
Pictures of a Bygone Era

The Syndication of *Amos 'n' Andy*, 1954-66



Doug Battema

Western New England College

This article seeks to raise questions about historiographical practice, challenge the reliance on apparently stable discourses of nation and race within contemporary historiography, and expand understanding of the potential and multiple sites of influence in which television operated during its early years as a popular medium. Drawing on principles articulated by Foucault and de Certeau about the production and generation of knowledge, the article critiques previous historical examinations of *Amos 'n' Andy* for overlooking salient features of the television program's cultural and industrial context, as well as its syndication run from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s. Using information about the syndication of *Amos 'n' Andy* gleaned principally from entertainment and advertising trade journals, the article points out how a more thorough understanding of the local, regional, and international context and of industrial practices may prove essential for recognizing possibilities about the patterns and circulation of cultural beliefs and historiographical norms.

Keywords: *Amos 'n' Andy; historiography; syndication; racial representation*

The images of blacks [that white children] saw in *Amos 'n' Andy* [during its run in syndication] were not simply ones the NAACP found harmful. They were images produced in 1951-1954—before the Brown decision, the Montgomery boycott, the sit-ins, and the freedom rides—pictures from a bygone era, preserved intact and disseminated year in and year out among the youth of a new age.

—Ely (1991, 240)

Historical examinations of television in the 1950s and early 1960s have tended to focus on its remarkably rapid growth—both as an economically powerful industry built by the corporations that dominated radio and as an influential social institution that, for better or worse, insinuated itself into

the homes and leisure habits of millions of Americans at an unprecedented pace. Many such histories implicitly or explicitly center on the articulation of a coherent postwar identity (individual and/or collective) through discourses of nation, as titles of recent texts about this peculiar era suggest: the Lary May (1989) anthology *Recasting America*, Stephanie Coontz's (2000) *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*, George Lipsitz's (1994) *A Rainbow at Midnight: Class and Culture in Cold War America*, and Lynn Spigel's (1992) *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Post War America*.

Yet the ability of television to effect a coherent, collective national identity during the 1950s and early 1960s seems unlikely, since the imagined unifying powers of television did not always exist in practice—but only in discursive (re)constructions sustained by ongoing explorations of historical continuities and ruptures. Such projects, by examining the ways in which national concerns (about gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, class, political affiliation, and the like) provide the framework for studying the television industry and television's social positions, tend to marginalize other potentially complicating factors. Local and/or regional distinctions are often conveniently flattened or overlooked, while sources of evidence provide documentation that appears to speak with authoritative truths, in what Foucault (1972, 6) called "the language of a voice since reduced to silence, its fragile, but possibly decipherable voice," that challenge the proposed unity of the 1950s set forth by previous historiographical practices yet suggest that the multiple histories of the past may be decisively rehabilitated by creating "series" (to crib again from Foucault) that adhere to familiar, well-established patterns by which subaltern histories can be articulated. Each of these marginalized concerns represents unities inadvertently established within contemporary historiographical practice, series that appear to correct for traditional biases but that may instead simply displace such biases.

This article seeks to raise questions about historiographical practice, to challenge the reliance on the discourse of nation particularly during examinations of the 1950s and 1960s (the former as fractious in its own way as the latter), and to expand our understanding of the potential influences that television may have had during its early years by examining the syndication history of the *Amos 'n' Andy* television program during the 1950s and 1960s. *Amos 'n' Andy* represents a limit case, inasmuch as its use of black characters was, if not unique, potentially controversial and might be expected to have sparked substantial discussion among historians and

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among viewers in the 1950s and 1960s. Racial considerations and almost exclusive attention to national network broadcasts (and national organizational opposition to the show), however, have tended to marginalize other, equally critical elements. My exploration draws on the work of Michel Foucault and Michel de Certeau to mount a critique of the historiographical practices driving these reconstructions of the program, to suggest alternative discursive rearticulations of the past, and to indicate a direction for examining the still-unspoken gaps within analyses of *Amos 'n' Andy*. I apply these insights to *Amos 'n' Andy* by, first, reconsidering its position within the broadcast communications industries and, second, rehabilitating some of the discourses surrounding the program while noting its persistent and contradictory presence throughout the 1950s and 1960s. While the specific details of this case help build on academic understandings of *Amos 'n' Andy*'s cultural and industrial significance during this period (important enough on its own, in my opinion), the broader application of such insights is at present more tentative and limited. I also believe, however, that this type of inquiry suggests potential directions for further research and theoretical work.

The Possibilities of History

Foucault (1972), in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, indicated that history is often written as a study of the points of rupture, of discontinuities within human societies that emerge over a period of time. The turn toward a counterhistory of gaps or discontinuities is, in his estimation, liberating and productive. The problem reestablished by this approach (or, rather, these approaches) is not how a single pattern or a single history is written or described, since totalizing histories are unlikely to be produced, but how limits are drawn and defined, how a tradition is separated or demarcated from another. History as a discipline thus concerns itself with defining what constitutes the historical concern or concerns and determining what kind of historical evidence can be mobilized to help account for a given rupture or set of discontinuities. Foucault enumerated three basic roles for rupture within historical analyses: the historian must develop an appropriate periodization that seeks out ruptures, he or she must recognize the process as descriptive rather than prescriptive "and not something that must be eliminated by means of his [*sic*] analysis" (p. 9), and he or she must always attempt to specify the limits of discontinuous practices. Ruptures, as a result, are paradoxical engines of history: they constitute both the fuel and the machinery, the "instrument and [the] object of research" (pp. 8-9). The process of history becomes an articulation of limits rather than a search within given parameters, which Foucault suggested solicits charges of "murdering history" when it is merely discarding a misleading construction

of the sovereignty of human consciousness, the false sense of authority and power that serves as the basis of an authority by which power is exercised to mute relations in the present.

Foucault (1972) proceeded to critique the development of discursive regularities around any given oeuvre, arguing that any unifying concept through which an oeuvre is established and delimited is an interpretive rather than objective concept. We must, he suggested, discard our search within the "manifest discourse" of a historical period for "the repressive presence of what it does not say; and this 'not-said' is a hollow that undermines from within all that is not said" (p. 25). If we interrogate existing unities and envision history as "a population of events in the space of discourse in general" that one then mobilizes, organizes, and structures in a meaningful manner, then we must constantly display an awareness of how "raw" historical materials are produced and rearticulated to create a category of and for analysis (pp. 26-27). A description of discursive events prompts us to question why one statement appears rather than another, in turn leading to a process by which a statement or event is temporarily isolated to illuminate the various relationships in which it exists and then becomes the basis through which the development of these relationships ensues—ensuring that the isolation or removal from history does not remain permanent and enabling the historian's awareness of a discursive formation within which an object becomes intelligible. The danger inherent in such temporary isolation is that it becomes permanent: what was said, what was written, or what was produced is systematically overlooked in favor of more convenient or expedient conjectures about what might have been said, written, or produced.

Discourse, finally, is in Foucault's (1972) words not merely the "slender surface of contact . . . between a reality and a language" but the place in which "one sees the loosening of the embrace . . . of words and things, and the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice" (p. 49) since rules define "the ordering of objects." These rules constitute "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak," a process that extends far beyond simply using signs to designate "things" (pp. 48-49). What Foucault pointed toward is a historical practice that constantly interrogates these rules to elaborate theoretically on them, showing the rough seams and hesitant movements toward different possibilities (both those systematically eschewed by the historian and those that did not emerge or develop historically).

Similarly, de Certeau (1988) contended that "history imposes its law upon the faraway places that it conquers when it fosters the illusion that it is bringing them back to life," instantiating a division between the knowing/known present and the knowable past (p. 36). The historiographical operation, therefore,

is not only one of bringing these “immense dormant sectors of documentation” to life, of giving a voice to silence, or of lending currency to a possibility. It means changing something which had its own definite status and role into *something else* which functions differently. (p. 74)

History ultimately becomes a study of itself as much as of the purported object of study; it is a tactic of colonization that can be mediated only by the awareness of its tactics, its consciousness of the mutations it effects in the past as well as its ramifications for the future, and its reflection on the reasons for its production.

Attempts to put these or similar theories into practice often produce arguments that purport to break consensus histories, yet frequently reproduce similar established patterns that leave intact significant components of these histories. For example, Christopher Anderson's (1994) *Hollywood TV: The Studio System in the Fifties* seeks to reevaluate the relationship between Hollywood film studios and the television industry during the 1950s, arguing that the studios did not collapse as television replaced the cinema as the dominant mode of entertainment but that Hollywood successfully adjusted to the presence of television as a rival industry and cultural phenomenon. Though Anderson's work is excellent, writing against consensus histories while foregrounding the role of discourse and of power in producing historical events and histories of such events, his work also manifests two difficulties evident in contemporary understandings of the 1950s media industries. First, he expended a great deal of energy in opening up potential directions in which the Hollywood studios could have gone with the advent of television, only to foreclose those possibilities by the end of the work. This effective disavowal may leave the consensus history intact: the developments of the 1950s were, if not inevitable, evidently “natural,” and while the route through the 1950s is understood with more depth, the status of the industries in question and of American society at the conclusion of the decade appears little different from their status at the end of a consensus history. Second, he concentrated on the major Hollywood studios and network television industries at the expense of smaller Hollywood production firms and of syndicated television fare. Anderson referred to both, albeit briefly, raising questions as to whether probing these would allow for a more nuanced study of audience practices, industrial logic, and the articulation of local/regional identities within the nation. By recognizing but choosing not to elaborate on localized details in favor of exploring the practices of large firms with national recognition, Anderson's deployment of marginalized sources to support his argument produces a history that re-creates established patterns of research and evidence, a history of power that emanates from the center (or centers) and shapes marginal practices, and a history that discounts these more ephemeral and

inadequately documented practices that produced and circulated series like *Amos 'n' Andy*.

