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Penn-Concordia Graduate Student Conference in Cinema and Media Studies Proposal

Although the intersections between cinema, race, and modernity are becoming better scrutinized in Film Studies, few have yet to adequately address the role of *religion* in shaping these complex formations. This is especially problematic because religion was (and continues) to be a major arbiter for negotiating race and mass culture, particularly during the film industry's conversion to synchronized sound. It is seldom acknowledged that many of the all-black cast musicals during the conversion process were those that engaged with African American religious spirituals: *Hearts of Dixie* (1929) and *Hallelujah!* (1929). Furthermore, it became commonplace to speak of a "vogue" for "the negro religious voice" both on screen and in US culture at large. The first half of my presentation will incorporate scholarship from diverse cultural channels (Broadway, vaudeville, popular music) in addition to overlapping discourses on Hollywood's public opinion research to tease out the conditions under which Hollywood becomes interested in producing and distributing African American musical performance *at this specific historical juncture*.

The second half of my presentation will ask the following question: given that early sound films simply rearranged the diegetic positions codified in earlier Hollywood films without initiating a corresponding shift in the cinema's racial imaginary, of what "value" can we prescribe to the "black fad" films of the transition era? Inspired by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and James Baldwin, my presentation will *reorient* attention back on to African American audiences to argue that discursive critiques in the black press (a rather complex *disaggregation* process to combat the "surplus symbolic value" of black bodies and voices) created a productive space in which to negotiate an unprecedented set of questions around the impact and significance of race, religion, and modernity. Such a discussion will no doubt spark debate regarding the centrality of *racialized religion* in mass culture in addition to questioning whether production history is necessarily incomplete without a consideration of how it has been shaped by film reception.