

# The Emancipation of Boyhood

# LEBBIOU.

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## '60 THE NEW SECESSION. '79

IN the Republic of Letters there has never been any distinction save that of merit. From the blind beggar, Homer, down the ages through Aesop and Terence, the slaves, to Dumas, the mulatto, the only credential asked or given, was that of merit. A footing once obtained within its sacred bounds and all were alike—the slave and the prince, the beggar and the millionaire stood together on one platform and were joined in a noble equality.

It remained for the members of the North Carolina Amateur Press Association to demand that this ancient and noble glory sh'ld be cast aside and men be rated not by their degree of ability; not by moral worth, but by accidents of birth or fortune.

The editors of the *North Carolina Amateur* protest not only against our election to the 3rd. Vice Presidency of the N. A. P. A, but against our membership in that honorable body. They declare themselves insulted by the membership and election; impute sinister motives to the honorable gentlemen by whom we were unanimously supported

and finally give notice of their secession from the 'dom.

The N. C. A. P. A, backs up these declarations by a series of resolutions in which they assert that our election was a direct insult to the Southern members and they proceed to call a convention for the formation of a Southern Amateur Press Association and the cutting of all connection with the Napa.

We entered the 'dom in as good faith as either of the editors of the *N. C. Amateur* and are as sadly mistaken as they, to find that "Civil Rights" would ever be questioned. And to the credit of the last convention, "where the boy editors, from the great lakes on the North; from the billowy Atlantic on the East to the peaceful waves of the Pacific on the West;" we can say, that there was only one present who had ever dared to oppose the subject.

As proudly as any, we can boast that we have worked our way to to the front. Commencing with contributions to the puzzle departments of the *Boys of New York*, *Boys' Own* and *Wide Awake* and afterwards sending our journalistic productions to the *Juvenile Weekly* of Lexington, Ky, the *Amateur*

So what defines this community that is both so intensely imagined and so weirdly empty, that exists only to *be* a community?

In the late 1860s, manufacturers of printing presses in the United States began producing smaller versions of their commercial offerings for use in the home, where they could sit on a dining room table or fit in the corner of a parlor (fig. 1). The invention of these hobby presses led to an explosion of newspapers written, edited, and printed by teenage boys, who identified themselves as "amateur journalists." By the end of the 1870s, every state in the union could boast at least a handful of amateur papers, and some had hundreds. There are over 55,000 in the American Antiquarian Society collections alone (fig. 2). Most issues were four to eight pages, or one or two folded sheets of paper, but some ran up to thirty-two pages. At least one was printed on the back of a postcard. About half of amateur editors printed their own papers; perhaps another quarter or third had them printed by other amateur printers, and the remainder took them to professional job printers. In the twentieth century, amateur journalism grew to include adults as well as adolescents, but in its early decades it constituted a uniquely teenage print subculture—arguably, the first in existence.

When I first delved into this archive as part of a project on nineteenth-century underground literature, I did so with high hopes, because amateur newspapers constituted not only a cultural underground but also a material one, with largely autonomous networks of production and distribution. And I assumed that, since the amateur newspapers were made by teenagers, they would be particularly incendiary. Once I started reading through the amateur papers, however, I found a print subculture very different from the rowdy, subversive one I had anticipated. Although the amateur press trumpeted the free-spiritedness of its boy-editors, it is, to all appearances, incredibly boring. The papers are derivative, moralistic, and monotonous. At first I was disappointed by how boring the amateur press turned out to be. Then I started to suspect that this boringness might actually be what was fascinating about it.



Fig. 1a Advertisement for hobby printing presses: Novelty Press, 1870s.  
Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass. Photograph by the author



Fig. 1b Advertisement for hobby printing presses: Golding Junior Press, 1879.  
Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass. Photograph by the author.



Fig. 1c Advertisement for hobby printing presses: Columbian Press, ca. 1875. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass. Photograph by the author.