Historiographic Practice and *Amos 'n' Andy*

In line with these observations about the role of the historian and the understanding of historiographical processes, I would like to resituate *Amos 'n' Andy's* position within the immediate postwar era and within the trajectory of media studies. The program must be recognized not simply as a manifestation of racial tensions or a textual collection of and elaboration on preexisting racial practices, in which the salient issues are the NAACP's campaign against the show, the textual content of the program (whether it was racist, what levels of control various groups had in conditioning its production and reception, etc.), and the reaction of black and/or white communities to the program. Without losing sight of these considerations, I seek to imbricate the show within a different political-economic and cultural trajectory that may enable a revised understanding of which audience(s) consumed, and may have been influenced by, this program; the locations within which it circulated; and the practices of reproduction and consumption both by audiences in the 1950s and 1960s and by historians in later years. Attempting to articulate these connections may actually intensify the significance of race in the analysis by arguing that previous histories' focus on racial representations at the national level of distribution inhibits our ability to see how such representations might have circulated locally.

Examinations of *Amos 'n' Andy's* postwar incarnation typically follow a similar pattern: they document the slow decline of the radio version, which fades into the invisible ether along with the rest of the prewar radio networks as television invades the home; they trace the genesis of the television version and the NAACP protests that immediately followed its appearance on the small screen; and they attribute the demise of *Amos 'n' Andy's* network run to pressure arising from said NAACP protests and/or to declining ratings, perhaps mentioning in passing that the program remained available via syndication until the mid-1960s. In essence, they set the parameters of discourse within a narrowed spatial field (tracing the discourses emerging with respect to a national concern) and a constrained temporal field (principally the late 1920s through the early 1950s, though often with substantial development of previous events conditioning the production and reception of *Amos 'n' Andy* and brief allusions to subsequent discourses about the program). These examinations also suggest a thematic field, centering on the racial controversies that erupted in the show's wake, often implying that class can help explain the show's popularity by indicating its quintessentially American middle-class appeal. The

underlying motivation for each is to trace the development of processes of inclusion, exclusion, and (mis)representation. Such interpretive processes fall into the trap Foucault described of attempting to uncover the repressed tensions within what was not said at the expense of uncovering potential connections to what was said, failing to explore other significant “traces” left by the program.

Leonard Archer’s (1973) essay on the show, one of the earliest substantial studies of the program, offers a paradigmatic example of the historiographic approach to examining *Amos ‘n’ Andy*. In 1973, Archer wrote that *Amos ‘n’ Andy*’s producers, “Charles Correll and Freeman Gosden, began preparations for bringing *Amos ‘n’ Andy* to television in 1946. For three years they conducted a search for Black talent to fill the cast” (p. 233). He noted that the show premiered under the sponsorship of the Blatz Brewing Company, only to be challenged immediately by the NAACP; Blatz did not withdraw its sponsorship, however, and the program remained on the air. Opinions from various African American viewers were solicited to determine whether they considered the show a racist affront, with the results generally indicating that it was not.¹ Archer then alluded in some detail to the eruptions of interracial solidarity that emerged within the opposition to the show:

Several organizations joined the NAACP protest against *The Amos ‘n’ Andy* television show. For example, the Eighth Annual Institute of the Michigan Federation of Teachers, Fourth Region, which met in Grand Rapids, Michigan, drew up a resolution against the show. The resolution contained the statement: “. . . a gross and vulgar caricature of the 15,000,000 Negro citizens of this country.” . . . This organization of teachers requested that the local CBS television station, WOOD-TV, WKZO-TV, and the Blatz Brewing Company discontinue presentation of *The Amos ‘n’ Andy Show*. The Catholic Interracial Council also stated editorially that the *Amos ‘n’ Andy* series should be discontinued because the show is harmful to interracial understanding and good will and is offensive to Negro Americans. (p. 240)²

Archer also noted that the program lost the support of WTMJ-TV in Milwaukee (home of the show’s sponsor, Blatz Brewing Co.) not principally because of the NAACP protest but, according to station manager Walter J. Damm, “the station did not consider [*Amos ‘n’ Andy*] up to professional and technical standards” (p. 242). Ultimately, Archer asserted,

The Blatz Brewing Company discontinued its sponsorship of the *Amos ‘n’ Andy Show*, and the series was dropped from the CBS-TV network. As a consequence of the protest campaign, more than ten Black performers lost their employment. The NAACP campaign did not remove the show from the television channels altogether. Local television stations in various parts of the

country continued to telecast the show locally by using the filmed series of the *Amos 'n' Andy Show*. (pp. 243-44)

Archer's history effectively ends here, demonstrating an awareness of the program's syndication without pursuing its uses and implications while simultaneously suggesting a potentially meaningful distinction between the initial national broadcast run and local rebroadcasts of the filmed program.

A decade later, Thomas Cripps (1983) suggested that the *Amos 'n' Andy* television show appeared at a complex moment in (African) American life. Despite small steps toward equal rights such as the legal desegregation of the armed forces and a slight postwar growth in the black middle class, the show was a "comic anachronism that depended for its humor on stereotypical racial traits" and "provided the occasion for blacks to debate, both with CBS and among themselves, the precise nature of racial prejudice" (p. 33). Stepping back historically, Cripps traced divergent opinions about the radio show within black communities and then suggested that the black middle class mounted strong opposition to the television show because of its newfound sense of political efficacy. Moreover, he claimed,

CBS's decision to broadcast a television version of *Amos 'n' Andy* seemed a regressive flaunting of lily-white power in the faces of a formerly vulnerable minority. Moreover, CBS stood alone in its programming preferences, if we may credit a report written by the agent of Hugh Wiley, a writer of black Southern local-color stories. Wiley's agent explained a dry spell that began in 1947 as follows: "Stories dealing with the negro [*sic*] character are, unfortunately impossible to sell," not merely because *Amos 'n' Andy* preempted the field but because of "extreme pressure" from blacks. (p. 35)

In this new, more liberal environment, racial equality seemed possible—and television was positioned as a potential ally in the movement toward integration. Citing the entertainment trade journal *Variety* and the middle-class African American magazine *Ebony*, Cripps explained that

in the three years between 1950 and 1952, the life span of the *Amos 'n' Andy* show, network executives embarked on "a new policy of cultivating the Negro audience"—at least according to the trade papers. When NBC hired a public relations firm to direct a series of seminars intended to lead toward "a more realistic treatment of the Negro on the air and the hiring of more Negro personnel," *Variety* characterized it as part of a "movement." In fact there was something to the story; all manner of memoranda passed among the topmost broadcast executives, urging cooperation with the Urban League, "integration without identification" in casting radio shows, more black material, and "the creation of new program ideas designed to realize" these new goals. (p. 38)

Yet CBS stood in the way of integration, and this potentially racist “creature enjoyed a national premiere on June 28, 1951, impervious to the ineffectual black pressure against the show. . . . At this point CBS seemed to have won the day. Blatz Beer proved to be an eager sponsor,” and the show’s director evidently proved to be an adept television sitcom director, giving the show a stable foundation (p. 40).³ In Cripps’s historical take, CBS’s attempts to deracinate the show and render it a sympathetic, if humorous and stereotyped, portrayal of American middle-class life made it a rousing success, neutralizing much of the NAACP’s opposition and painting the organization as an overly sensitive institution that only succeeded in stalling the careers of black performers (pp. 46-48).⁴ Ultimately, Cripps suggested, the show dropped out of its network slot because of economic pressures and the sponsor’s desire for greater prestige rather than because of the NAACP’s protests or ambivalent portrayals of African Americans:

Blatz’s decision to withdraw from sponsorship at the end of the 1953 season was depicted in the trades not as a defeat at the hands of the NAACP, but as a quest for a higher-class image accomplished by picking up the prestigious *Four Star Playhouse*. The show survived in syndication, often earning solid ratings and audience shares. Far into the 1960s *Amos ‘n’ Andy* played as a “strip,” or daily program, usually in fringe time but occasionally in prime. . . . When it finally expired in major markets it played on in small-time Southern metropolitan areas, remembered not as a vanquished enemy, but almost as a martyr—“one of the alltime major casualties of the radio-to-video transition,” according to *Variety*. (p. 49)

Cripps endnoted his reference to the syndication of *Amos ‘n’ Andy*, indicating that the television program seemed to thrive in the South, West, and smaller markets, while “flopping” in large markets such as New York City, and ultimately sputtered to an end in part because of “the possibility that when *Amos ‘n’ Andy* was opposed by programs that were slanted toward children, the adults in the family overrode the tastes of the young” (endnotes 53-54). As will be elaborated on below, however, there exists some evidence to suggest that children were perhaps the target audience for *Amos ‘n’ Andy* reruns, that the program did fairly well in large markets, and that *Amos ‘n’ Andy* drew substantial audiences in the Midwest and Northeast as well as the South and West.⁵

Finally, though Melvin Patrick Ely’s (1991) analysis of *Amos ‘n’ Andy* concentrated principally on the show’s radio incarnation, he devoted most of his final chapter to exploring the television show. Ely noted that the radio and television rights to the program were acquired by CBS in a talent raid on rival NBC, that the television “series was one of the first to be filmed rather than broadcast live” (perhaps marking the show as low class and

popular in appeal, indicating CBS's prescient view of the show's utility in syndication, and/or enabling the containment of potentially disruptive blackness through editing techniques⁶—lacking much material evidence, it is difficult to do more than speculate), and that CBS remained faithful to the radio show's format, suggesting that the network "had no inclination to tamper with a successful formula" (pp. 203-5). Ely explored the ways in which the black performers and the scripts both replicated and challenged racial stereotypes, suggesting a profound ambiguity within the show's representational strategies, and indicated the problems that CBS faced as a result of changing social mores: network executives were reportedly sensitive to public concerns, having "inherited the desire of the national radio networks to avoid alienating segments of their potential audience" and recognized "black demands for social change [that] had become increasingly persistent and vocal in the 1940s"; the show's representational strategies, therefore, included adopting a middle-class aesthetic in attempting to "arouse only comfortable, friendly feelings among *Amos 'n' Andy's* viewers, white or black" (p. 212).

