Hollywood: Fox Film Corporation
- Billboard (2011a). Chain Hang Low [Chart Positions]. *Billboard*. Retrieved 29 November, 2011, from <http://www.billboard.com/charts#/song/jibbs/chain-hang-low/8369446>
- Billboard (2011b). Chicken Noodle Soup [Chart Positions]. *Billboard*. Retrieved 29 November, 2011, from <http://www.billboard.com/#/song/webstar/chicken-noodle-soup/8321649>
- Billboard (2014). Lupe Fiasco [Chart Positions]. *Billboard*. Retrieved 23 September, 2014, from <http://www.billboard.com/artist/308591/lupe-fiasco/chart>
- Black Lives Matter. (2015). About Us. *Black Lives Matter*. Retrieved 28 June, 2015, from <http://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>
- Bolonik, K. (2012). “The New Normal” vs. “Modern Family”. *Salon*. Retrieved 24 February, 2015, from [http://www.salon.com/2012/12/12/i\\_want\\_my\\_gay\\_tv/](http://www.salon.com/2012/12/12/i_want_my_gay_tv/)
- Boynton, R. S. (1995). The Professor of Connection: A profile of Stanley Crouch. *RobertBoynton.com*. Retrieved 21 March, 2015, from [http://www.robertboynton.com/articleDisplay.php?article\\_id=30](http://www.robertboynton.com/articleDisplay.php?article_id=30)
- Box Office Mojo. (2015). Tropic Thunder. *Box Office Mojo*. Retrieved 30 March, 2015, from <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=tropicthunder.htm>
- Braxton, J. & Sainato, M. (2015). Dylann Roof is the product of a system that has bred racist hatred for centuries. *The Guardian*. Retrieved 22 June, 2015 from <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jun/22/dylann-roof-charleston-shooting-product-system-racist-hatred-centuries>
- Brooks, M. (Director). (1968). *The Producers*. Embassy Pictures

- Brown, J. H. (2008). Gangsta Rap Is A Minstrel Show Update. *The Tampa Tribune*. Retrieved 25 June, 2015 from <http://tbo.com/news/news/2008/apr/27/bz-gangsta-rap-is-a-minstrel-show-update-ar-153824/>
- Bryant, R. (2002). Shaking Things Up: Popularizing the Shimmy in America. *American Music*, Vol. 20, No 2 (Summer 2002), 168-187.
- Burke, L; Crowley, T; Girvin, A. (Ed.) (2000). *The Routledge Language and Cultural Theory Reader*. London: Routledge
- C. L. (1881). An Old Actor's Memories: What Edmond S. Conner Recalls About His career. *The New York Times*. Retrieved 04 November, 2015, from <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9503E7D6133CEE3ABC4D53DFB066838A699FDE>
- Carpenter, J. (Director). (1992). *Memoirs of an Invisible Man*. Burbank: Warner Bros.
- Carvin, A. (2010). 'Bed Intruder' Meme: A Perfect Storm of Race, Music, Comedy and Celebrity. *NPR: Social Web*. Retrieved 08 June, 2015, from <http://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2010/08/05/129005122/youtube-bed-intruder-meme>
- CBS8 (2013). SDUSD announces suspensions in 'blackface' controversy. *CBS8*. Retrieved 22 April, 2015, from <http://www.cbs8.com/story/23852884/sdusd-announces-suspensions-in-blackface-controversy>
- Cendrowski, M. (Director). (2008a). The Bad Fish Paradigm. [Television series episode]. In C. Lorre; B. Prady (Creator), *The Big Bang Theory*. Burbank: Warner Bros. Television
- Cendrowski, M. (Director). (2008b). The Peanut Reaction. [Television series episode]. In C. Lorre; B. Prady (Creator), *The Big Bang Theory*. Burbank: Warner Bros. Television
- Cendrowski, M. (Director). (2008c). The Griffin Equivalency. [Television series episode]. In C. Lorre; B. Prady (Creator) *The Big Bang Theory*. Burbank: Warner Bros. Television
- Cendrowski, M. (Director). (2014). The Proton Transmogrification. [Television series episode]. In C. Lorre & B. Prady (Creators), *The Big Bang Theory*. New York: Comedy Central
- Chang, J. (2014). Azealia Banks, Iggy Azalea and hip-hop's appropriation problem. *The Guardian*. Retrieved 31 March, 2015, from <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/dec/24/iggy-azalea-azealia-banks-hip-hop-appropriation-problem>
- Chappelle, D. (2000). *Dave Chappelle: Killin' Them Softly* [stand-up performance]. New York City: HBO

- Chappelle, D. & Brennan, N. (2003). *Chappelle's Show*. [Television programme]. Beverly Hills: MGM Television
- Chappelle, D. (2006). *Chappelle's Show: The Lost Episodes*. [Television series episode]. In D. Chappelle & N. Brennan (Creators), *Chappelle's Show*. Beverly Hills: MGM Television
- Chidester, P; Campbell, S; Bell, J. (2006). "Black is Blak": Bamboozled and the Crisis of a Postmodern Racial Identity. *The Howard Journal of Communications*, No. 17, 287-306
- Christgau, R. (2014). Robert Christgau: Iggy Azalea's 'New Classic' Is Plenty Authentic -- and Damn Good to Boot. *Billboard*. Retrieved 31 May, 2015, from <http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/pop-shop/6251555/robert-christgau-iggy-azaleas-new-classic-is-plenty-authentic-and>
- Chude-Sokei, L. (2006). *The Last "Darky": Bert Williams, Black-on-Black Minstrelsy, and the African Diaspora*. Durham: Duke University Press
- Cinegraphic. (2007). 1950 Blackface Performance: Vernon & Ryan. [Video online]. *YouTube*. Retrieved 28 June, 2015, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfiNT6AKG0s>
- Clements, R. L. & Rady, A. M. (2012). *Urban Physical Education: Instructional Practices and Cultural Activities*. Champaign: Human Kinetics
- Clifton, D. (2014). How to talk to white people about Iggy Azalea. *The Daily Dot*. Retrieved 31 March, 2015, from <http://www.dailydot.com/opinion/talking-about-iggy-azalea-white-people/>
- Citizen Bot. (2013). The Big Bang Theory: Minstrel Show or Smart Social Commentary? *Big Shiny Robot*. Retrieved 23 February, 2015, from <http://www.bigshinyrobot.com/56115/big-bang-theory-minstrel-show-or-smart-social-commentary/>
- Coates, T. (2013). 30 Rock's Rejection of White Guilt. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved 22 March, 2015, from <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/01/i-30-rock-i-s-rejection-of-white-guilt/272732/>
- Cochran, J. (2013). The Modern Minstrels. *Jason Cochran: Stuff you never knew you never knew*. Retrieved 25 June, 2015, from <http://jasoncochran.com/blog/the-modern-minstrels/>
- Cockrell, D. (1997). *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and their World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Cole, C. M. (2012). American Ghetto Parties and Ghanaian Concert Parties: A Transnational Perspective on Blackface. In S. Johnson (Ed.) *Burnt Cork: Traditions and Legacies of Blackface Minstrelsy* (pp. 223-258). Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