Given how boring the results were, what led amateurs to start newspapers? No one, it seems, started an amateur newspaper because he—and it was almost always he—had something to say. The contents of the papers are unrelievedly repetitive of one another. Instead of creating an outlet for one's own thoughts, it appears that one started an amateur newspaper to join a community of other amateurs. This community is not just an *effect* of print, as has often been argued of other print cultures. Community is also the *cause* of print. Thus while amateur newspapers often address themselves to what they termed “the boys and girls of America,” their actual audience largely seems to have consisted of other amateurs. The amateur press's distribution methods more or less ensured this. The majority of the papers were distributed through an old-fashioned exchange system that hearkened back to the late eighteenth century: one editor would write to another requesting an exchange, and before long editors developed standing exchange arrangements (fig. 3). Amateur editors often accused other papers of being what they called “exchange frauds,” or papers got up solely to obtain exchanges from other papers. But arguably, these accusations masked the fact that such practices were less exceptional than normative. To a certain extent, all amateur papers only existed to exchange.

The subject matter of the papers further built amateurdom into a self-contained world. While the front pages of papers would often feature a poem, a story, or didactic essay, by the mid-1870s most of their contents revolved around the activities of amateurdom—or “the ‘dom,” as most called it. These consisted of editorials on the state of the ‘dom, reviews of other newspapers, in-jokes aimed at fellow editors, reports from local, state, and national amateur

conventions, histories of amateur journalism, profiles of prominent amateur editors, and so on.

The media of the amateur press likewise promoted its insularity, for the amateur press's second most popular product, after newspapers, was directories of amateur newspapers. As soon as a town could boast at least three amateur newspapers, an enterprising amateur would issue a directory of them (fig. 4). Directories would typically list the editor's name, age, the title of his paper, and his address, but they also often included his height, weight, and hair and eye color (fig. 5). Sometimes editors hacked out woodcuts to accompany these profiles (fig. 6). The set of images below shows a series of cuts from the *Warsaw (Ind.) Amateur Directory* parodying the convention, which indicates just how popular it was (fig. 7). Rather than treating print as a technology of disembodiment, as we so often do, the amateurs insisted on visualizing one another's bodies.

This projection of bodily presence through print suggests how avidly amateurdom imagined its print networks as more intimate connections. One Missouri amateur described this structure of feeling in a kind of Whitmanian reverie:

[W]e imagine ourself in far-off Massachusetts—in Gardner—enjoying ourself amid the score of surrounding amateurs, and pleasantly participating in one of the Gardner Clubs' socials. Then, away we fly over the thousands of miles between old Massachusetts and the 'golden fields of California,' to a meeting of the California amateurs. We can see them, though mostly young, sincerely laboring, in their best manner, for the upbuilding of the cause in the West. O, how we long to mingle with them, give the benefit of our greater experience, and enter as sincerely into the work as they ... Then, away we go again to New York—and the number of other places to which we sometimes allow ourself to roam, within our mind, is limited only by the number of places and amateurs constituting Amateurdom.



So what defines this community that is both so intensely imagined and so weirdly empty, that exists only to *be* a community? Various other groups in the late nineteenth century, from soldiers to patients in mental hospitals to polar explorers, took advantage of the newly available hobby presses to produce amateur newspapers. Yet only the teenage amateur journalists rallied under the banner of “amateur.” The definition was recursive: if only teenage boys identified as amateurs, they identified amateurs only as being teenage boys. As one guide explained, the term “has a separate or different signification from the word found in the dictionary. In Amateurdom ... the expression is used to denote what may be called, in plain terms, a boy editor, or boy journalist.” By “boy,” the amateurs meant something closer to what we would call “teenager”; amateurs usually set the age range as between 11 and 21.



Fig. 4 Amateur directories, clockwise from top left: Marietta & Harmar Amateur Directory for 1878 (Harmar, Ohio: Will S. Knox, 1878); The National Amateur Directory (East Saint Louis, Ill.: The Future Great, 1879); North-American Amateur Newspaper Directory (Osage City, Kansas: Clinton C. Hollenback, 1882); Dubuque Amateur Directory for 1875 (Dubuque, Iowa: G. H. Graves, 1875); The Eastern Amateur Directory for 1882 (Frederick: Frank A. Doll, 1882); Amateur Directory (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Will A. Innes, 1875); California and Nevada Amateur Directory for 1877 (East Oakland, Calif.: E. William Gracey, 1877). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.

