

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

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

It was very interesting to read about the early career of Clifton Webb, a person that most people today would know only from his relatively late film career, and not when he was a younger man working as a dancer on Broadway.

The paper is potentially an interesting contribution to various overlapping fields, including the history of ethnicity in the United States and the history of theater.

While the potential is certainly there, the paper needs a considerable amount of redrafting in order to work properly.

The structure in particular needs a lot of attention. Points are raised and dropped and then raised again in a confusing manner. The jumping around from one topic to another needs to be eliminated. There needs to be a much more streamlined narrative, that begins by introducing the reader to the various interlocking issues, and then takes them through particular themes one by one.

The use of Habermas as a framing device does not work at all. It should be dropped altogether. You are trying to say something about audience responses but Habermas is not helping you to do this. You come up here against a major methodological problem. You do not have much access, either direct or indirect, about how audiences actually responded to the performance in question. What you mostly have are some critics' reviews of the time and some social commentary contained therein. This is not enough to do an audience-based study or some kind of Habermas-inspired analysis. You should just focus on trying to show how certain kinds of people, whose writings have happened to be still accessible today, made sense of the show and either praised or criticised it, according to certain kinds of ways of thinking.

You also need to situate the paper in terms of particular bodies of literature and the current debates within them. You need to utilise your material in a way that draws upon those debates and in turn meaningfully contributes to them with a novel set of insights into both the particular issues at hand and the wider debates as these might be informed by your specific empirical material. You need to decide which scholarly fields and which debates you are going to shape your material in light of.

Another way of putting that is that the paper reads very much like you have written it for yourself or for a very Insider group. You have to spell things out for a broader readership that will not know much about the subject area, while retaining a sophisticated enough take on the material in order to be able to convince more specialist readers that you know what you are talking about.

It would be wise towards the start of the paper to have a section that sets out the broader historical context within which the performance was located. You should also set out the various *dramatis personae* that you will be concerned with, giving their biographical information early on in the text, and then later on going into more detail about the particular performance that we can now understand in light of already knowing who these people are.

Also tell the reader about how different scholarly points of view have understood that historical context, and spell out how current debates about that context inform what is at stake in your analysis of this particular material.

I wish you success in reworking what can potentially be a fine contribution to various areas, not just historical ones but also contemporary analysis of race and ethnicity.