

# Racism, self-hatred toxic for Blacks

**“Black Like You: Blackface, Whiteface, Insult & Imitation in American Popular Culture”**

By John Strausbaugh; Afterword by Darius James; Tarcher/Penguin; Hardcover, \$24.95; 384 pages, illustrated ISBN: 1-58542-498-6

By Kam Williams  
*Sentinel-Voice*

“Listening to Knipp, a White man, impersonating Shirley Q. Liquor, a Black woman, was one thing. Actually seeing a White man in blackface drag on a stage in New York City in the 21st century was an entirely different experience... there is much about Shirley that seems a throwback to more openly racist times. Her character is an easily recognized stereotype: the Black welfare queen.

She’s a single mother on government assistance, who claims she has never worked

a day in her life. She speaks Ebonics with a broad Gulf States drawl.” She has nineteen ‘chirrun.’ In one of her routines, ‘Who Is My Baby Daddy?’ she croons the children’s names, including Cheetoh, Limbo, Curtis, Lemonjello, Orangejello, Kmartina, Velveeta, Cocoa Puffs, Maybelline, Gingivitis, Brylcreem, Nyquil and Sh\*thead. She drinks malt liquor, smokes too much, drives a Cadillac...

At its best, Knipp’s humor is inspired satire of an America seen from its lowest rung, poking equal fun at Blacks and Whites, rich and poor. At his worst, Knipp stoops to traffic in the lowest, most common, racist jokes.” —Excerpted from Chapter 1, Blackface in the 21st century

During the 19th century, minstrel shows were responsible for providing the most popular and enduring form of entertainment across

America. “Coon shows,” featuring characters with names like “Jim Crow” and “Sambo” toured the country with casts comprised of White clowns darkened by a combination of burnt cork and bright red lipstick.

In the first half of the 20th century, such showbiz greats as Bing Crosby, Judy Garland, Shirley Temple, Al Jolson and Eddie Cantor could still be found performing in blackface whether on the Broadway stage or in Hollywood movies. But, with the rise of the Civil Rights Movement, the practice finally fell in disfavor

and was deemed socially unacceptable.

So, it naturally comes as something of a surprise to see that some folks are choosing to break the taboo in the 21st century as we witness a resurgence of what had come to be considered a shameful stain on the nation’s past.

John Strausbaugh examines this phenomenon in “Black Like You: Blackface, Whiteface, Insult & Imitation in American Popular Culture,” a book which not only carefully chronicles the history of minstrelsy from its inception in 1832 through its assorted permutations right

up to the present-day incarnations.

To a certain extent, the author blames gangsta’ rap for the genre’s re-emergence, since that music’s free use of the n-word has been seized upon by Whites inclined to rationalize resurrecting the mindset of yesteryear.

As Strausbaugh explains, “The word ‘nigger,’ which for decades was so taboo it could be rendered only as ‘the n-word,’ began to resurface in the 1990s. While still extremely controversial and scandal-provoking, its ubiquity in rap lyrics created a social context in which some

White Americans have felt emboldened to use it as well.”

Though at times disturbing, as in its posture that hip-hop, as the latest form of minstrelsy, is simply carrying on a racist tradition of ridiculing African-Americans in most demeaning ways imaginable. “Black Like You,” nonetheless, simultaneously offers an excellent analysis of a dysfunctional culture perhaps already too permeated by self-hatred and an inclination towards the toxic mistreatment of minorities to bother adhering to any politically-correct ideals.



Whitney Houston and Bobby Brown in happier times. The celebrity couple has had a long and tumultuous relationship.

## Whitney

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work in California seeking a separation.

“It is a legal separation. It is not a divorce or a divorce petition,” Parks said.

Parks said she has not seen the documents and didn’t know which court they were filed in.

Asked about speaking with Brown, Parks said, “Bobby’s not speaking with anyone at this time.”

Recently, Houston has made attempts to clean up her public image. On Tuesday night, she attended a public event with cousin Dionne Warwick and mogul and mentor Clive Davis in Beverly Hills. And she is working on an album of new material; she hasn’t released a record since 2002.

Houston, 43, won multiple Grammys in the 1980s and 1990s, including two for the mega-hit “I Will Always Love You,” from the 1992 film “The Bodyguard,” in which she also starred opposite Kevin Costner.

“I Will Always Love You,” won Grammys for record of the year and best female pop vocal, and “The Bodyguard” soundtrack won album of the year.

Houston also won Grammys in 1985 and 1987 for best female pop vocal for “Saving All My Love for You” and “I Want to Dance with Somebody (Who Loves Me).” She won a Grammy for best female R&B vocal in 1999 for “It’s Not Right, But It’s Okay.”

Her musician husband recently reunited with New Edition for a show at July’s Essence Musical Festival. The show got mixed reviews from the audience when Brown jumped suggestively around the stage and made vulgar remarks about his sex life with Houston.

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group an**D** **F**ollow  
the fall s**C**hedule.



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