By equating “amateur” with “teenager,” amateurs posited teenagers as being by definition excluded from the world of letters. Indeed, the amateur press routinely presented itself as dissident and oppressed. In this respect, amateurdom constituted not only a subculture—that is, a group whose aesthetic practices depart from those of the dominant culture—but also a counterpublic. Michael Warner defines a counterpublic both by its oppositional stance with regard to the public sphere and by its “awareness of its subordinate status.” Amateur journalists wore their “subordinate status” like a badge of honor. They delighted in recounting the persecutions of the professional press and, indeed, the world at large, in language that cast middle-class white adolescents as society’s most victimized demographic. The Bowensburg *Illinois Amateur* complained, “Talk about the women and the darkies, and the—the—all the rest of

'em; none of 'em all are half so badly used as the boys ... [T]o be a boy is to be somebody without a right in the world." Cincinnati's *Idyllic Hours* agreed, declaring, "Boys and young men [are] systematically suppressed." Thus on the eve of the twentieth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, one prominent editor adopted the language of slavery and freedom to describe amateur journalism as "the emancipation of boyhood from the fetters of sixty centuries." Accordingly, the names amateurs gave their papers conjure up liberation, even revolution. *Little Lunatic*, *Terror*, *Spunk*, *Dynamite*, *The Wasp*, *The Hornet*, *Gatling Gun*, *Snark*, *Jolly Queer*, *Thunderbolt*, *Little But Loud*—all project a rowdy independence.

Yet not only does this sense of persecution sit awkwardly on these boys of privilege, who had the money available to buy a hobby printing press, but their oppositional postures turn out to have little substance. The papers insistently promulgated bourgeois order. They extolled the virtues of perseverance, punctuality, and correct grammar. They warned readers against using slang, being late, smoking, reading dime novels, or even playing baseball at amateur press conventions. In fact, several papers explicitly presented amateurism as the antidote to adolescent misbehavior. The San Francisco *Ubiquitous* advised parents, "If your boy wishes to run a paper, by all means, give him all the encouragement in your power. By editing and printing a paper, he may derive many useful lessons ... Editing a paper will keep him home nights, keep him out of bad company, mischief, etc." The Worcester *Diamond* echoed these sentiments in the form of a poem called "Youth Not Wasted" that presents amateurs as saviors of other boys' misspent youth:

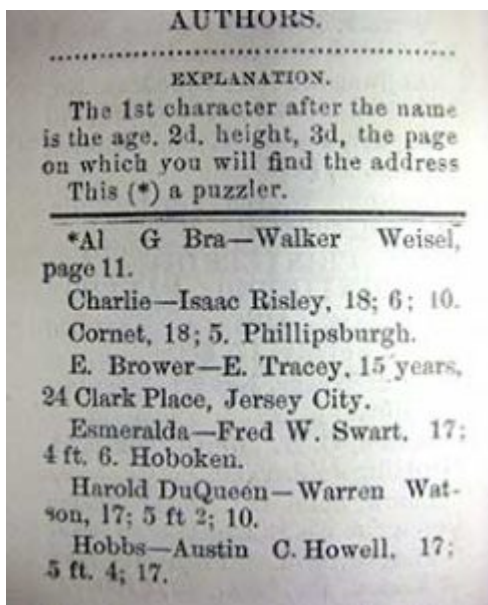


Fig. 5 New Jersey State Amateur Directory (Vienna, N.J.: Zander Snyder, 1877). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.

Of all the periods of life  
 From the cradle to manhood's strife  
 When weak are morals and trembles Truth,  
 Is in the perilous time of youth.  
 Then sown are seed which harvest yield;  
 And we must culture Life, the field  
 Upon whose tilled and troubled soil  
 Are grown the fruits of honest toil.  
 Yes, important as it is to all,  
 That time to many marks their fall,  
 That they the pleasures of life may taste  
 Their time of youth must go to waste.  
 But—thank Heaven!—there's one class of boys  
 Who glean from youth more than transient joys!  
 Who have a purpose,—a work to do;  
 Who have ambition, industry, too.  
 THE AMATEUR JOURNALIST!