- Collins, D. & David Metzler, D. (Creators). (2003). *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. [Television programme]. New York: Bravo
- Cooper, H. M. (1988). Organizing knowledge synthesis: A Taxonomy of Literature Reviews. *Knowledge in Society*, Spring 1988, Volume 1, Issue 1, pp 104-126
- Coppola, F. F. (Director). (1979). *Apocalypse Now*. Beverly Hills: United Artists
- Crawford, B. (2006a). Minstrel Show Rap. *XXL Bloggers*. Retrieved 08 October, 2011, from <http://www.xxlmag.com/bloggers/2006/09/minstrel-show-rap/>
- Crawford, B. (2006b). Black People: WTF?. *ByronCrawford.com*. Retrieved 08 October, 2011, from [http://www.byroncrawford.com/2006/09/black\\_people\\_wt.htm](http://www.byroncrawford.com/2006/09/black_people_wt.htm)
- Crawford, B. (2006c). Bol on the radio. *Byron Crawford.com*. Retrieved 09 October, 2015, from [http://www.byroncrawford.com/2006/12/minstrel\\_rap\\_sh.html](http://www.byroncrawford.com/2006/12/minstrel_rap_sh.html)
- Crosland, A. (Director). (1927). *The Jazz Singer*. Burbank: Warner Bros. Pictures
- Crouch, S. (2000). SPIKE LEE IS PROVOKING - IN THE RIGHT WAY. *The New York Daily News*. Retrieved 25 June, 2015, from <http://www.nydailynews.com/archives/opinions/spike-lee-provoking-article-1.886837>
- Crouch, S. (2003). Putting the White Man in Charge. *The Jazz Times*. Retrieved 28 June, 2015, from <http://jazztimes.com/articles/19802-putting-the-white-man-in-charge>
- Crouch, S. (2006a). Mtv, Still Clueless After All These Years. *New York Daily News*. Retrieved 27 November, 2011, from [http://articles.nydailynews.com/2006-08-07/news/18342749\\_1\\_mtv-christina-norman-black](http://articles.nydailynews.com/2006-08-07/news/18342749_1_mtv-christina-norman-black)
- Czajkowski, E. (2013). Shut Up, 'Variety': The Cluelessness of Claiming that Sarah Silverman Shouldn't Be "As Dirty As the Boys". *Splitsider*. Retrieved 30 March, 2015, from <http://splitsider.com/2013/11/shut-up-variety-the-cluelessness-of-claiming-that-sarah-silverman-shouldnt-be-as-dirty-as-the-boys/>
- Daily News. (2008). Quincy Jones: When it comes to hip hop, Wynton Marsalis blows it. *Daily News*. Retrieved 15 April, 2015, from <http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/gossip/quincy-jones-hip-hop-wynton-marsalis-blows-article-1.299333>
- Davey, D. (2007). Davey D: Why commerce is killing the true spirit of hip-hop. *The Mercury News*. Retrieved 28 June, 2015, from [http://www.reclaimthedia.org/media\\_justice/why\\_commerce\\_is\\_killing\\_the\\_true\\_spirit\\_of\\_hip\\_hop](http://www.reclaimthedia.org/media_justice/why_commerce_is_killing_the_true_spirit_of_hip_hop)
- Davis, F. (2002). *Like Young: Jazz, Pop, Youth and Middle Age*. Boston: Da Capo Press



- Davis, F. (2007). Hip-Hop Is Dead to Him. *The Village voice (Music)*. Retrieved 15 April, 2015, from <http://www.villagevoice.com/2007-04-10/music/hip-hop-is-dead-to-him/2/>
- DeFrantz, T. (2012). Thomas F. DeFrantz: Buck, Wing and Jig. *Duke Today*. [Video online]. *Duke Today*. Retrieved 04 September, 2012, from <http://today.duke.edu/2012/03/thomas-f-defrantz-buck-wing-and-jig#video>
- Delingpole, J. (2010). South Park: The most dangerous show on television?. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved 22 April, 2015, from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/7671750/South-Park-The-most-dangerous-show-on-television.html>
- Department of Justice. (2015). Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department. Retrieved 28 June, 2015, from [http://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opa/press-releases/attachments/2015/03/04/ferguson\\_police\\_department\\_report.pdf](http://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opa/press-releases/attachments/2015/03/04/ferguson_police_department_report.pdf)
- Derschowitz, J. (2013). Miley Cyrus' VMA performance blasted by Parents Television Council. *CBS News*. Retrieved 08 June, 2015, from <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/miley-cyrus-vma-performance-blasted-by-parents-television-council/>
- DesignMami. (2006). Ms. Peachez - Fry That Chicken. [Video online]. Retrieved 30 March, 2015, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGrqW3nx5HM>
- DesRochers, R. (2014). *The Comic Offense: From Vaudeville to Contemporary Comedy*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic
- Dixon, G.W. (1834) *Zip Coon*. [Score] Publisher Unknown
- Dmytrewycz, P. (2012). The Big Bang Theory and Nerd Minstrelsy. *The Brown Tweed Society*. Retrieved 23 February, 2015, from <http://thebrowntweedsociety.com/2012/07/25/the-big-bang-theory-and-nerd-minstrelsy/>
- Dobruck, J. (2013). UC Irvine fraternity suspends itself for releasing blackface video. *The LA Times*. Retrieved 22 April, 2015, from <http://articles.latimes.com/2013/may/02/local/la-me-ln-irvine-fraternity-suspends-20130502>
- Dougan, J. (2001). *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy* by Annemarie Bean; James V. Hatch; Brooks McNamara; *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum American Popular Culture* by William J. Mahar; *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* by W. T. Lhamon [Book Review]. *American Music*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 360-363.

- Dredge, S. (2013). YouTube aims to tame the trolls with changes to its comments section. *The Guardian*. Retrieved 07 March, 2015, from <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/nov/07/youtube-comments-trolls-moderation-google>
- Dumont, F. (1899). *The Witmark Amateur Minstrel Guide and Burnt Cork Encyclopedia*. New York: M. Witmark and Sons
- Dyson, M. E. (2004). The Culture of Hip Hop. In M. Forman & M. A. Neal (eds.), *That's The Joint!* [First edition]. Abingdon: Routledge
- Ebert, R. (2000). *Bamboozled*. [Film review]. *Rogerebert.com*. Retrieved 04 June, 2015, from <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/bamboozled-2000>
- Elias, N. & Scotson, J. (1994) *The Established and the Outsiders*. London: Sage
- Ellis, R. (2010). Is 'Jersey Shore' a modern-day minstrel show?. *The Examiner*. Retrieved 30 March, 2015, from <http://www.examiner.com/article/is-jersey-shore-a-modern-day-minstrel-show>
- Ellison, R. (1964). Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke. *Shadow and Act* (First Vintage International Edition, 1995). New York: Random House, pp. 45-59.
- Ely, M. P. (1991). *The Adventures of Amos 'n' Andy: A Social History of an American Phenomenon*. New York, USA: The Free Press
- Epp, M. H. (2003). Raising minstrelsy: Humour, satire and the stereotype in The Birth of a Nation and Bamboozled. *Canadian Review of American Studies*, No. 33, 17-35.
- Evans, B. (2013). Father apologises after football fan son, 10, is engulfed in Twitter race storm for blacking up his face to look like his favourite player El Hadji Diouf. *The Daily Mail Online*. Retrieved 21 April, 2015, from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2256190/El-Hadji-Diouf-Father-apologises-son-engulfed-Twitter-race-storm-blackening-face-resemble-player.html>
- Fey, T. (Creator). (2006). *30 Rock*. [Television programme]. New York: National Broadcasting Company
- Finn, N & Rosenbaum, C. (2012). Little People vs. *Snow White: Life's Too Short* Star Calls Dwarf Casting "Inexcusable". *E! Online*. Retrieved 17 February, 2015, from <http://www.examiner.com/article/is-jersey-shore-a-modern-day-minstrel-show><http://uk.eonline.com/news/321970/little-people-vs-snow-white-life-s-too-short-star-calls-dwarf-casting-inexcusable>