According to Ely (1991), the show's CBS run met with mixed success. Though it garnered high ratings, it met with immediate opposition from the NAACP, which was holding its national convention at the same time the show made its network debut. While Ely remained sensitive to the "lack of agreement among Afro-Americans that *Amos 'n' Andy* was offensive, and discord even among the show's critics as to how to proceed" (p. 214), the lack of firm opposition from local NAACP chapters and ambivalent reactions to the program at the local level appear secondary to the national organization's criticism and to the visually startling (re)appearance of racial stereotypes on the nation's television screens. The characters, wrote the NAACP's Roy Wilkins, "say to millions of white Americans who know nothing about Negroes, and to millions of white children who are learning about life, that this is the way Negroes are" and put the disparity between portrayals of whites and blacks "before the eyes of [Walter] White, Wilkins, and others who had stopped noticing the radio show years before" (pp. 215-16). Ely seemed to imply that an offending program registered on a national level only because it generated discourses such as the evidently ineffectual exchanges between CBS executive Sig Mickelson and the NAACP's Walter White that represented "a drama of interest-group politics and network responses" (pp. 227-235) in the early 1950s.⁷

Ely (1991) attributed *Amos 'n' Andy's* decline and fall from the network schedule to its biweekly rather than weekly appearance, a practice that "seems to have been a routine one; some other series of the period ran on a similar schedule," which caused its ratings to plummet despite an Emmy nomination (p. 238). This begs the question as to why this factor played a significant role in *Amos 'n' Andy's* decline but not the decline of other

shows; fails to explain adequately why CBS was subsequently able to profit by syndicating the show “to local television stations across the country, each of which lined up its own sponsors”; and ignores CBS’s subsequent consideration of “a virtual carbon copy of *Amos ‘n’ Andy*” that was never produced “not because of black opposition” but because “the new show would cost so much to produce that it could not turn the desired profit” (pp. 238-39). And though Ely described the “unchecked” dispersal of the program in domestic and international syndication, as well as noting its potential impact on children watching the show during school vacations and daytime hours, he avoided examining local sites in which the program appeared for traces of how its presence was fitted in relation to the emerging civil rights movement (p. 240).⁸ The portrayals—anachronistic, as “the popular show thus remained on the small screen until the mid-1960s, serving up the characterizations of the early ‘50s to a whole new generation even as America’s racial landscape changed radically” (p. 8)—did not appear to create dissonance within viewers or to have discernible effects on contemporary race relations or industrial practices. Moreover, Ely contended that the show’s syndication was discontinued by CBS’s fear of “renewed controversy” in an era of “black pride and black power” and of “pirating by film bootleggers”—paradoxically suggesting that the show would be resented and embraced—and suggested that the show was shelved because its value had been fully exhausted (p. 242).⁹

These previous histories are summarized in detail to demonstrate the common gaps that each leaves in examining the show, despite the fact that they represent attempts to examine *Amos ‘n’ Andy* at different historical junctures and in substantially different forms.¹⁰ First, each is concerned principally with *Amos ‘n’ Andy*’s CBS network run, evidently on the twin assumptions that a synchronized national platform was the most influential location for the show and that the presence of relatively readily available discourses on the show (including a national advertising campaign underwritten by a single identifiable sponsor, the NAACP protests, and national press attention) provides the effective limits of historical study. As such, the show’s submersion into syndication would seem to be a less interesting and influential period in its existence.

Such an interpretation, however, overlooks several critical industrial and social factors. To begin with, the Federal Communications Commission station freeze in effect from 1948 through 1952 prevented the show from reaching many suburban and rural areas—as a small handful of potentially lucrative large industrial centers constituted the primary locations for television stations constructed before the freeze. Cripps and Ely contended that *Amos ‘n’ Andy* was produced with an eye toward syndication from the beginning, perhaps demonstrating CBS’s awareness of the freeze’s effect without suggesting how that fact might have influenced the

decision to produce the show or the content of the episodes—a consideration that could affect their textual analyses. The show's disappearance from the national airwaves at the same time that simultaneous nationwide distribution was finally realized is also curious; if consumers in the South and West (where, Ely suggested, reruns were to enjoy their largest audiences) were finally starting to receive television, if *Amos 'n' Andy* had captured the nation's imagination so thoroughly that listeners in the 1930s set their watches by the radio show, and if the NAACP protest had proven ineffective because of divided black opinion, 1953 seems to be the most inopportune time for CBS and Blatz to pull the plug. Moreover, the four-year period prior to the lifting of the Federal Communications Commission freeze was marked by the extinction of most, if not all, of the handful of locally produced programs featuring black performers, such as WCBS-TV's Bob Howard. Since African American viewers were expected to seek out representations of blackness, and since black actors' guilds and other pressure groups were protesting the lack of opportunities for employment, it would seem that CBS would have had clear sailing in encouraging African Americans to purchase televisions, reaching African American audiences, and scoring public relations points.¹¹ Keeping *Amos 'n' Andy* on the air might also have made the network more attractive to stations conscious of soliciting black viewers without alienating whites, thereby facilitating its ability to gain affiliates.¹²

Studies of *Amos 'n' Andy* also tend to ignore the simultaneous presence of *The Beulah Show* on national network television, perhaps undercutting the purported uniqueness of *Amos 'n' Andy* and suggesting an implicit gender bias within historiographical practices—or, perhaps, suggesting that *Amos 'n' Andy* is the more compelling subject of study because its prominent syndicated run allows historians to remember it more clearly (Ely 1991, 255-57).¹³ Finally, if Herman Gray's (1995) assertion that "our contemporary moment continues to be shaped discursively by representations of race and ethnicity that began in the formative years of television" and "is the defining moment with which subsequent representations . . . remain in dialogue" (p. 74),¹⁴ then narrowing the existence of these "formative years" to *Amos 'n' Andy*'s network run inhibits contemporary analyses from being able to trace suggestive links about existing practices to historical ones and necessarily encourages a focus on the first-run appearance of the program.

Each of these histories, secondly, effectively concludes any examination of the radio show at roughly the time that the television show emerges. The progress narrative positing a rapid, wholesale transition from radio to television remains intact with statements such as, "*Amos 'n' Andy* would have faded away quietly with the rest of radio comedy and drama in the 1950s, had the series not been adopted by the new mass medium that supplanted radio" (Ely 1991, 203). de Certeau's (1988) observation about the role of

breakage, of historiographical ruptures, may be recalled here: just as the deceased past is segmented from the living present, so radio's history is segmented from television's by "a selection between what can be *understood* and what must be *forgotten* in order to obtain the representation of a present intelligibility" (p. 4). Thus, the replacement of radio by television as the dominant mode of national culture remains an unquestioned unity around which examinations of *Amos 'n' Andy* are built. Similarly, the salience of the NAACP's protests against the television program appears to pick up where the protests against the radio show, begun in 1931, left off (see, for example, Ely 1991, 193-95)—sustaining the illusion that the 1951 protest movement, like the civil rights campaign that flourished in the 1950s and 1960s, arose spontaneously rather than appearing as peak moments in a series of ongoing efforts. Yet as de Certeau also suggested, repressed and forgotten elements return: the *Amos 'n' Andy* radio program not only remained on CBS network radio during the program's network television run, but sponsors continued to pick up the show until 1960, when CBS dropped its radio soap operas and other fictional programming in favor of a news/personality/public affairs format (CBS Radio bumping all soapers 1960).¹⁵ Moreover, the radio show's popularity appears not to have been profoundly affected by the controversy over the television edition; a 1954 *Sponsor* article remarked that

programming trends this fall will be marked by an intensification of previous developments caused by television, especially at night. Possibly the most noticeable development will be the increased use of strips at night. CBS will have an hour of them from 9:30 to 10:30 p.m. The *Amos 'n' Andy Music Hall* will be on from 9:30 to 9:55 five nights a week. . . . *Amos 'n' Andy* will also remain in [its] half-hour period weekly formats on Friday and Sunday, respectively. (Special facts report 1954, 256)

Thus, the radio program and television program's relationship might be more accurately cast as supplementary than as mutually exclusive, encouraging a more nuanced study of advertisers' approaches to both media—an important adjustment, given that most commercial network television and radio programs were produced by the sponsors rather than the networks at this juncture.

Third, each analysis privileges nationalized discourses about the show at the expense of particular local, regional, or international discourses. Television in the 1950s—like radio in its heyday—was presumed to appeal to a national imagination, and textual analyses of advertisements and programs tend to address how such shows articulated spaces for the American woman or working-class Americans (cf. Spigel 1992; Lipsitz 1994). A person's "opinion about *Amos 'n' Andy* depended less on actual social status than on feelings of security or insecurity about his or her own position, or

that of the race as a whole, *in American society*," suggested Ely (1991, 223, emphasis added)—positing one's own position within a more immediate (local or regional) social environment as curiously less salient than the "actual social status" of black citizens within the United States, subordinating the practices of lived experience to the exigencies of national imagination. Moreover, class is frequently offered as the lens through which racial representations were mediated, an analytical move that produces an evidently contradictory set of conclusions: the black middle class either resented the show as a regressive intervention into social developments or enjoyed it for its deliberately constructed American middle-class appeal, while the black lower classes either rejected it for stifling opportunities for upward mobility or embraced it for portraying a wider range of African American life than was visible in other media programming. Such interpretations, however, depend on the relative stability of class as an explanatory mechanism and do not probe the discursive formation of class norms: "actual social status" is articulated as an objective taxonomic structure through which an individual can be located, and its deployment in histories of the 1950s tends to overlook different local or regional inflections. Such local and regional norms become more complex to rearticulate when concerns about race, gender, and other axes of personal or collective identity become added to the mix.