Fig. 6a Woodcuts of amateur journalists; Richard Gerner in the Amateur Gazette (Fostoria, Ohio), Vol. 1, No. 4 (August 1877). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.



Fig. 6b Woodcuts of amateur journalists; N. H. Kelsey in the Amateur Gem (Enfield Centre, N.H.), Vol. 2, No. 2 (August 1872). Courtesy of the American

Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.



Fig. 6c Woodcuts of amateur journalists; Geo. W. Hancock in the Amateur Iowan (Washington, Iowa), Vol. 1, No. 1 (January 1878). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.

The poem emphasizes the hazards of adolescence, “the perilous time of youth,” before realizing “But thank Heaven!—there’s one class of boys / who glean from youth more than transient joys!” The poem’s enthusiasm over this discovery is so intense that the final line, which reveals the identity of these boys, ruptures the previously neat pattern of rhyming couplets, bursting out “THE AMATEUR JOURNALIST!” It’s tempting to read this as an allegory for the mode of the amateur journalist himself—formally disruptive but tremendously staid in content.

In fact, when amateurs did decide to challenge the authority of their official counterparts, as they did on one notable occasion, this was the battle they picked: they mounted a campaign to wipe out sensationalist newspaper fiction and dime novels, which they objected were not sufficiently edifying for young people. They proposed to replace this “blood and thunder” literature with what they termed “pure literature.” A typical editorial from the *Brooklyn Waverly* urged on the cause:

This fight must, it seems, be fought alone and single handed ... Those papers, from the nature of their contents, will always find readers in a certain class; but it is our work to prevent them reaching the firesides of our homes. Let the good work continue. Keep a steady front. Whip the stragglers into line. Recruits will flock to our standard. The fraternity *must* and *will* be victorious ... At first our efforts were laughed at, then smiled at; but now, with a sober face and still more sober thoughts, the publishers of these sheets are beginning to find that our efforts have not been in vain,—their large circulations are slowly but surely decreasing. The day must surely come when they will disappear entirely, and, on that day, when the last of those vile sheets is wiped from the face of the earth, Amateurdome will rise in the estimation of the public, one hundred percent.

The *Waverly's* harangue is remarkable for its combination of the martial and the domestic, the indignation at being marginalized coupled with the resounding sense of privilege (sensationalist papers “will always find readers in a certain class,” but not at “the firesides of our homes”). It is at their most square that the amateurs present themselves as most oppositional, giving the whole campaign an air of embattled priggishness.

The amateurs’ desire to put their rebelliousness on display, even amidst their indisputable propriety, appears quite graphically on the cover of the 1875 *Amateur Directory* from Grand Rapids, Michigan (fig. 8). The first thing to note about this scene of amateur printing is how unlikely it is. Editors sometimes made space for their presses on dining room tables or in bedrooms; lucky ones wrote of repurposing disused sheds. But a capacious room devoted to presswork, complete with full-size composing table and imposing desk, was unheard of. Perhaps the most startling aspect of this imagined scene of production, however, is the painting hanging on the wall on the left. Apparently of two figures in a fistfight, its crude lines and combative subject seem out of place in the tidy domestic setting. Its very incongruity, though, makes a striking figure of amateurism’s ornamental unruliness. Indeed, the illustration’s depiction of the comfortable home that such rebellion finds within scenes of middle-class propriety suggests that amateurism’s oppositional postures may actually work in tandem with its conservatism, as much as in tension with it.



Fig. 7 Warsaw Amateur Directory (Warsaw, Ind.: Aborn & Winder, 1877). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.