- Flanagan, C. (2014). The Dark Power of Fraternities. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved 21 April, 2015, from <http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/02/the-dark-power-of-fraternities/357580/>
- Floyd, S. A. (2002). Ring Shout! Literary Studies, Historical Studies, and Black Music Inquiry. *Black Music Research Journal*, Vol. 22, 49-70.
- Freeman, H. (2013). Miley Cyrus's twerking routine was cultural appropriation at its worst. *The Guardian*. Retrieved 30 March, 2015, from <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/27/miley-cyrus-twerking-cultural-appropriation>
- Frith, S. (2007). *Taking Popular Music Seriously: Selected Essays*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Co.
- Gaines, F. P. (1924). *The Southern Plantation: A Study in the Development and Accuracy of a Tradition*. New York City: Columbia University Press
- Garner, D. (2013). When Bird Was a Fledgling: Stanley Crouch's 'Kansas City Lightning,' on Charlie Parker. *The New York Times*. Retrieved 26 June, 2015, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/11/books/stanley-crouchs-kansas-city-lightning-on-charlie-parker.html?ref=topics>
- Gee, p. (2005). *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*. (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). New York: Routledge
- Grant, D. (Director). (2005). *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*. Santa Monica: Lionsgate
- Green, A. E. (Director). (1946). *The Jolson Story*. Culver City: Columbia Pictures
- Grenoble, R. (2013). Trayvon Martin, George Zimmerman Halloween Costumes Couldn't Be More Offensive (PHOTO). *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved 25 April, 2015, from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/10/28/trayvon-zimmerman-halloween-costume\\_n\\_4170528.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/10/28/trayvon-zimmerman-halloween-costume_n_4170528.html)
- Griffin, J. H. (1961). *Black Like Me*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin
- Griffith, W. D. (1915). *Birth of a Nation*. Epoch Film Co
- Gubar, S. (1997). *Racechanges: White Skin, Black Face in American Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Gubar, S. (2006). RACIAL CAMP in The Producers and Bamboozled. *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (Winter 2006), 26-37.
- Hall, S. (Ed.) (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage Publications

- Halloween Candy Buy Back. (2014). *Halloween Candy Buy Back [About]*. Retrieved 25 April, 2015, from <http://www.halloweencandybuyback.com/about.html>
- Hamm, C. (2000). *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and Their World* by Dale Cockrell; *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* by W. T. Lhamon;; *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum American Popular Culture* by William J. Mahar [Book Review]. *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (Spring, 2000), 165-183.
- Hammond, W. (2006). *Bamboozled*. [Film review]. *Time Out: London*. Retrieved 04 June, 2015, from <http://www.timeout.com/london/film/bamboozled>
- Harmon, D; Schrab, R; Silverman, S. (Creators). (2007). Face Wars [Television series episode]. In S. Silverman (Creator) *The Sarah Silverman Program*. New York: Comedy Central
- Harris, S. J. (2014). Able-Bodied Actors and Disability Drag: Why Disabled Roles are Only for Disabled Performers. Rogerebert.com. Retrieved 15 February, 2015, from <http://www.rogerebert.com/balder-and-dash/disabled-roles-disabled-performers>
- Haze, A. (2015). Angel Haze: "It Feels Like a Punch To The Gut When Someone Takes Our Culture and Runs With It. *Noisey: Music by Vice*. Retrieved 02 March, 2015, from [http://noisey.vice.com/en\\_uk/blog/angel-haze-on-hip-hop-and-cultural-appropriation-2015](http://noisey.vice.com/en_uk/blog/angel-haze-on-hip-hop-and-cultural-appropriation-2015)
- Heaggans, R. (2009). *The 21st Century Hip-Hop Minstrel Show: Are We Continuing the Blackface Tradition?*. San Diego: University Readers
- Heelan, W. A. & Helf, J. F. (1901). Every Race Has a Flag but the Coon. [Sheet music]. New York: Jos. W. Stern & Co.
- Hernandez, G. (2014). Tuc Watkins apologizes for using 'blackface' to describe Modern Family's Cam and Mitch. *Gay Star News*. Retrieved 21 February, 2015, from <http://www.gaystarnews.com/article/tuc-watkins-apologizes-using-blackface-describe-modern-familys-cam-and-mich221214#sthash.I5Y7Rpti.pTHJ6DvX.dpuf>
- Hewitt, I. (2012). Wynton Marsalis interview: It don't mean a thing if it ain't got swing. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved 15 April, 2015, from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/worldfolkandjazz/9376790/Wynton-Marsalis-interview-it-dont-mean-a-thing-if-it-aint-got-swing.html>
- Hill, M. L. (2006). Video of the Day – New Dance or Old Cooning?. *Mark Lamont Hill*. Retrieved 08 November, 2011, from <http://www.marclamonthill.com/video-of-the-day-new-dance-or-old-cooning-1010>

- Holehouse, M. (2014). Racist? No, our black-face dance is a proud tradition. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved 22 May, 2015, from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/labour/10777858/Racist-No-our-black-face-dance-is-a-proud-tradition.html>
- Horn, M. (2010). Minstrelsy in the New Millennium. *Wordpress*. Retrieved 12 May, 2014, from <http://marleehorn.wordpress.com/2012/02/25/minstrelsy-in-the-new-millennium/>
- Hot 97. (2014a). Great Race Debate with Macklemore on Ebro in the Morning!. [Video online]. *YouTube*. Retrieved 09 June, 2015, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrMU9wm8hn4>
- Hot 97. (2014b). Azealia Banks Goes Off on TI, Iggy + Black Music Being Smudged Out. [Video online]. *YouTube*. Retrieved 01 June, 2015, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uFDS-VEEI6w>
- Huang, Y. (2010). *Charlie Chan: The Untold Story of the Honorable Detective and His Rendezvous With American History*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company
- Huffington Post. (2012). Photo Of University Of Florida Frat Members Wearing Blackface Sparks Controversy. *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved 22 April, 2015, from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/29/university-of-florida-blackface-beta-theta-pi\\_n\\_2038326.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/29/university-of-florida-blackface-beta-theta-pi_n_2038326.html)
- Jackson, B. (1982). The Minstrel Mode. In L. D. Jr. Rubin (Ed.) *The Comic Imagination in American Literature* (pp. 149-156). New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press
- Jary, D. & Jary, J. (1995). *Collins Dictionary of Sociology* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Glasgow: Harper Collins Publishers
- Jasiri X. [real name unknown]. (2010a). Just A Minstrel [Video online]. *Youtube.com*. Retrieved 08 November, 2011, from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c2zEWXxKsrU>
- Jhally, S. & Lewis, J. (2003). Enlightened Racism: *The Cosby Show*, Audiences and the Myth of the American Dream. W. Brooker & D. Jermyn (eds.) *The Audience Studies Reader*, New York: Routledge, 279-287
- JibbsVEVO. (2006). Jibbs - Chain Hang Low. [video online]. Retrieved from 30 March, 2015, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4SBN\\_ikibtg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4SBN_ikibtg)
- Johnson, S. (2003). Juba's Dance: An Assessment of Newly Acquired Documentation. *Proceedings of the 26th Annual Conference of the Society for Dance History Scholars* (SDHS, 2003)