In sum, each of these valuable historical accounts forecloses the same possibilities for *Amos 'n' Andy* by refusing to see the links that may be made beyond the scope of their respective projects as particularly significant. These lacunae are not unexpected or incomprehensible: these very insightful studies follow well-established and productive patterns for historical work, and the connections they do not attempt to make are likely to be found only in localized historical crevices, if they exist at all. However, such historiographical regularities and the focus on racial discourses should not be used as an alibi for shutting out other connections that may be made between the program and its social, industrial, and political utility. Beginning to scrutinize the postnetwork circulation of *Amos 'n' Andy* and considering other innovative aspects of the program beyond its all-black cast can help us understand not only more about the history of *Amos 'n' Andy* as a cultural phenomenon but about the formation of industry norms and globalization early in television history.

The Syndicated Adventures of *Amos 'n' Andy*

To begin, we must consider the uses to which *Amos 'n' Andy* was put in its postnetwork run and how those uses—or intended uses—may have affected the show's original production. As Ely and others noted, *Amos 'n' Andy* appeared on television in June 1951 as one of the first significant programs

to be shot on film rather than aired live. The program's status as a filmed product may have had an underlying racial motive (ensuring control over black actors) and may have enabled CBS to extract profits from markets in which it did not have an affiliate (or additional profits from markets in which the network did have an affiliate), thus helping the network to consolidate its power during television's formative years. Despite high initial costs, too, the actors were undercompensated for their work: since "the cast had expected a long and profitable network run for the series" (as the network and the show's producers purportedly had, a point that may contradict the suggestion that the program was produced with eventual syndication in mind), they "received only limited residual payments from the syndication of the shows—but not, apparently, because of racial discrimination," as the industry practice of paying out such residuals was in its infancy (Ely 1991, 241). By producing a fairly high-quality aesthetic product by 1950s standards, CBS set itself up to pay out substantial initial costs but realize increasing returns through syndication, amortizing the initial investment. Finally, *Amos 'n' Andy* was occasionally picked up by independent stations, particularly late in the show's syndicated career—thus distributing the risk of any potential backlash among individual stations with little to lose, sponsors wary of centralized NAACP opposition, and the network's syndication subsidiary.

In the early part of the 1950s, the distribution of *Amos 'n' Andy* to individual stations rather than to network affiliates may have allowed the network to profit from areas in which subsequent growth had created potential first-time viewers eager to see the televised version of the popular radio show. By the latter part of the decade, syndication was nearly a \$100 million endeavor critical to the health of the advertising, television, and Hollywood studio industries. An article titled "Syndication Lands the Big Spenders" (1959) indicated the increasing need for television advertising at local and national levels:

Many a brand—despite nation-wide campaigning—can get a shellacking in particular marketing areas from local or regional competitors. . . . Thus in the last few months there's been a parade of major advertisers who have taken syndicated programs in 30 or more markets for the first time. (pp. 29-30)

Syndication allowed advertisers to disseminate messages on a local level, reinforcing the impact of national advertising, while using a proven product with a more narrowly targeted audience than network fare; it also enabled local advertisers to attach their brand names to a product with widespread recognition and potentially allowed national firms to tailor advertising messages to local markets. Furthermore, syndication gave small production companies such as ITC or United Artists TV the opportunity to

provide stations with an alternative to network offerings. These industry practices may take on added significance in the wake of the quiz show scandals, which ruptured the advertising industry's hold on the production of television programming. As such, exploitation of syndication markets was considered less "as an alternative to network" advertising than providing supplementary opportunities "to specialize in supportive campaigns for established brands, with network retaining the spearhead efforts for new products" (p. 50).

In short, ample evidence exists as to the importance of syndication generally during the 1950s and 1960s. Locating the precise position of *Amos 'n' Andy* within the television industry at this time, however, is more complicated. Using *Sponsor*-Telepulse ratings provided by *Sponsor* magazine from 1954 through 1959 as well as *Variety*-Arbitron ratings from the 1950s and 1960s,¹⁶ it is possible to trace roughly the waxing and waning of *Amos 'n' Andy*'s appeal in selected local markets. In my selected sample, *Amos 'n' Andy* first appears as number 6 of the top ten syndicated shows in four to nine markets for February 1954—netting an average rating of 15.4, which placed the sitcom between Westerns *Hopalong Cassidy* (no. 5, with an average rating of 16.0) and *Gene Autry* (no. 7, with an average rating of 15.2). *Amos 'n' Andy* managed a 12.2 rating on CBS's owned-and-operated station in New York, where it aired at 2:00 P.M., and a 16.4 in Los Angeles, where it aired in prime time at 8:00 P.M.—solid ratings given competition from six other stations. The sitcom also netted a 10.0 rating on WBZ-TV in Boston, where it aired at 11:30 P.M.; a 28.3 rating on KOMO-TV in Seattle, where it aired at 8:30 P.M.; and a 10.0 rating on WTOP-TV in Washington, D.C., where it aired at 7:00 P.M. (*Sponsor* 8, no. 8 [19 April 1954]: 116-17). The program remained among the top ten shows over the next few months, with its ratings and ranking fluctuating slightly despite the show's expansion to Detroit, St. Louis, and San Francisco.¹⁷

In August 1954, however, the show rocketed to the number 1 position in the top ten shows in four to nine markets with a 17.9 average rating, likely on the strength of a 44.8 rating on WDSU-TV in the two-station New Orleans market—suggesting the show's potential popularity among Southern viewers.¹⁸ Its ratings grew the following month to an average of 18.1, though its ranking among the top ten shows in four to nine markets slipped to number 6 (evidently as a result of a September boom in the syndication market).¹⁹ Shortly thereafter, in November 1954, *Amos 'n' Andy* emerged for the first time into the listing of top ten shows in ten or more markets, slipping into the number 10 slot with an average rating of 16.3. Stations in Buffalo, New York (WGR-TV, 7:00 P.M., 19.3 rating); Columbus, Ohio (WTVN, 7:30 P.M., 19.9 rating); and Birmingham, Alabama (WBRC-TV, 6:00 P.M., 21.5 rating), joined New Orleans (WDSU-TV, 9:30 P.M., 46.8 rating) in propelling the program's growth. The presence of Buffalo and Milwaukee (WTVW,

9:30 P.M., 11.8 rating) among the cities in which *Amos 'n' Andy* enjoyed syndicated success suggests, contra Ely's assertion, that viewers of the program were not necessarily residents of the South and West.²⁰ Such pronounced success was evidently short lived, however: ratings for the next three months indicated that *Amos 'n' Andy* did not make the top ten for either four to nine or ten or more markets.²¹

Sponsor's ratings data indicate that the program enjoyed its widest syndication success from June 1955 through September 1956 (see the appendix). During this fifteen-month period, *Amos 'n' Andy* appeared among the top ten in four to nine markets nationwide six times (ranking no. 1 twice, with average ratings of 21.4 and 21.2, and ranking no. 2 three times, with average ratings of 16.1, 16.8, and 16.0) and among the top ten in ten or more markets nationwide nine times (with its highest ranking at no. 2 in April 1956 with a 20.4 rating).²² After this time, however, *Amos 'n' Andy* appeared in the top ten syndicated programs only once more, managing a number 10 ranking among the top ten programs in four to nine markets in March 1958 with an average rating of 13.7. The breakdown of stations carrying *Amos 'n' Andy* indicates several apparent "firsts" for the sitcom during the mid-1950s: WPIX, an independent station, rather than WCBS-TV, a network owned and operated, carried the program in New York City (garnering a 9.8 rating in a 6:30 P.M. slot); the show began between 5:00 P.M. and 7:00 P.M. in every market except New Orleans, where it showed at 9:00 A.M. (to a 12.7 rating); and the show's highest ratings were in Baltimore, Atlanta, Detroit, Boston, and Cleveland—not necessarily in Southern markets, such as New Orleans, Memphis, Birmingham, or Charlotte, or in Western markets, such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, or Seattle (all of which had appeared as locations in which *Amos 'n' Andy* had achieved high ratings in previous months).²³

Additional research in *Variety* also reveals some interesting aspects to the program's syndicated circulation. WCBS-TV in New York, for instance, briefly carried the program as a sustaining feature (i.e., without advertiser support) in April 1954—though the program was moved from its time slot at 2 P.M. on Sundays to 10:30 P.M. on Saturdays, likely a rather unattractive location on the schedule ("A&A" client exiting 1954). Syndication figures published by *Variety* in 1959 indicated that *Amos 'n' Andy*—though clearly waning and appearing less frequently among the top ten syndicated programs than in previous years—still periodically drew significant numbers of viewers not only in Memphis, Knoxville, Charlotte, and other Southern locales but in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Columbus, Ohio; Detroit, Michigan; and even Anchorage, Alaska.²⁴

This kind of purely statistical analysis, while offering a rough indication of where *Amos 'n' Andy* appeared, illuminates little about who watched the programs or how the show was situated vis-à-vis other contemporary

events. Fortunately, other information gathered by *Sponsor* provides occasional glimpses into who watched the syndicated programs, demographically speaking. An audience composition survey from April 1956, released in July 1956, suggested that the primary viewers of *Amos 'n' Andy* were women: for every one hundred homes tuned in to *Amos 'n' Andy*, there were eighty-three women, seventy-two men, thirty-seven children, and sixteen teens attending to the show (Audience composition figures 1956, sec. 2, "Fall Facts Basics"). Similar data released in January 1957 suggested that in November 1956, for every one hundred homes tuned in to *Amos 'n' Andy*, there were seventy-nine women, seventy-three men, thirty-six children, and eleven teens watching the show (Spot television basics 1957). Part of this pattern may be related to when the show was typically inserted into local program schedules; though *Amos 'n' Andy* appeared in early prime time in some markets, it was frequently aired during the daytime. Situation comedies in general apparently thrived during daytime hours, according to *Variety*—a factor perhaps related to the conception of the daytime audience as malleable and feminized, accounting for its willingness to view a sitcom even in its "umpteenth repeat in a market, without any apparent slackening in [the program's] draw as daytime attractions" (Television's funny money 1960, 31).

