

# Review of: "Passing Strange: Radical Chic, Race, Sex, Song, and Dance in "Moanin' Low""

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This piece provides a detailed engagement with a very interesting example of interwar performance in which class, race, gender and sexuality were all in play. In the course of the text we are given a good range of contextualisation in relation to the lives and ethnicities of the performers and their milieux. The text would benefit from a more deliberate introduction setting out the aims of the article which, it appears, lie in both understanding the performance – which is not seen as quite so complicated – and the challenges of engaging with it across a landscape of rights, particularly, black rights activism – this latter topic, it is made clear, is decidedly complex. The negative aspects of appropriation of non-white culture are made clear although it should be said that, if this was also very much an assault on bourgeois values, those values that it assaulted were themselves decidedly racist. As a scholar of LGBTQ history I was left feeling that the sexuality issues in the performance were, in contrast, somewhat under-investigated. Was Webb, as a queer man, appropriating heterosexuality? Or was there an element here of scrambling the codes so that in this alternative theatrical world it was not quite clear who was what race, gender or sexual preference? If so this suggests that radical chic was less of an upper-set lifestyle accessory and more of a threat to the oppressive superstructure of America then and since. I should finally say that I do not like the expectation here to score pieces between 0 and 5 stars. My three does not mean it is 'worse than a 4', but simply I mean by the 3 that there are some great things in here but the piece left me wanting more.