- Johnson, S. (Ed.) (2012a). *Burnt Cork: Traditions and Legacies of Blackface Minstrelsy*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press
- Johnson, S. (2012b). Death and the Minstrel: Race, Madness and Art in the Last (W)Rites of Three Early Blackface Performers. In S. Johnson (Ed.) *Burnt Cork: Traditions and Legacies of Blackface Minstrelsy* (pp. 73-103). Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Kaufman, G. (2015). Iggy Azalea Breaks Twitter Silence To Talk Upcoming Britney Performance And New Music. *MTV: News*. Retrieved 09 June, 2015, from <http://www.mtv.com/news/2134086/iggy-azalea-twitter-britney-performance-new-music/>
- Kelly, A. A. (2014). *The New Classic* [CD album]. Santa Monica: Def Jam Records
- Know Your Meme. (2015). Trolling. Retrieved 5 March, 2015, from <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/subcultures/trolling>
- Kwapis, K. (Director). (2009). *He's Just Not That Into You*. Los Angeles: New Line Cinema
- Langford, J. (Director). (2010). Halloween on Spooner Street. [Television series episode]. In S. MacFarlane (Creator). *Family Guy*. Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox Television
- Lapchick, R. (2005, 24 August). Mascots are a matter of respect. *ESPN*. Retrieved from <http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/page2/story?page=lapchick/050825&num=0>
- Lee, S. (2000) *Bamboozled*. Los Angeles: Newline Cinema
- Levin, H. (Director). (1950) *Jolson Sings Again*. Culver City: Columbia Pictures
- Lewis, J. (2007). Shock of the New. *The Guardian*. Retrieved 28 June, 2015, from <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2007/mar/02/jazz>
- Lewis, M. M. (2007a). The Wu-Tang Candidate. *Bronx Biannual*, Issue 2, pp 41-58
- Lewis, M. M. (2007b). Facing Off: Blackface, Minstrels and Hip Hop. *Dazed and Confused*, pp. 82-83
- Lhamon, W. T. (1998). *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press
- Lloyd, C. & Levitan, S. (Creators). (2009). *Modern Family*. [Television programme]. New York: American Broadcasting Company
- Lockyer, S. & Pickering, M. (Eds.). (2005). *Beyond a Joke: The Limits of Humour*. Basingstoke: Palgrave/MacMillan

- Logan, B. (2013, 11 February). Sarah Silverman [review]. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2013/feb/11/sarah-silverman-review>
- Logan, T. (1898). *The Coon's Trade-Mark: A Watermelon, Razor, Chicken and a Coon* [Score]. New York: Jos. W. Stern & Co
- Lopez, Q. (2012). *White Bodies, Black Voices: The Linguistic Construction of Racialized Authenticity in US Film*. (Unpublished PhD thesis). The University of Texas at Austin. Retrieved from <http://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/ETD-UT-2012-05-5349/LOPEZ-DISSERTATION.pdf?sequence=1>
- Lorre, C. & Prady, B. (Creators). *The Big Bang Theory*. [Television programme]. New York: CBS
- Lott, E. (1991). "The Seeming Counterfeit": Racial Politics and Early Blackface Minstrelsy. *American Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (June, 1991), 223-254.
- Lott, E. (1992). Love and Theft: The Racial Unconscious of Blackface Minstrelsy. *Representations*, No. 39 (Summer, 1992), 23-50.
- Lott, E. (1995). *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Louis, E. (2006). ALL RHYME, NO REASON FOR RAP WORLD'S MODERN MINSTRELS. *The New York Daily News*. Retrieved 28 June, 2015, from [http://www.nydailynews.com/archives/opinions/2006/10/22/2006-10-22\\_all\\_rhyme\\_\\_no\\_reason\\_for\\_rap.html](http://www.nydailynews.com/archives/opinions/2006/10/22/2006-10-22_all_rhyme__no_reason_for_rap.html)
- Love, B. L. (2013). Tyler Perry Take Over TV. In D. L. Leonard & L. Guerrero (Eds.), *African Americans on Television: Race-ing for Ratings* (pp. 282-298). Santa Barbara: Praeger Publishers.
- Lowry, B. (2013, 20 November). Sarah Silverman's Bad Career Move: Being as Dirty as the Guys. *Variety*. Retrieved 30 March, 2015, from <http://variety.com/2013/tv/columns/sarah-silvermans-bad-career-move-being-as-dirty-as-the-guys-1200834142/>
- Lucas, G. (Director). (1999). *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace*. Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox
- Lumet, S. (Director). (1978). *The Wiz*. Los Angeles: Universal Studios
- Lupe Fiasco. (2012a). *Food & Liquor II: The Great American Rap Album Pt. 1*. [CD] New York: Atlantic Records
- Lupe Fiasco. (2012b). Bitch Bad. [Video online]. Retrieved 29 March, 2015, from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3m3t\\_PxiUI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3m3t_PxiUI)