Such audience breakdowns and programming patterns, combined with the evident consciousness within media industries of the needs and desires of different segments of the potential viewing audience, may suggest that the hypothesized "mass" audience that consensus history posits as the television industry's target was not conceived of as a unitary, homogeneous, and docile entity but instead was multiple, heterogeneous, and elusive—particularly at the local level. Given the ability of individual stations to tailor their selection of syndicated television films to their particular audiences, it is possible that *Amos 'n' Andy* (along with other syndicated programming) perhaps represented the capacity for a kind of narrowcasting, particularly given its apparent popularity among women and children (which may be either a cause or an effect of its appearance during the day in some markets) and its relatively strong ratings in Southern markets.

Yet this demographic information cannot be understood as a transparent, objective collection of data. Characterizing the audience for *Amos 'n' Andy* as principally women and children might have been a tactical maneuver on the part of CBS Films, Inc., to assist in the program's sale. Though the information is broken down and presented along the axes of age and gender, there is no discussion of the class or racial composition of the audience in these data—a profoundly complicating factor, since our understanding of the reception of *Amos 'n' Andy* would likely be quite different if the program's audience were predominantly African American or white, predominantly upper class or lower class. Given industry norms at the time of

syndication, coupled with the efforts of some Southern stations to segregate the television screen (see, for instance, Classen 2000), it seems likely that black television viewers' habits were at best considered less important and at worst overlooked completely. Simply put, the audience produced by such measurement systems may have seemed clearly defined as white and middle class but been composed of a far wider range of viewers. But the categories of race and class remain critical ones to address: given that those scrutinizing the data might have presumed a predominantly white audience, what implications might further erasing blackness—intentionally or otherwise—pose in the case of *Amos 'n' Andy's* syndication? What role could class have played in the audience composition for the data collected by *Sponsor* and *Variety*? Absent this information, it is impossible for either the sponsor and station during the 1950s and 1960s or the historiographer in the present day to draw many firm conclusions about who watched *Amos 'n' Andy* and how. If syndicated airings of *Amos 'n' Andy* managed to articulate meaningful, localized spaces for African American and/or white viewers, and/or for members of a particular socioeconomic class or set of classes, then relying on ratings data that conceal this information may result in problematic interpretations.

How, then, might we start to get beyond the highly restrictive parameters offered by relying on these ratings data or to prize open the meanings such data might have effected at the time? One possibility is to examine other contextual elements. For example, advertisements placed in *Sponsor* by individual stations and by CBS Films, Inc., suggest ways in which the show could be framed by the industry for eventual viewer consumption. WMAR-TV (Baltimore) solicited participating sponsorships from advertisers in late 1956 for a "hilarious comedy series for the entire family: Amos 'n [sic] Andy," observing that "the amusing antics of Amos, Andy, Kingfish, and Sapphire, Harlem's most beloved characters, garner huge audiences for advertisers, because the comedies are designed to appeal to the entire family" (*Sponsor* 10, no. 23 [3 November 1956]: 4; also 10, no. 31 [29 December 1956]: 78). CBS Television Film Sales, Inc., attempted to cash in on the show's 1956 success by running a two-page ad spread hawking the "fastest-moving comedy team in syndication" and informing potential clients that

Amos 'n' Andy have appear[ed] in *more than 200 markets to date . . .* and they're still going strong, growing stronger! Daytime or nighttime, weekday or weekend, first-run or re-run—regardless of market size or program competition—the 78 Amos 'n' Andy half-hours now completed consistently draw top ratings in their time period.

The ad also listed a number of "satisfied sponsors"—"Food Fair, Sav-on Drugs, Sears Roebuck, Sinclair Dealers, Safeway, Tri-State Motors are just a

few of the important local and regional advertisers currently sponsoring *Amos 'n' Andy*" (*Sponsor* 10, no. 11 [28 May 1956]: 22-23). The apparent breadth and variety of advertisers backing the program, as well as its suitability for the entire family, suggest a universal appeal that perhaps undermines the earlier criticisms of the program's potentially harmful or controversial content. The articulation of a satisfied and complacent audience within these advertisements seems as structured around the absence of racial and class characteristics as around the presence of presumably beneficial elements (the "entire family," presumably nuclear).

Focusing on statistics and industrial discourses alone, however, cannot suffice—since decisions within the media industries are necessarily made in implicit or explicit dialogue with the surrounding culture. Performing a social or cultural analysis of *Amos 'n' Andy* involves trying to assess the conditions in which the program could be made intelligible by viewers (rather than simply for them) and how it might have been articulated with or disarticulated from the concerns of the civil rights movement or the cold war, both of which intensified after the show's network run. Advertisements and ratings for the program do not necessarily provide substantial information about how a program was interpreted, though it is possible to infer a marked decrease in the quantity and prominence of such ads. But it is these interpretations that matter, perhaps above all, to assessing the program's impact on race relations—and traditional historiographic methodology has shed little light on that impact, limited as it is by its focus on national discourse and on a highly constrained period. Though Ely has critiqued the show for conveying, wholesale, static "pictures of a bygone era" to a world in which racial dynamics were becoming less uncertain, it would be useful to assess how those pictures were interpreted in a domestic American context: Were they vehicles for American nostalgia? Were they read in relation to other domestic situation comedies of the era (*The Honey-mooners* or *I Love Lucy*, for instance)? Were they understood as ironic or satiric commentary when juxtaposed with images of civil rights protest marches and eruptions of racially motivated violence on the evening news? How did the understanding of this program vary, suggesting local or regional inflections on the evidently unitary "domestic American context"?

In the hopes of fleshing out some of the local or regional discourses about the program in syndication, I scrutinized a small sample of prominent newspapers for references to *Amos 'n' Andy* during months in which *Sponsor-Telepulse* ratings suggested substantial viewership of the program, hoping to find announcements of the program's initial appearance in the area, advertisements for upcoming episodes or stations on which the program aired, columns referring to the program, or perhaps op-ed pieces connecting *Amos 'n' Andy* to the growing civil rights movement. However, my efforts were rather fruitless: the *San Francisco Chronicle* from May 1954

informed me only that *Amos 'n' Andy* appeared every Thursday night at 7:30 on station KPIX, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* from 1-14 January 1956 contained merely two brief plot synopses in the Friday television schedule,²⁵ and the *Atlanta Constitution* for April 1954, August 1955, and October 1955 contained no references to *Amos 'n' Andy*, even in television listings (despite its presence in *Sponsor-Telepulse* ratings). The *Constitution's* television listings for September 1963 and September 1964 did indicate that the program ran on WAGA-TV, channel 5, at 6:30 P.M. on weeknights but contained little additional information about the show.²⁶ In short, there appeared to be little attention given to *Amos 'n' Andy* reruns—few discussions of its appearance as a part of everyday life, even among advertising discourse in the mainstream press—in conveniently accessible public discourse. Of course, my sample size was extremely small and limited, and it may be that further research will uncover more significant discussion about the syndicated appearance of *Amos 'n' Andy* in any given local area than I have yet found.²⁷ Presumably, the stations that aired the program promoted it with television advertisements and perhaps billboards, flyers, and/or signs; however, these modes of communication are inaccessible given the parameters of the present study. Organizations that may have agitated either for or against the appearance of *Amos 'n' Andy* reruns, as well as local stations that aired the program, may also have records or archives detailing how the program was received by the community and/or what factors determined whether to purchase rights to the show (or to allow a contract for syndication rights to expire).

A more productive endeavor came in attempting to trace the controversy that erupted in 1964 Chicago, when an independent station, WCIU, decided to begin airing *Amos 'n' Andy* reruns in an attempt to build a local audience. Though such a high-profile, nationally publicized moment represents an atypical example of *Amos 'n' Andy's* syndicated history, offering a peg to which we should not attribute inordinate significance, it is a convenient example that can offer some insights into the cultural discourses enabled by the program's presence in local television. The *Chicago Defender*, not surprisingly, lambasted WCIU for its decision, contending that a "flood of protests are crystallizing into an organized movement to stop the televising of the series which depicts Negroes in an 'uncomplimentary light' "; the paper also quoted several community activists who labeled the program an anachronism that may have had a place in America's social history at one time but "that its place is there—in history—and not on the present day TV screens" (*Amos 'n' Andy? Chicago's upset 1964*, 1). *Christian Century* weighed in on the event by suggesting that "most white Americans and some Negro Americans find [the problem with *Amos 'n' Andy*] too subtle for their comprehension" and could not "see the connection between the oppression of the Negro in American society and the entertainment world's

habitual portrayal of the Negro in menial or low-comedy roles"; the stereotypes about African Americans manifest in the program "create an atmosphere which seriously handicaps the Negro's struggle for social and civil justice," "assaults his personality and increases his anxiety; it established in white minds barriers which exclude all Negroes, even those who in no way resemble the stereotype" (Eliminate the racial slur 1964, 757). The *New York Times* noted simply that "'Amos 'n' Andy' returned to Chicago television last night amid protests from Negro civil rights spokesmen. . . . There were no demonstrations at the station when the evening show went on the air. The reruns will be shown twice a week" (Chicago station begins 1964, 13). *Variety* did not take a stand about whether the program should be re-aired but noted that local columnists Mike Royko of the *Daily News* and Irv Kupcinet of the *Sun-Times* had opined against the show as detrimental in the contemporary racial climate. *Variety* also pointed out that *Amos 'n' Andy* had aired on WGN-TV in Chicago just two years before, evidently to little protest, and quoted WCIU's president, John Wiegel, defending the program's characterization of African Americans as "lovable and human. They live well, in nice houses, and they're good citizens. Also this is the first program on television in which the Negro gets an opportunity for equal treatment and for acting jobs" ("Amos 'n' Andy" [13th time 'round] 1964, 50).