In her study of nineteenth-century childhood, Karen Sánchez-Eppler suggests that this combination of boisterousness and primness rippled beyond the amateurs’ circle. She identifies the late nineteenth century as marking a transition in the understanding of childhood, one that she argues pivoted on a middle-class embrace of “mischievous play.” She explains, “By the end of the [nineteenth] century, play, and the worlds of the imagination, would become cultural markers for what was marvelous about childhood, and this culturally

valuable play would be recognized as an attribute of middle-class affluence and leisure." Yet she argues that it is through images of working-class children that these middle-class ideals about play and leisure develop. Ironically, borrowing ostensibly working-class traits of trouble-making actually consolidates middle-class belonging. Sánchez-Eppler cites amateur journalists as evidence for her argument, noting that hobby presses "enabl[ed] well-to-do youth to play press laborers themselves." Understanding the amateurs as taking on working-class identities illuminates the frequency with which they represent their hobby as *work*—and hard work, at that—even when, as in the article by the Missouri amateur quoted earlier, work appears less as an action than a feeling. Moreover, it allows us to see that when they imagine themselves as rebels, they draw on a history of very real class conflict in America, a history in which laborers in the printing trades were often the most radical.

The amateurs' iconoclasm, however, detaches their rebelliousness from anything resembling political action. Instead, their sense of embattled boyhood recasts rebellion as a developmental trait—an innately teenage characteristic as temporary as it is endemic. Linking rebellion to age (while delinking it from a broader sense of history) aligned the amateurs squarely with contemporaneous theories of adolescence, particularly those of psychologist G. Stanley Hall. Hall's pioneering study *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education* (1904), which he based on research he conducted in the 1880s and 1890s, defined adolescence as a distinct developmental stage characterized by "storm and stress," a term Hall borrowed from the German *Sturm und Drang* movement but separated from its core elements of political and aesthetic critique. Moreover, for Hall, adolescent "storm and stress" was not just developmental but racial. His conception of adolescence drew on German biologist Ernst Haeckel's theory that "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny," or that individual development echoes the evolutionary history of a species. Hall argued that whereas children are analogous to "savages," adolescence marks the time among the "higher races" when "the later acquisitions of the race slowly become prepotent." His study thus carefully distinguished between the youth of "the white race" and "American aborigines," "Filipinos," "Hawaiians," "Eurasians," and "the Negro in America," effectively circumscribing adolescence as a developmental stage reserved for white children.



Fig. 8 The Amateur Directory (Grand Rapids, Mich: Will A. Innes, 1875).  
Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.

In 1879, however, a challenge to such racial demarcations—and the theory of adolescent rebellion they underpinned—memorably shook the ordinarily humdrum world of amateurdom. Each summer the National Amateur Press Association, or N.A.P.A., held a convention at which it elected new members to office. Among the officers elected at the 1879 convention was Herbert A. Clarke, who became Third Vice President (fig. 9). Clarke was the editor of a Cincinnati journal called *Le Bijou*, otherwise known as “the boss journal of the Ohio Valley” (fig. 10). He was also African American. Upon learning of the election, Edward A. Oldham, editor of the Wilmington, North Carolina, *Odd Trump*, published a stinging editorial titled “Civil Rights in Amateurdom,” objecting not only to Clarke’s election but to his membership in the N.A.P.A. Other North Carolina newspapers soon followed. The *North Carolina Amateur* announced, “From today onward we declare ourselves seceded from the National Amateur Press Association (?) and do earnestly hope that all who coincide with us will lend their assistance to establish a white boys’ Amateur Press Association”—or, as the group later dubbed themselves, an “Amateur Anti-negro Admission Association.”



Fig. 9 Group portrait of the assembled amateurs at the 1882 National Amateur Press Association convention in Detroit, from H. H. Ballard, “A Convention of Amateur Journalists,” *St. Nicholas* (July 1882): 708. Herbert A. Clarke is in

the second row, third person from the right. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.