- Lupe Fiasco. (2012c). Behind The Scenes: Lupe Fiasco - Bitch Bad. [Video online]. Retrieved 29 March, 2015, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=26bzaowOQgo>
- Lupe Fiasco. (2012d). Lupe Talks Bitch Bad with RapGenius.com. [Video online]. Retrieved 29 March, 2015, from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_9nxGpjzO70](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_9nxGpjzO70)
- MacFarlane, S. (Creator). (1999). *Family Guy*. [Television programme]. Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox Television
- MacFarlane, S; Barker, M; Weitzman, M. (Creators). (2005). American Dad! [Television programme]. Los Angeles: Fuzzy Door Productions
- Magee, M. (2013, 29 October). Serra High joins blackface controversy. *U-T San Diego*. Retrieved 22 April, 2015, from <http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2013/Oct/29/serra-high-blackface-jamaican-bobsled/>
- Mahar, W. J. (1999). *Behind The Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum American Popular Culture*. Illinois: University of Illinois.
- Manning, H. J. (2013). *Michael Jackson and the Blackface Mask*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Co.
- Marsalis, W. (2007). *From the Plantation to the Penitentiary*. Santa Monica: Blue Note Records/EMI
- Martin, A. (2006, 26 October). Fry That Chicken. *Seeingblack.com*. Retrieved 30 March, 2015, from [http://www.seeingblack.com/article\\_91.shtml](http://www.seeingblack.com/article_91.shtml)
- Massood, P. (2008). *The Spike Lee Reader*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press
- Maurice, A. (2012). From New Deal to No Deal: Blackface Minstrelsy, Bamboozled, and Reality Television. In S. Johnson (Ed.), *Burnt Cork: Traditions and Legacies of Blackface Minstrelsy* (pp. 191-222). Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Mayors Against Illegal Guns. (2013). *Shoot First: "Stand Your Ground" Laws And Their Effect On Violent Crime And The Criminal Justice System* [Think tank report].
- Mazza, E. (2015). Don Lemon Holds A Big N-Word Sign On CNN. *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved 25 June, 2015, from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/06/23/don-lemon-sign\\_n\\_7642624.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/06/23/don-lemon-sign_n_7642624.html)
- McBain, S. (2014). A Dutch court has ruled that "Black Pete" is offensive. How did it take so long?. *The New Statesman*. Retrieved 25 June, 2015, from <http://www.newstatesman.com/world-affairs/2014/07/dutch-court-has-ruled-black-pete-offensive-how-did-it-take-so-long>



- McCarthy-Miller, B. (2012). Live From Studio 6H. [Television series episode]. In T. Fey (Creator). *30 Rock*. New York: National Broadcasting Company
- McFarlin, J. (2014). *Macklemore and the Fear of the Minstrel Show*. *Harvard Journal of Sports and Entertainment Law*. [Online]. Retrieved 09 June, 2015, from <http://harvardjsel.com/2014/02/macklemore-minstrel-show/>
- McGrath, C. (2010). Charlie Chan: A Stereotype and a Hero. *New York Times*. Retrieved from 27 June, 2015, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/11/books/11chan.html>
- McKay, G. (Ed.). (1997). *Yankee Go Home (And Take Me With You)*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press
- McNeil, W. K. (2011). Juba. *Grove Music Online/Oxford Music Online*. Retrieved 29 October, 2013, from <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/A2083956>
- Meyers, J. P. (2010). The World According to Marsalis: Difference and Sameness in Wynton Marsalis's *From the Plantation to the Penitentiary*. *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, Volume 22, Issue 4, 416–435.
- Morris, D. (2015). Iggy Azalea's minstrel show is imploding. *Creative Loafing: Tampa Bay*. Retrieved 31 March, 2015, from <http://cltampa.com/earbuds/archives/2015/01/09/iggy-azaleas-minstrel-show-is-imploding#.VRRrFvuHLktx>
- Morris, S. B. (2003). Bamboozled: Political Parodic Postmodernism. *West Virginia University Philological Papers*, Vol. 50, 67-77.
- Nashrulla, T. (2015). Rachel Dolezal's Brother Says She Warned: "Don't Blow My Cover". *Buzzfeed*. Retrieved 17 June, 2015 from <http://www.buzzfeed.com/tasneemnashrulla/rachel-dolezals-brother-says-she-warned-dont-blow-my-cover#.yrA62OpgY>
- Nathan, H. & Emmett, D. D. (1949). Dixie. *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Jan., 1949), 60-84.
- Nathan, H. (1958). Emmett's Walk-Arounds: Popular Theater in New York. *Civil War History*, vol. 4, no. 3, 213-224.
- Nathan, H. (1962). *Dan Emmett and the Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy*. Oklahoma: Oklahoma University Press
- Nerduary. (2013). Scott Garner Defends The Big Bang Theory. *The Nerduary*. Retrieved 23 February, 2015, from <http://www.nerduary.com/2013/01/scott-garner-defends-big-bang-theory.html>

- New York Daily News. (2015). Un-patriot games: GOP senators' letter to Iran is a treacherous betrayal of the U.S. constitutional system. Retrieved 16 April, 2015, from <http://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/editorial-un-patriot-games-article-1.2143378>
- Notes From the Ghetto Side. (2013, August 30). Trap Rap's Hip Hop Minstrel Show Iggy Azalea and the New Face of Pop-Culture Racism. [Weblog]. <http://theghettoside.wordpress.com/2013/08/30/white-trap-raps-hip-hop-minstrel-show-iggy-azalea-and-the-new-face-of-pop-culture-racism/>
- Nowatzki, R. (2010). *Representing African Americans in Transatlantic Abolitionism and Blackface Minstrelsy*. Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press
- Nussbaum, E. (2013, 31 January). "30 Rock": I Love This Dirty Sitcom. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved 22 March, 2015, from <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/30-rock-i-love-this-dirty-sitcom>
- O'Reilly, B. (Presenter and Creator). (2013). *The O'Reilly Factor*. [Television series episode]. New York: Fox News Channel
- Obama, B. (2015a). *50th Anniversary of the Selma to Montgomery Marches*. Edmund Pettus Bridge, Selma, Alabama. 07 March, 2015.
- Obama, B. (2015b). President Obama's Comments on Baltimore Violence — Video & Transcript. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved 2 March, 2015, from <http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2015/04/28/president-obamas-comments-on-baltimore-violence-video-transcript/>
- Okolosie, L. (2014). Cameron and the morris dancers: a sign of our nationalistic mood. *The Guardian*. Retrieved 22 May, 2015, from <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/oct/14/david-cameron-blacked-up-morris-dancers-nationalistic-englishness-black-people>
- Ollison, R. (2006). Can blackface be far behind?. *The Baltimore Sun*. Retrieved 2 March, 2015, from [http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2006-11-26/news/0611270238\\_1\\_chain-hang-low-minstrel-frosted-lipstick](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2006-11-26/news/0611270238_1_chain-hang-low-minstrel-frosted-lipstick) [date accessed 02/03/2015]
- Ordway, D. M. (2012). University of Florida fraternity members wore blackface to party. *The Orlando Sentinel*. Retrieved 22 April, 2015, from [http://articles.orlandosentinel.com/2012-10-26/news/os-university-florida-fraternity-blackface-20121026\\_1\\_blackface-halloween-party-student-government](http://articles.orlandosentinel.com/2012-10-26/news/os-university-florida-fraternity-blackface-20121026_1_blackface-halloween-party-student-government)
- Ormond, R. (Director). (1950). *Yes Sir, Mr. Bones*. Sigmund Neufeld Productions
- Our World. (2009). Spike Lee On Tyler Perry's Movies Shows! Its Coonery Buffoonery. [Video online]. *YouTube*. Retrieved 30 May, 2015, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ciwhh3fB6vE>