Yet the *Chicago Daily Tribune* had little to say about the show's reappearance in its city, noting only that "Amos 'n' Andy, who returned to Chicago television by way of WCIU, channel 26, evoked few calls yesterday despite advance protests from integration leaders"; the *Tribune* also quoted Wiegel as stating that

we received a total of eight telephone calls yesterday. . . . The reaction of the callers was divided between those for and against showing this filmed series. . . . I feel that Amos 'n' Andy can do more for their cause than all the sitdowns and demonstrations. The acceptance of the show by Negroes shows how little influence the leaders of integration groups have with their rank-and-file members. (Amos 'n' Andy return 1964, 1A)

The paper had nothing else to say about the show's reappearance, beyond listing its location in the daily television schedule, for the remainder of that month. The *Defender's* letters column, "Let the People Speak," demonstrated widely divergent opinions about the show's reemergence, with one letter indicating that "200 Protest Amos 'n' Andy TV Show via Signed Petition" and another adjoining letter indicating that "Reader Has No 'Beef' with Amos 'n' Andy" (The people speak 1964, 9).

Such isolated moments of commentary were rare and atypical, however; it remains unclear exactly when the program was discontinued by WCIU,

since neither the *Tribune* nor the *Defender* mentioned its demise that year. Still, these bits of discourse are useful for identifying other potential sites of information about how *Amos 'n' Andy* was circulated in syndication. Local television station archives or records may still exist indicating whether they carried the show and what the community's reaction might have been. Local NAACP chapters may have carried records about their members' reactions to the program, while local newspapers might have helped to prepare the way for *Amos 'n' Andy* through advertisements for the show and television columns. The show's apparent popularity among women and children also suggests that specialized kids' magazines and women's magazines might shed some light on how the show was interpreted, while records kept by local or regional advertisers such as Food Fair, Fidelity Federal & Security Life, and Kroeger Foods²⁸ could indicate why they believed the show would reflect positively on their products during this turbulent period in American race relations.

Finally, locating information about the show's role within an international context proved even more difficult. Aside from the program's sale to the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1954—a move that, predictably, earned the wrath of the NAACP (B.B.C. gets rights to "Amos 'n' Andy" 1954, 47; "Amos 'n' Andy" on B.B.C. 1954, 19)—there was little discussion in the U.S. trade or popular press about the show's overseas distribution. Despite the *Defender's* claim that the primary outlet for *Amos 'n' Andy* in the United States was "on television outlets in southern states of the U.S. Even when there was no sponsor available for northern outlets the Dixie stations continued to run the repeat films" (NAACP asks Britain 1954, 18), the program was successfully marketed to several other countries and unsuccessfully hawked to others. *Amos 'n' Andy* elicited mixed reactions from British audiences (*Amos 'n' Andy* in Britain 1954, 35) and was available to Canadian viewers—ultimately provoking the president of the Canadian Pacific Union of Sleeping Car Porters to decry revivals of "discarded and dated" minstrel shows sparked by the television program (*Negro jars brotherhood fete* 1956, 1). *Amos 'n' Andy* cocreator Freeman Gosden also discussed the possibility of circulating the television show in Italy (Gosden sets Brit. 1954, 32), though apparently this effort was unsuccessful,²⁹ and the show was among the first set of U.S. programs sold to Australia (*Aussies on U.S. Telepix* 1956, 42) as that country geared up to begin telecasting in 1956.

Moreover, at a time when U.S. media products were beginning to be disseminated to all corners of the globe as part of the twinned effort to contain communism and to open up foreign markets, it would be useful to know how *Amos 'n' Andy* served as a cultural ambassador and how it was marketed to and received by non-European markets—especially those that might have read its episodes as typical of colonialist discourse. The television industry was certainly aware of the promise syndication held,³⁰ yet

other than Ely's (1991, 240) reference to the show's appearance in "Australia, Bermuda, Kenya, and western Nigeria," there is little evidence about international reaction to the program readily available to the U.S. scholar. Moreover, Ely's statement appears to be at least partly inaccurate: though there is some corroborating evidence to suggest that Kenya and western Nigeria initially purchased the rights to the show, despite firm opposition from the NAACP and the pointed observation that "the [United States Information Agency], which is interested in the United States image abroad, declined to comment on the development," *Amos 'n' Andy* was barred by the Kenyan government less than two weeks after the sale (Adams 1963, 49; see also Kenya bans "Amos" 1963, 25). According to R. Achiend Oneko, minister of information, broadcasting, and tourism, "the language in the show was well below that of the average American Negro. Since this would be the first impression many of Kenya's people received about life of the Negro in America, it could be 'quite misleading' " ("Amos 'n' Andy" show banned 1963, 53). Even the possibility that the United States Information Agency might be concerned about the portrayal of African Americans abroad, particularly in politically "unstable" Third World countries where the communist threat was considered significant, suggests that *Amos 'n' Andy's* international distribution might produce a useful supplement to contemporary understanding of America's global media presence.

Conclusion

Recent scholarship, especially that structured around Foucauldian genealogical principles or informed by poststructuralism, has often explicitly eschewed overarching master narratives and sought to draw evidence from overlooked, marginalized sources to write counterhistories that require us to confront and to challenge consistently our methods of creating and disseminating knowledge. But the apparent boundaries of nation, of racial identity, and of other taxonomic or demographic categorizations continue to structure, often unconsciously, the boundaries of research and intellectual inquiry (my own included). Continuing to characterize *Amos 'n' Andy* as a uniquely American phenomenon fails to acknowledge fully the range of industrial, local, regional, and international contexts in which the program circulated and on which the discourse of nation relies for definition. Conducting a thorough examination of *Amos 'n' Andy* also cannot stop with the end of the program's radio or television days, nor can it take its racial content as the given limits of inquiry. Moreover, as the data from *Variety* and *Sponsor* suggest, the knowledge produced about the reception context of and audiences for *Amos 'n' Andy* during the period of its widest circulation erased the very categories of nation and race that have motivated most previous examinations of the program—rendering our understandings of

Amos 'n' Andy and its impact more tenuous than they may seem at first glance.

The limited and limiting definitions of race and of nation, in particular, that we often take for granted in delimiting historiographic practices must be more thoroughly and consistently interrogated. Should we fail to do so, to paraphrase and resituate Ely's eloquent language from the epigraph, much of our historical awareness and our contemporary historiographical practices predicated on knowledge previously generated may become anachronisms, mere pictures from a bygone era, preserved intact and disseminated year in and year out among the citizens, students, and scholars of a new age.

APPENDIX
Ratings Data Obtained from Trade Journals

Issue Volume and Number	Date	Page Range
Sponsor magazine ^a		
Volume 8		
8	19 April 1954	116-17
11	31 May 1954	44-45
12	14 June 1954	74-75
14	12 July 1954	52-53
16	9 August 1954	56-57
18	6 September 1954	56-57
20	4 October 1954	52-53
22	1 November 1954	74-75
24 ^b	29 November 1954	58-59
26	27 December 1954	50-51
Volume 9		
2 ^b	24 January 1955	58-59
4 ^b	21 February 1955	52-53
6 ^b	21 March 1955	48-49
20	3 October 1955	50-51
22	31 October 1955	58-59
24	28 November 1955	44-45
26	26 December 1955	68-69
Volume 10		
2	23 January 1956	96-97
3	6 February 1956	46-47
5	5 March 1956	90-91
7	2 April 1956	66-67
9	30 April 1956	78-79
11	28 May 1956	44-45
13	25 June 1956	44-45
15	23 July 1956	54-55
17	20 August 1956	58-59

(continued)

APPENDIX (continued)

Issue Volume and Number	Date	Page Range
19	17 September 1956	54-55
22	27 October 1956	88-89
27 ^b	1 December 1956	66-67
Volume 11		
2 ^b	12 January 1957	14-15
8 ^b	23 February 1957	56-57
12 ^b	23 March 1957	54-55
16 ^b	20 April 1957	50-51
18 ^b	4 May 1957	50-51
23 ^b	8 June 1957	70-71
28 ^b	13 July 1957	56-57
32 ^b	10 August 1957	50-51
36 ^b	7 September 1957	52-53
40 ^b	5 October 1957	54-55
45 ^b	9 November 1957	48-49
49 ^b	7 December 1957	50-51
Volume 12		
3 ^b	18 January 1958	52-53
8 ^b	22 February 1958	46-47
10 ^b	8 March 1958	54-55
13 ^b	29 March 1958	62-63
18	3 May 1958	44-45
22 ^b	31 May 1958	52-53
26 ^b	28 June 1958	44-45
Volume 13		
2 ^b	10 January 1959	52-53
8 ^b	21 February 1959	78-79
11 ^b	14 March 1959	54-55
15 ^b	11 April 1959	64-65
19 ^b	9 May 1959	50-51
24 ^b	13 June 1959	46-47
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- a. Issues are *Sponsor* magazine's *Sponsor-Telepulse* ratings of top-spot film shows (the chart covers half-hour syndicated film programs specially made for TV).
- b. Entries are those in which *Amos 'n' Andy* did not appear in either the listing of top ten shows in ten or more markets or the listing of top ten shows in four to nine markets.
- c. Issues containing the "Variety City-by-City Syndicated and National Spot Film Chart," alternatively titled "Variety-ARB City-by-City Syndicated and National Spot Film Chart" or "Variety-Telepulse City-by-City Program Chart."

Notes

1. See especially Archer's (1973) reproduction of results from a survey of "365 Negro adults" in 1951 (p. 241) and qualified support for the show expressed by *Pittsburgh Courier* columnist Billy Rowe (p. 235).

2. Archer (1973) cited *The Worker* (23 November 1951, 30) as his source for this bit of information; he also noted that despite the program's top-ten rating among viewers, the "NAACP continued its protest and it gained strength through the cooperation of labor groups, church and civic groups" (p. 241) (Archer's source is the *Pittsburgh Courier*, 18 August 1951, 19).

3. Cripps (1983) used *Variety* and the African American newspaper the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, as well as personal interviews, for his information.

