

Does the Minstrel Show Have a Place In School Programs?
Here Is a Frank Statement of the Situation Which Will Cause
You to Think.

Innocent Fun or Social Shame?

By The Staff

Urban League of Portland

TRADITIONALLY, minstrel shows have presented the American Negro as a buffoon, an object of levity; as given mainly to such pursuits as crap-shooting, razor-wielding and chicken stealing; as being ultra-lazy, unfaithful to marriage vows, afraid of ghosts, given to unintelligible jabbering and the use of unwieldy words, and endowed with numerous other traits of a negative character.

All qualified students of the current social scene recognize such characterizations as largely responsible for much of the interracial misunderstanding which presently prevails and which weighs heavily against the American Negroes' progress in attaining recognition as full American citizens. The soot-black faces and enormous white mouths of minstrel men are objectionable, as well as the exaggerated so-called Negro dialect. But beyond this, it is the treatment of the Negro as a "thing apart" in our civilization that is most reprehensible. Certainly, the picture presented by minstrel shows and their successors—certain types of radio and motion picture characterizations purported to represent Negroes—is a direct contradiction to the findings of science with regard to race.

This stereotyped version of a non-white minority is, in effect, a device of miseducation when used anywhere. When it is presented in a school setting and under school auspices, this effect is exaggerated. Here, it appears that the school, our foremost educational institution, has given its sanction and approval to such characterizations, and they are likely to be regarded as representing the evaluation which the school places on human personality when that personality is encased in a colored skin.

When the subject is discussed, some persons always raise the question, "Why do Negroes resent the minstrel so?"

They resent the minstrel because the continual presentation of the Negro as less than a human or as a subhuman has been rationalized to permit the color caste patterns which presently exist in our society. For generations, this rationalization has been translated into action which adversely affects the condition of the Negro American and which is con-

Preventive, Not Remedial

Oregon Education Journal:

I am enclosing, herewith, a statement on black face minstrel shows. Every year some school, in or around Portland, presents a minstrel. In most instances, the school and persons who sponsor the minstrel show have no malice toward any group, and in many cases, teachers and principals are deeply hurt when the matter is discussed with them. We have, therefore, prepared this statement which sets forth our main objections to minstrels.

I believe the material contained in this statement is educationally sound and is material with which practically all school people would agree. I, therefore, request your perusal of it. If you agree with the point of view set forth, will you, through your magazine or other appropriate means, help with the circulation of it? If we are able to do this, our efforts will be preventive rather than remedial, and the negative aspect of complaint after or during the presentation of minstrel shows will be removed.

Sincerely,

Edwin C. Berry
Executive Secretary
Urban League of Portland

trary to the best interests of our nation. To Negroes, this has meant humiliation, privation and fear; it has meant denial of jobs, segregated housing, poverty, ill health, poor education, and in many instances, has removed the incentive factor from the consciousness of Negro youth and adults.

The stereotyped characterizations of the Negro personality are widely accepted by uninformed Americans. Most of these persons are not viciously prejudiced, but grossly misinformed. The minstrel buttresses and seems to give credence to this prevalent misinformation.

The black face minstrel shows, like some of the songs of the Stephen Foster era, are no longer acceptable. They are carry-overs from a part of our national history and national shame which all thinking Americans are now trying to rectify.

The Black Face Minstrel:

1. Presents an exaggerated and derogatory stereotype of the American Negro minority.
2. Offends the sensibilities of most Negroes and others who are working toward better racial understanding.
3. Miseducates non-Negro youth.

4. Confuses Negro youth.

5. Defeats, in a measure, the purpose of the schools to educate for participation in a democratic society.

These are among the reasons we believe the minstrel show has no place in the program of our public schools.

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