- Oxford Concise English Dictionary. (2006). *Oxford Concise English Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Palmer, J. (2009). Parody and Decorum: Permission to Mock. In S. Lockyer & M. Pickering (ed.) *Beyond a Joke: The Limits of Humour*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 79-97
- Parents Television Council (2015). South Park. Retrieved 30 March, 2015, from <http://www.parentstv.org/ptc/shows/main.asp?shwid=1373>
- Parker, T. & Stone, M. (Writers) (1997). *South Park*. [Television programme]. New York: Comedy Central
- Parker, T. (Director). (1998). Summer Sucks. [Television series episode]. In T. Stone & M. Parker. (Creators). *South Park*. New York: Comedy Central Productions
- Parker, T. (Director). (2005). Free Willzyx. [Television series episode]. In T. Stone & M. Parker. (Creators). *South Park*. New York: Comedy Central Productions
- Parker, T. (Director). (2010). 201. [Television series episode]. In T. Stone & M. Parker. (Creators). *South Park*. New York: Comedy Central Productions
- Parker, T. (Director). (2013). World War Zimmerman. [Television series episode]. In T. Stone & M. Parker. (Creators). *South Park*. New York: Comedy Central Productions
- Paskman, D. & Spaeth, S. (1928). *'Gentlemen, Be Seated!' A Parade of the American Minstrels* (reprinted 1976). New York: General Publishing Company Limited.
- Patton, T. O. (2008). Jim Crow on Fraternity Row: A Study of the Phenomenon of Blackface in the White Southern Fraternal Order. *Visual Communication Quarterly*, Volume 15 July–September 2008, 150-168
- Pengelly, M. (2014). Richard Sherman: 'Racism is alive and active' in NFL and America. *The Guardian*. Retrieved 21 April, 2015, from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/08/richard-sherman-sterling-racism-nfl-nba>
- Perrin, S. (1903). *Dat's the Way to Spell Chicken* [audio recording]. Philadelphia: Victor
- Perry, T. (Creator). (2006). *House of Payne*. [Television programme]. Atlanta: Tyler Perry Studios
- Perry, T. (Creator). (2009a). *Tyler Perry's Meet the Browns*. [Television programme]. Atlanta: Tyler Perry Studios
- Perry, T. (2009b). *Madea Goes to Jail*. Atlanta: Tyler Perry Studios

- Perry, T. (2011a). Tyler Perry Tells Spike Lee To "Go To Hell!" - HipHollywood.com. *Youtube.com*. [Video online] Retrieved 03 December, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YOnY6cxnBI&feature=related>
- Perry, T. (2011b). Tyler Perry On His Critics: "Spike Lee Can Go Straight To Hell". *Box Office Magazine*. Retrieved 03 December, 2014, <http://www.boxofficemagazine.com/news/2011-04-19-tyler-perry-on-his-critics-spike-lee-can-go-straight-to-hell>
- Perry, T. (2012). *Madea's Witness Protection*. Atlanta: Tyler Perry Studios
- Pickering, M. (2008). *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Co.
- Pilkington, E. (2010). Italian-Americans hit back at Jersey Shore's use of the word "guido". *The Guardian*. Retrieved 02 March, 2015, from <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2010/jan/03/mtv-jersey-shore-guidos-italian>
- Pinkster, S. (1998). Stanley Crouch, Our Black American Mencken. *VQR: A National Journal of Literature and Discussion*. Retrieved 02 March, 2015, from <http://www.vqronline.org/essay/stanley-crouch-our-black-american-mencken>
- Pinkster, S. (2003). The New Minstrelism, Or Why So Much In Contemporary Black Culture Went Wrong. *VQR: A National Journal of Literature and Discussion*. Retrieved 02 March, 2015, from <http://www.vqronline.org/essay/new-minstrelism-or-why-so-much-contemporary-black-culture-went-wrong>
- Portwood, J. (2013). What Does a Queer Eye Reunion Mean?. *Out.com*. Retrieved 24 February, 2015, from <http://www.out.com/entertainment/popnography/2013/09/20/queer-eye-straight-guy-bravo-reunion-10-year-anniversary>
- Powell-Morse, A. (2014). The Unofficial 2014 NFL Player Census. *Best Tickets*. Retrieved 21 April, 2015, from <http://www.besttickets.com/blog/nfl-player-census-2014/>
- PR Newswire. (2006). Jibbs Sells One Million Ringtones of Hit Single "Chain Hang Low". *PR Newswire: United Business Media*. Retrieved 02 November, 2011, from <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/jibbs-sells-one-million-ringtones-of-hit-single-chain-hang-low-56605002.html>
- Queen Latifah. (2013). Tyler Perry Explains 'Madea' Character on The Queen Latifah Show. [Video online]. *Youtube.com*. Retrieved 09 June, 2015, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOhP6t0Q86I>
- Queerty. (2009). The Gay Steppin' Fetchits of *He's Just Not That Into You*. *Queerty.com*. Retrieved 21 February, 2015, from <http://www.queerty.com/the-gay-steppin-fetchits-of-hes-just-not-that-into-you-20090205>

- Queerty. (2014). Jesse Tyler Ferguson Responds To Actor Who Called His Character "The Gay Equivalent Of Blackface". *Queerty.com*. Retrieved 24 February, 2015, from <http://www.queerty.com/jesse-tyler-ferguson-responds-to-actor-who-called-his-character-the-gay-equivalent-of-blackface-20141221>
- Rahman, A. (2013). WHITE RAPPER FAQ. *Tumblr*. Retrieved 28 June, 2015, from <http://aamerrahman.tumblr.com/post/53978736048/white-rapper-faq>
- Randolph, J. J. (2009). A Guide to Writing the Dissertation Literature Review. *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation*, Vol 14, No 13, 1-13
- Rap World. (2015). Rap and Hip Hop History. *Rap World*. Retrieved 28 June, 2015, from <http://www.rapworld.com/history/>
- Regester, C. (1994). Stepin Fetchit: The Man, the Image, and the African American Press. *Film History*, Vol. 6, No. 4, 'Audiences and Fans', 502-521
- Reynolds, H. (1928). *Minstrel Memories: The Story of Burnt Cork Minstrelsy in Great Britain from 1836 to 1927*. London: Alston Rivers Ltd
- Rice, E. L. (1909). *1000 Men of Minstrelsy, and One Woman*. (Publisher Unknown)
- Rice, E. L. (1911). *Monarchs of Minstrelsy, from "Daddy" Rice to Date*. New York: Kenny Publishing Company
- Rich, F. (1984). STAGE: 'THE WIZ' BACK ON BROADWAY. *The New York Times*. Retrieved 22 March, 2015, from <http://www.nytimes.com/1984/05/25/theater/stage-the-wiz-back-on-broadway.html>
- Riggs, J. (Director). (2010). Christmas Attack Zone. [Television series episode]. In T. Fey (Creator). *30 Rock*. New York: NBC
- Riis, Thomas. (1989). *Just Before Jazz: Black Musical Theater in New York, 1890 to 1915*. Washington D. C.: Smithsonian Institute
- Rogin, M. (1994). "Democracy and Burnt Cork": The End of Blackface, the Beginning of Civil Rights. *Representations*, No. 46 (Spring, 1994), 1-34
- Rogin, M. (1996). *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrant in the Hollywood Melting Pot*. Los Angeles: University of California Press
- Ronosaurus Rex. (2010, November 10). The Mirror in the Text, Part II: Mise en Abyme. *Ronosaurus Rex: Metablog on Metafiction* [weblog]. Retrieved 31 March, 2015, from <http://ronosaurusrex.com/metablog/2010/11/10/the-mirror-in-the-text-part-ii-mise-en-abyme/>