4. Cripps (1983) asserted,

As though challenging the NAACP, every incident, character, and set contributed to a touching domestic drama that was anything but an exploitation of black life. Indeed, the most persistently nettling quality of the program in the minds of black activists was not in the substance of plot or character but mainly in the survival of a stylized Negro dialect. Nevertheless, it often seemed balanced or disarmed by the middle-class accents that marked many of the shows. (p. 46)

He added, "Every setting, prop, and gesture reaffirmed the form and substance of middle-class life. . . . The rooms are jammed with the same icons of conventionality that have dressed the sets of all the programs in the series" (p. 47).

5. A full-page ad in *Sponsor* (4 April 1959, 3) for filmed versions of *The Burns and Allen Show* compared the program to other top syndicated comedies. The fifth highest rated comedy in syndication, according to data taken from *Television Age*, was *Amos 'n' Andy*, which, the data indicated, attracted eighty-seven children, forty-six women, and thirty-nine men per one hundred homes viewing the show. The eighty-seven children viewers per one hundred homes was clearly the highest of the shows listed, well ahead of *The Honeymooners* (sixty-five children viewers per one hundred

homes). While these data may not necessarily contradict Cripps's assertion that adult tastes won out over children's, they suggest that children may have been avid watchers of *Amos 'n' Andy's* comedy.

6. Ely (1991) wrote, "CBS, having chosen the cast for its ability to replicate the radio show, wanted its new black principal actors *not to interpret their roles so much as deliver performances as close as possible to those of Gosden and Correll*" (p. 206). The threat of black autonomy, the potential for a challenge to white authority, was clamped down on in the television series by encouraging black actors not to disrupt established representational patterns—something that a filmed broadcast, rather than a live one, could guarantee. Ely's references to tension on the set arising from Gosden's coaching of the black performers might suggest the salience of my point.

7. Ely (1991) added that

the struggle against *Amos 'n' Andy* in 1951 amounted to a spirited protest lodged by some prominent elements of a ten-percent minority of the American population, imperfectly supported by a small, besieged cohort of white liberals, against a background of wide-spread but inchoate grumbling among ordinary Afro-Americans [and that this protest] won little attention in the white press and less than the [NAACP] must have hoped for even in the major black weeklies. (p. 237)

Thus, this accounted in part for the lack of significant critical public discourse about the program. If such discourses were so marginalized, however, it is appropriate to ask why Ely devoted most of his chapter to the tensions between the NAACP and CBS rather than exploring the ways in which the program was used and by whom.

8. Ely (1991) also stated, apparently erroneously, that the series appeared in Kenya and western Nigeria, an assertion contradicted by the *New York Times* 1966 "obituary" for the television show (Adams 1966, 23).

9. Again, it is curious that Ely (1991) did not examine the context of reception or recirculation of the video images. If, as he noted, "the shows had been circulating [in syndication] for a period that would have been remarkable even for a former network hit with two or three times as many episodes available" (p. 242), it would seem crucial to understand why the show became and remained so popular.

10. To clarify, Archer's (1973) analysis is a chapter in a book surveying the appearance of blackness in various public sites and scrutinizing NAACP opposition to such presentations, Cripps's (1983) analysis appears as part of an anthology about American history and television, and Ely's (1991) analysis composes the final chapter of his book about *Amos 'n' Andy* as an American cultural phenomenon. Each takes a slightly different approach to the material and provides slightly different interpretations as a result, but on the whole their conclusions seem remarkably similar given the eighteen-year time span between publication—in part, I believe, because they adhere to established historiographic patterns. These treatments are not isolated examples, either: discussions of *Amos 'n' Andy* by Melbourne S. Cummings (1988), Jannette Dates (1993), and Michele Hilmes (1997) follow similar trajectories. Hilmes's discussion of *Amos 'n' Andy's* role in radio, for instance, tends to explain how the program drew "on its social and cultural context both to find its means of expression and to reach an audience that will understand it—though understandings will vary" (p. 87) and ultimately helped to articulate a sense of

national belonging as well as a racial hierarchy within the boundaries of that nation. Even though Hilmes's work has a very different focus, it is interesting that she chose to mention the television show in the following manner:

By the 1960s, after the television controversy, the show was regarded as an out-of-date embarrassment (though it received wide play in syndication), and by 1972 one writer could conclude, "There probably isn't much point in trying to read some deep sociological significance into *Amos 'n' Andy*." (pp. 92-93)

Such explanation appears contradictory: if it was "an out-of-date embarrassment," how could it receive "wide play in syndication"? And how can we theorize, first, the continued presence of the radio program, which picked up new sponsors in the mid-1950s to late 1950s before finally expiring in the early 1960s, on the CBS radio network and, second, the relationships between "the television controversy," the reasons for the television program's cancellation, and the syndicated product?

11. A lengthy article in *Sponsor* (20 September 1954) suggests the profound concern over the relative paucity of black television viewers, particularly vis-à-vis the growing popularity and success of radio formats tailored for African American audiences. The article stated, "In an era where many radio outlets have lost audiences to television, it's only natural that the adman, confronted with the figures of Negro Radio audience growth, should ask himself, 'Don't Negroes watch television' " (What advertisers should know 1954, 161)? The article noted that TV set penetration rates were roughly 27.2 percent, as opposed to more than 90 percent for radio receivers, and asserted that this figure matched up fairly well with an NBC-TV study indicating that

61% of white women had tv sets in their homes while only 36% of Negro women had video sets. SPONSOR's figure is lower primarily because it included the tv saturation of small Southern tv markets which have only recently gotten tv. (What advertisers should know 1954, 161)

The journal suggested that the low penetration rates overall indicated only a temporary state of affairs, based on the higher penetration figures in New York, Boston, Pittsburgh, and other Northern cities that had enjoyed television stations during the freeze. However, *Sponsor* also found some evidence for more race-based reasons operating against television's continued penetration:

Robert Lyons, manager of Negro-programmed WRAP in Norfolk, a market where more than a half-million well-paid Negroes live within range of the station, told *Sponsor*: "Television has not penetrated the Negro audience to the same degree as it has the white audience. This is not due to lower buying power but to the fact that a Negro seeking entertainment is more apt to find it in listening to a program of specific Negro interest than in viewing a television program composed of white actors dealing with a white family situation." (What advertisers should know 1954, 161)

12. It is also interesting to consider de Certeau's (1988) assertion that "in the West, the group . . . is legitimized by what it excludes (this is the creation of its own space),

and it discovers its faith in the confession that it extracts from a dominated being" (p. 5). The denial of a space for *Amos 'n' Andy* on the network's schedule at roughly the same time it achieved nationwide status, accompanied by the cancellation of local programs featuring black performers, could be interpreted as a bottom-up, locally instigated symbolic exclusion of African Americans from the nation—a sort of discursive assertion of domination, a conquering of a national imagination.

13. Ely's (1991) postscript explains how *Amos 'n' Andy* reruns engaged his childhood imagination, perhaps influencing his line of academic study. In addition, the tendency for historians to marginalize daytime television-watching (or radio-listening) practices and texts in favor of scrutinizing prime-time viewing/listening habits and texts is a long-standing bias that is only recently beginning to be reevaluated.

14. Though Gray (1995) observed the potential for blacks to read against the dominant white framework imposed on the show at the point of production, thus acknowledging the contradictory flows of discourses in the 1950s rather than their racial or class unities, he also stated that "many middle-class blacks were so outraged by these shows, particularly *Amos 'n' Andy*, that the NAACP successfully organized and engineered a campaign in 1953 to remove the show from the air" (p. 75). Interestingly, he cited Cripps (1983) and Ely (1991)—as well as an earlier version of Dates's (1993) essay on black representations in television—as among the sources that inform his point, when they indicated that the NAACP's opposition both began in 1951, not 1953, and did not necessarily lead to CBS's decision to cancel the show. Gray also did not observe the potential impacts that the syndication of *Amos 'n' Andy* might have had on audiences and subsequent representational patterns, instead moving directly to an exploration of *The Nat "King" Cole Show*, *I Spy*, and *Julia*—an indication that the histories written about *Amos 'n' Andy* that focus primarily or exclusively on its network appearance may subsequently facilitate inaccuracies in other academic analyses.

15. The precise form that the radio program took during the 1950s is unclear, but a two-page advertisement for CBS Radio in the 14 February 1959 issue of *Sponsor* (13 [7]: 10-11) crowed that *Amos 'n' Andy* received critical accolades as Comedy Show of the Year and Best Transcribed Series—specifically not as Musical Show of the Year. The month before (3 January 1959), *Sponsor* had noted that "out of the scores of evening programs that were on the air 20 years ago only four—at least, in title—are around today. They are: *Amos 'n' Andy*, *Fibber McGee & Molly*, *the Lone Ranger*, and *Hit Parade*" (*Sponsor* hears 1959, 52). The term "at least in title" may refer to *Amos 'n' Andy's* incarnation as *Amos 'n' Andy's Music Hall*, but it is unclear if the two were mutually exclusive. Finally, to further muddy the waters, listings of sponsors for nationally networked radio programs seemed to indicate separate sponsors for *Amos 'n' Andy* and *Amos 'n' Andy's Music Hall* (cf. Radio basics 1957, 54-55, which lists CBS's clients sponsoring *Amos 'n' Andy* on radio as the Advisory Board for Promotion of Calif. Bartlett Pears; Best Foods, Inc.; General Mills; and P. Lorrillard, while *Amos 'n' Andy Music Hall* was sponsored by General Foods).

16. Available issues of *Sponsor* began, fortuitously, with 8 March 1954 (vol. 8, no. 5) and run through 1964; however, I was unable to complete my examination of the full available run and stopped with 29 August 1959 (vol. 13, no. 35). I should also note that shares would be more useful figures to use, but I have not yet been able to

find a more consistent source of local share figures than the numbers occasionally offered by *Variety*. There is also some indication that the *Variety*-Arbitron data match up well with *Sponsor*-Telepulse ratings, suggesting at least some reliability to the numbers. For instance, the former's ratings for *Amos 'n' Andy* in November 1958 averaged out to a 12.5 over forty markets, while the latter's averaged out to an 11.8 over twenty-seven markets (*Sponsor* 13, no. 8 [21 February 1959]: 72). Derek Kompare has provided me with a few pages of *Broadcasting* that offer selected Arbitron ratings for major local markets in 1958. The figures indicate that *Amos 'n' Andy* was among the top ten programs in Atlanta and Boston in December 1957 (*Broadcasting* 3 February 1958, 62); in Atlanta in January 1958 (*Broadcasting* 17 February 1958, 74); in Los Angeles, Atlanta, and Boston in February 1958 (*Broadcasting* 7 April 1958, 70); and in Los Angeles and Atlanta in March 1958 (*Broadcasting* 26 May 1958, 54).

17. *Sponsor*-Telepulse ratings: *Sponsor* 8, no. 11 (31 May 1954): 44-45; 8, no. 12 (14 June 1954): 74-75; 8, no. 14 (12 July 1954): 52-53; 8, no. 16 (9 August 1954): 56-57; and 8, no. 18 (6 September 1954): 56-57. Arbitron ratings in *Variety* provide some supplementary information. The following locations had *Amos 'n' Andy* listed among the top ten syndicated spot film chart; specific volume and page numbers are referenced in the appendix. Note the ratings and shares for Evansville in June 1954 and for Greater Houston in July 1954:

May 1954: New York—approximate set count is 4,175,000; number 7 *Amos 'n' Andy*, WCBS, Saturday 10:30-11:00; May rating 11.2, 23 share (Baltimore, Columbus, Youngstown, and Lexington, Kentucky, do not list *Amos 'n' Andy* among their top ten programs)

June 1954: Los Angeles—approximate set count is 1,730,000; number 4 *Amos 'n' Andy*, KNXT, Tuesday 8:00-8:30; June rating 19.6, 32 share (Boston, Atlanta, Louisville, and Dayton do not list *Amos 'n' Andy* among their top ten programs)

June 1954: (1) San Diego—approximate set count is 220,000; number 9 *Amos 'n' Andy*, KNXT, Tuesday 8:00-8:30; June rating 15.9, 27 share; (2) New York—approximate set count is 4,175,000; number 8 *Amos 'n' Andy*, WCBS, Saturday 10:30-11:00; June rating 9.1, 18 share; (3) Detroit—approximate set count is 1,150,000; number 9 *Amos 'n' Andy*, WXYZ, Monday 10:00-10:30; June rating 13.5, 35 share; (4) Portland—approximate set count is 140,000; number 6 *Amos 'n' Andy*, KOIN, Wednesday 7:30-8:00; June rating 26.3, 47 share; (5) Evansville—approximate set count is 30,000; number 1 *Amos 'n' Andy*, WEHT, Sunday 8:30-9:00; June rating 56.7, 93 share (Minneapolis-St. Paul, Cincinnati, Denver, Buffalo, Harrisburg/Lancaster/Reading, Washington, Providence, Syracuse, San Antonio, and Columbus do not list *Amos 'n' Andy* among their top ten programs)

July 1954: (1) Salt Lake City—approximate set count is 150,000; number 9 *Amos 'n' Andy*, KSL, Sunday 7:00-7:30; July rating 19.4, 73 share; (2) Los Angeles—approximate set count is 1,730,000; number 4 *Amos 'n' Andy*, KNXT, Tuesday 8:00-8:30; July rating 18.7, 38 share; (3) Greater Houston—approximate set count is 290,000; number 5 *Amos 'n' Andy*, KPRC, Sunday 8:00-8:30; July rating 36.6, 70 share (New York, Cincinnati, Quad City, Milwaukee, Boston, Balti-

more, Atlanta, Dayton, Chicago, Philadelphia, Cleveland, and San Francisco do not list *Amos 'n' Andy* among their top ten programs)

18. Ratings taken from the *Sponsor-Telepulse* ratings of top-spot film shows—chart covers half-hour syndicated film programs specially made for TV (see *Sponsor* 8, no. 20 [4 October 1954]: 52-53). Note the absence of Evansville and Greater Houston from the list of markets examined by the *Sponsor-Telepulse* ratings when, as the previous note suggests, *Amos 'n' Andy* reruns enjoyed immense popularity in those areas. This points up the potential frustrations evident in trying to assess the local and regional appeal of syndicated programming.

19. Ratings taken from the *Sponsor-Telepulse* ratings of top-spot film shows—chart covers half-hour syndicated film programs specially made for TV (see *Sponsor* 8, no. 22 [1 November 1954]: 74-75).

20. Ratings taken from the *Sponsor-Telepulse* ratings of top-spot film shows—chart covers half-hour syndicated film programs specially made for TV (see *Sponsor* 8, no. 26 [27 December 1954]: 50-51).

21. Ratings taken from *Sponsor-Telepulse* ratings of top-spot film shows—chart covers half-hour syndicated film programs specially made for TV (see *Sponsor* 9, no. 2 [24 January 1955]: 58-59; 9, no. 4 [21 February 1955]: 52-53; and 9, no. 6 [21 March 1955]: 48-49).

22. Ratings taken from the *Sponsor-Telepulse* ratings of top-spot film shows—chart covers half-hour syndicated film programs specially made for TV (see *Sponsor* 9, no. 20 [3 October 1955]: 50-51; 9, no. 22 [31 October 1955]: 58-59; 9, no. 24 [28 November 1955]: 44-45; 9, no. 26 [26 December 1955]: 68-69; 10, no. 2 [23 January 1956]: 96-97; 10, no. 3 [6 February 1956]: 46-47; 10, no. 5 [5 March 1956]: 90-91; 10, no. 7 [2 April 1956]: 66-67; 10, no. 9 [30 April 1956]: 78-79; 10, no. 11 [28 May 1956]: 44-45; 10, no. 13 [25 June 1956]: 44-45; 10, no. 15 [23 July 1956]: 54-55; 10, no. 17 [20 August 1956]: 58-59; 10, no. 19 [17 September 1956]: 54-55; and 10, no. 22 [27 October 1956]: 88-89).

23. Ratings taken from *Sponsor-Telepulse* ratings of top-spot film shows—chart covers half-hour syndicated film programs specially made for TV (see *Sponsor* 12, no. 18 [3 May 1958]: 44-45).

24. Ratings taken from the *Variety-Telepulse City-by-City Program Chart* for 1959: *Variety* 213, no. 7 (14 January): 46-47; 213, no. 8 (21 January): 42-43; 213, no. 9 (28 January): 30-31; 213, no. 10 (4 February): 38-39; 213, no. 11 (11 February): 38-39; 213, no. 12 (18 February): 30-31; 213, no. 13 (25 February): 34-35; 214, no. 1 (4 March): 30-31; 214, no. 2 (11 March): 42-43; 214, no. 6 (8 April): 42; 214, no. 7 (15 April): 117; 215, no. 1 (3 June): 28; 215, no. 2 (10 June): 38; 215, no. 3 (17 June): 31, 34; 215, no. 4 (24 June): 88, 92; 215, no. 5 (1 July): 36, 38; 215, no. 6 (8 July): 46, 52; 215, no. 7 (15 July): 46, 50; 215, no. 8 (22 July): 30, 34; and 215, no. 9 (29 July): 28, 96.

25. The plots for episodes airing at 9:30 P.M. on channel 7 were summarized as follows: first, on 6 January 1956, "*Amos 'n' Andy*, comedy. A plain looking woman mistakes the Kingfish for a matrimonial agent," and second, on 13 January 1956, "*Amos 'n' Andy*, comedy. The Kingfish rings up a phony scheme to buy a car cheaply." The sparse plot summaries were characteristic of the synopsis offered for any show and do not emphasize racial identity.

26. This information was obtained from *Atlanta Constitution* microform reels for September 1963 and September 1964. The *Constitution* also provided an area television programs listing that indicated *Amos 'n' Andy* also appeared on WDEF, channel 11, in Chattanooga, Tennessee, at 7 P.M. on Friday nights (cf. *Atlanta Constitution*, 20 September 1963, 14). Beyond that, the newspaper did not discuss *Amos 'n' Andy's* appearance in the Atlanta area. *Variety* also noted in late July 1964 that *Amos 'n' Andy* was the number 9 syndicated show in Atlanta, pulling down an average rating of nineteen for WAGA in the Monday through Friday 6:30 P.M. slot, confirming that the show was indeed on the air and attracting significant viewership—but offered no editorial comment on *Amos 'n' Andy's* continued success (All-American syndie champs 1964).

27. I should note as well that my sample did not include any representatives of the black press, such as the *Chicago Defender*, the *Baltimore Afro-American*, the (New York) *Amsterdam News*, or the *Pittsburgh Courier*. If these sources carried advertisements or commentary about locally syndicated airings of *Amos 'n' Andy*, these might provide a useful supplement to our understanding of the various meanings circulating around the program.

28. These firms were among a number listed as sponsors of the show in *Sponsor* 11, no. 40 (5 October 1957): 48-49.

29. Interestingly, *Variety* noted that no decision had yet been made as to whether the Italian version would be dubbed or subtitled if an agreement had been reached to show the program in Italy—seemingly a critical decision, given the reliance on linguistic wordplay, malaprops, and misunderstandings that motivate much of *Amos 'n' Andy's* humor.

30. See, for instance, Fells (1959) and “Scorecard on U.S. Telepix Sales Overseas” (1959). Fells, an executive vice president of United Artists Television, was particularly hyperbolic with respect to the possibilities of global syndication, likening its “seeming miracles” to “the power of prayer” and noting that syndication would “assume its inevitably massive form” as television spread to developing nations (Fells 1959, 30).

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Doug Battema is an assistant professor in the Department of Communications and Humanities at Western New England College. He recently received his doctorate from the Department of Communication Arts at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and wrote his dissertation on Olympic Game broadcasts in the United States.