- Rose, C. (2007). Wynton Marsalis Talks with Charlie Rose | Charlie Rose. [video online]. *Youtube.com*. Retrieved 15 April, 2015, from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=npI1pbA\\_DTA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=npI1pbA_DTA)
- Rosenbaum, J. (2008). *Bamboozled*. [Film review]. *Chicago Reader*. Retrieved 04 June, 2015, from <http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/bamboozled/Film?oid=1048217>
- Rothman, N. (2012). No, *The New York Daily News* Is Not A Conservative Paper – Their Endorsement Of Mitt Romney Is Huge. *Mediaite*. Retrieved 28 June, 2015, from <http://www.mediaite.com/online/no-the-new-york-daily-news-is-not-a-conservative-paper-%E2%80%93-their-endorsement-of-mitt-romney-is-huge/>
- Rotten Tomatoes. (2015). *Bamboozled* [collected film reviews]. Retrieved 05 June, 2015, from <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/bamboozled/>
- Ryan, F. (2015). We wouldn't accept actors blacking up, so why applaud 'cripping up'?. *The Guardian*. Retrieved 15 February, 2015, from <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jan/13/eddie-redmayne-golden-globe-stephen-hawking-disabled-actors-characters>
- Ryan, T. (2006a). *Chicken Noodle Soup*. [Audio recording]. New York: Scilla Hill
- Salsano, S. (Developer). (2009). *Jersey Shore*. [Television programme]. New York: MTV
- Sammond, N. (2015). 30 Rock - Believe in the Stars. [review]. *Critical Commons*. Retrieved 22 March, 2015, from <http://www.criticalcommons.org/Members/sammondn/clips/30-rock-believe-in-the-stars>
- Sanders, R. (Director). (2012). *Snow White and the Huntsman*. Universal City: Universal Pictures
- Sanford, E. S. (2012). Playing Disabled. *Painting on Scars*. Retrieved 15 February, 2015, from <https://paintingonscars.wordpress.com/2012/09/>
- Sanneh, K. (2006). Yo, Do Your Ears Hang Low?. *The New York Times: Music*. Retrieved 08 November, 2011, from [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/17/arts/music/17play.html?\\_r=1&scp=1&sq=jibbs&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/17/arts/music/17play.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=jibbs&st=cse)
- Saussure, F. D. (Translated by Meisel, P. & Saussy, H. ). (1893). *Course in General Linguistics*. New York City: Columbia University Press
- Saxton, A. (1975). Blackface Minstrelsy and Jacksonian Ideology. *American Quarterly*, Vol. 27, Issue 1 (March 1975), 3-28
- Scardino, D. (Director). (2008). Believe in the Stars. [Television series episode]. In T. Fey (Creator) *30 Rock*. New York: NBC

- Shadyac, T. (Director). (1996). *The Nutty Professor*. Universal City: Universal Pictures
- Schlusssel, D. (2009). Is MTV's "Jersey Shore" Anti-Italian?: Where is MTV's "Dearbornistan Jihad" Show?. *Debbie Schlusssel.com*. Retrieved 30 March, 2015, <http://www.debbieschlusssel.com/13545/is-mtvs-jersey-shore-anti-italian-where-is-mtvs-dearbornistan-jihad-show/>
- Schultes, P.; Dorner, V.; Lehner, F. (2013). Leave a Comment! An In-Depth Analysis of User Comments on YouTube. *Wirtschaftsinformatik Proceedings 2013*. Paper 42. Retrieved 22 March, 2015, from <http://aisel.aisnet.org/wi2013/42>
- Schwarzbaum, L. (2000). *Bamboozled*. [Film review]. *Entertainment Weekly*. Retrieved 04 June, 2015, from <http://www.ew.com/article/2000/10/13/movie-review-bamboozled>
- Scott, D. B. (2006). Blackface Minstrels, Black Minstrels, and Their Impact on British Popular Music. In J. Rushton & R Cowgill (eds.) *Europe, Empire and Spectacle in 19th-Century British Music*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 265-280
- Scott, D. M. (2015). February is African American History Month. *Africanamericanhistorymonth.gov*. retrieved 07 March, 2015, from <http://www.africanamericanhistorymonth.gov/about.html>
- Scout Songs. (2015). Do Your Ears Hang Low?. Scout Songs. Retrieved 02 March, 2015, from <http://www.scoutsongs.com/lyrics/earshanglow.html>
- Sharpton, A. (2015). What Ever Happened to Post-Racism?. *Huffington Post*. Retrieved 25 March, 2015, from: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rev-al-sharpton/what-ever-happened-to-pos\\_b\\_6925094.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rev-al-sharpton/what-ever-happened-to-pos_b_6925094.html)
- Shuker, R. (2005). *Popular Music: The Key Concepts* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Oxon: Routledge
- Shugart, H. (1999). Postmodern Irony as Subversive Rhetorical Strategy. *Western Journal of Communication*, Fall, Vol. 63, Issue 4, 433-456
- Silverman, S. (2011). Sarah Silverman: Turning Ignorance into Comedy [radio interview with Terry Gross]. *Fresh Air/NPR*. Retrieved 30 March, 2015, from <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=126165357>
- Smith, C. J. (2013). *The Creolization of American Culture: William Sidney Mount and the Roots of Blackface Minstrelsy*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press
- Southern, E. (1975). Black Musicians and Early Ethiopian Minstrelsy. *The Black Perspective in Music*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Spring, 1975), 77-99
- Speight, J. (1965). *Till Death Do Us Part*. [Television programme]. London: BBC

- Stasi, L. (2009). Italian exec behind "Jersey Shore". *The New York Post*. Retrieved 02 March, 2015, from <http://nypost.com/2009/12/08/italian-exec-behind-jersey-shore/>
- Stiller, B. (2008). *Tropic Thunder*. Universal City: Dreamworks Pictures
- Storey, J. (1998). *An Introduction to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (2nd ed.). Athens: The University of Georgia Press
- Storey, J. (2008). *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction* (5th ed.). London: Routledge
- Storey, J. (2012). *Cultural theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction* (6th ed.). Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd
- Strausbaugh, J. (2006). *Black Like You: Blackface, Whiteface, Insult & Imitation in American Popular Culture*. London: Tarcher Penguin
- Strinati, D. (2004). *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture* (2nd ed.). Oxon: Routledge
- Sun, K. (2014). Jazz and Its Discontents: A Jazz Musician's Reflections on the Cult of Wynton Marsalis. *The Harvard Crimson*. Retrieved 15 April, 2015, from <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2014/2/4/harvard-loves-wynton/>
- Tallack, D. (1991). *Twentieth-Century America: The Intellectual and Cultural Context*. Harlow: Pearson Longman
- Taylor, Y. & Austen, J. (2012). *Darkest America: Black Minstrelsy from Slavery to Hip Hop*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company
- Tharoor, I. (2014). Why the Dutch tradition of blackface ahead of Christmas won't go away. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved 25 July, 2015, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/11/13/why-the-dutch-tradition-of-blackface-at-christmas-wont-go-away/>
- The Smoking Gun. (2013). Meet The Florida Men Who Got Dressed Up As George Zimmerman And Trayvon Martin For Halloween. *The Smoking Gun*. Retrieved 25 April, 2015, from <http://www.thesmokinggun.com/buster/halloween/trayvon-zimmerman-halloween-costumes-657409>
- Theroux, J. & Coogan, S. (2008). *Tropic Thunder: Rain of Madness*. Hollywood: Paramount Home Entertainment
- Thorpe, D. (2003). Is America Ready for Sarah Silverman?. *Forward: The Jewish Daily*. Retrieved 30 March, 2015, from <http://forward.com/articles/9067/is-america-ready-for-sarah-silverman/>



- Timberlake, J. Suit and Tie. *20/20*. New York: RCA
- Tiny Jump. (2010). The Difference Between *Jersey Shore* and a Minstrel Show. *Tinyjump.com*. Retrieved 02 March, 2015, from: <http://tinyjump.com/the-difference-between-jersey-shore-and-a-minstrel-show/>
- Title XLVI (2014). JUSTIFIABLE USE OF FORCE (Florida Statute 776.013) chapter 776
- Top40charts.com. (2007). Crank That (Soulja Boy)' Hits No 1 On The Pop Chart. No 1 In Ringtone Sales & No 1 Digital. *Top40charts.com*. Retrieved 20 November, 2011, from <http://top40charts.com/news.php?nid=35293>
- Touré. (2010). Tina Fey And *30 Rock* Persistently Touch The Third Rail That Is Blackface. *Mediaite*. Retrieved 13 June, 2015, from <http://www.mediaite.com/online/tina-fey-and-30-rock-persistently-touch-the-third-rail-that-is-blackface/>
- Touré (2012). No Such Place as 'Post-Racial' America. *The New York Times* [The Opinion Pages]. Retrieved 30 March, 2015, [http://campaignstops.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/11/08/no-such-place-as-post-racial-america/?\\_r=0](http://campaignstops.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/11/08/no-such-place-as-post-racial-america/?_r=0)
- Tuhkanen, M. (2001). Of Blackface and Paranoid Knowledge: Richard Wright, Jacques Lacan, and the Ambivalence of Black Minstrelsy. *Diacritics*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Summer, 2001), 9-34
- Turteltaub, J. (1993). *Cool Runnings*. Burbank: Walt Disney Pictures
- TVtropes. (2015a). Dramatic Unmask. *TVtropes.com*. Retrieved 31 March, 2015, from <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/DramaticUnmask>
- TVtropes. (2015b). Bullet Dancing. *TVtropes.com*. Retrieved 06 June, 2015, from <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/BulletDancing>
- Urban Dictionary. (2015a). Drink the Kool-Aid [word definition]. *Urban Dictionary*. Retrieved 19 April, 2015, from <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=drink+the+kool-aid>
- Urban Dictionary. (2015b). Throwback [word definition]. *Urban Dictionary*. Retrieved 19 April, 2015, from <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=throwback>
- Urban Dictionary. (2015c). Bay Bay Kids [word definition]. Retrieved 30 March, 2015, from <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=bay+bay+kids>

- Walseth, B. (2007). Wynton Marsalis "From the Plantation to the Penitentiary" (Blue Note) [review]. *Jazz Chicago*. Retrieved 17, April, 2015, from <http://www.jazzchicago.net/reviews/plantpent.html>
- Wayans, K. I. (Director). (2004). *White Chicks*. Culver City: Columbia Pictures
- WebstarVEVO. (2006). Webstar, Young B - Chicken Noodle Soup ft. AG aka The Voice of Harlem. [Video online]. Retrieved 30 March, 2015, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sFav9P54JUA>
- Weeks, A. R. (1898). Oh Lor! gib dis Chile a Chicken [sheet music]. New York: Edward Schubert & Co
- Welles, O. (Director). (1952). *Othello*. Marceau Films/United Artists
- Westhoff, B. (2015). Pop appropriation: why hip-hop loves Eminem but loathes Iggy Azalea. *The Guardian*. Retrieved 01 June, 2015, from <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/feb/11/hip-hop-appropriation-eminem-iggy-azalea>
- Whites Educating Whites. (2013). Casual Racism 101: "Race Changing" and 30 Rock. *Whites Educating Whites*. Retrieved 22 March, 2015, from <http://whiteseducatingwhites.tumblr.com/post/40541785018/casual-racism-101-race-changing-and-30-rock>
- Wilkins, L. (2015). Stop hating on Iggy Azalea's 'blaccent.' She's not hip-hop's real problem. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved 01 June, 2015, from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/02/07/stop-hating-on-iggy-azaleas-blaccent-shes-not-hip-hops-real-problem/>
- Williams, P. J. (1999). Racial Ventriloquism. *The Nation* [online]. Retrieved 24 November, 2012, from <http://www.thenation.com/article/racial-ventriloquism#>
- Williams, T. (Director). (2004). *The N Word: An In-Depth Discussion*. New York: Trio Films/NBC Universal
- Wilson, T. E. (2013). Deaf Sexy: Genre and Disability in *Read My Lips*. In M. E. Mogk(ed.) *Different Bodies: Essays on Disability in film and Television*. North Carolina: MacFarland & Company, 17-27
- Willingham, A. J. (2013). Too far? Blackface Trayvon costume stuns the Internet. *HLN*. Retrieved 25 April, 2015, from <http://www.hlnv.com/slideshow/2013/10/28/halloween-costume-trayvon-martin-blackface-controversy>
- Winfrey, O. (2005). Chappelle's Story. *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. Chicago: Harpo Productions

- Wise, T. (2010). *Colorblind: The Rise of Post-Racial Politics and the Retreat from Racial Equity*. San Francisco: City Lights Publishers
- Wise, T. (2012). Coon Song. In D. Horn & J. Shepherd. *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World, Vol. 8 North American Genres*, Continuum, London, United Kingdom, pp. 155-157.
- Wittke, C. (1930). *Tambo and Bones: A History of the American Minstrel Stage*. Westport: Greenwood Press Publishers
- wyntonmarsalis.org. (2007). *From the Plantation to the Penitentiary* [album introduction]. Retrieved 17 April, 2015, from <http://wyntonmarsalis.org/discography/title/from-the-plantation-to-the-penitentiary>
- Zakos, K. P. (2009). *Racial Satire and Chappelle's Show*. [Masters thesis]. Georgia State University.
- Zaru, D. (2015). Obama uses N-word, says we are 'not cured' of racism. *CNN*. Retrieved 25 June, 2015, from <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/06/22/politics/barack-obama-n-word-race-relations-marc-maron-interview/>
- Zimmerman, A. (2014). The Cultural Crimes of Iggy Azalea. *The Daily Beast*. Retrieved 09 January, 2015, from <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/12/29/the-cultural-crimes-of-iggy-azalea.html>