Immediately, editorials on "civil rights in amateurdom" filled the pages of the amateur papers. Some papers explicitly argued for white supremacy in the amateur press, and others indicted the North Carolina amateurs for their bigotry. In *Le Bijou*, Clarke rebuked the North Carolina amateurs for violating the very meaning of the print public sphere:

In the Republic of Letters there has never been any distinction save that of merit. From the blind man, Homer, down the ages through Aesop and Terence, the slaves, to Dumas, the mulatto, the only credential asked or given, was that of merit. A footing was obtained within its sacred bounds and all were alike—the slave and the prince, the beggar and the millionaire stood together on one platform and were joined in a noble equality. It remained for the members of the North Carolina Amateur Press Association to demand that this ancient and noble glory sh'd be cast aside and men be rated not by their degree of ability; not by moral worth, but by accidents of birth or fortune.

But few others viewed the controversy within the context of an expansive (and eternal) "Republic of Letters." For most amateurs the major issue the controversy raised was not civil rights *per se* but the threat civil rights posed to the perceived unity of the 'dom. Thus the Lafayette, Indiana, *Welcome Visitor* "regret[ed] the Southern amateurs were so foolish as to broach the subject of Civil Rights" because "it has caused bitter feeling. Why cannot the fraternity leave such topics alone?" Yet the "Civil Rights" controversy revealed that such "fraternity" was a mirage, as the Brooklyn *Phoenix* (one of several northern papers that opposed Clarke's election) demonstrated when it opined, "Amateur Journalism is an institution, whose members are bound together by a strong fraternal feeling, and on that account alone negroes should not be recognized." Even as the *Phoenix* embraces the notion of "fraternal feeling," it tacitly acknowledges how fragile this feeling is; it can only be sustained if amateurdom is already homogenous. Other papers accordingly tried to erase the possibility of difference that the controversy had raised. The Hoboken *Jersey Amateur Journal*, for instance, reassured readers that the notion that "one solitary negro, who is moreover acknowledged to be a cultured gentleman, may contaminate, injure the prospects of, or control an Association composed of a *hundred* whites, is too preposterous and absurd to be worthy of refutation!" Meanwhile, the Cairo, Illinois, *Egyptian Star* supported Clarke on the grounds that "He is a 'nigger,' as some vulgarly term him, only in color, and not in head or heart."



Fig. 10 Advertisement for Le Bijou (Cincinnati, Ohio), Vol. 2, No. 2 (March 1879). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.

Clarke's election opened sectional rifts that threatened amateurdom's sense of itself as a national movement. It also revealed deep and not necessarily sectional currents of hatred that threatened to overwhelm amateurdom's commitment to fellow feeling. But what made Clarke's election most fraught was not the amateurs' racism, or the danger it posed to their sense of unity, but the way that racism tested amateurdom's notion of itself as a community of outsiders, united by oppression. Edward Oldham, the editor of the *Odd Trump*, offers a striking example of this dilemma. Oldham styled himself an eccentric, somewhat on the model of Edgar Allan Poe; he gave the *Odd Trump* the motto "Wrapt in the Solitude of Our Own Originality" (fig. 11). The 'dom, apparently with Oldham's blessing, interpreted Oldham's singularity as blackness. It gave him the nickname "Plutonian," which twitted a poem he wrote that contained a line about "Dame Night's Plutonian Darkness" (which, as the Washington, D.C., *Southern Star* pointed out at the time, "Literally translated means "dark, dark darkness"). But the nickname also took on racial resonances, especially as the "Civil Rights in Amateurdom" controversy raged. Various editors began referring to Clarke's "plutonian darkness" or reminded Oldham of his own claims to it, suggesting that Clarke might offer competition for this title. In *Le Bijou*, Clarke noted the irony:

Jerking himself spasmodically from the pit of plutonian darkness into which he had so unwisely crawled, Oldham [has tried] to *blacken* the N.A.P.A. by forming the National Amateur Journalists' League, devoted solely to youths of white-faced ancestry ... Wickedly enough, he chooses Boston as the cradle for his nefarious offspring. What! in sight of Bunker Hill, ... and within hearing of Faneuil Hall and those spots divinely sacred to future generations as the birth-place of our American patriotism and liberty? Hamburg (S.C.), or some other city whose history is indelibly written in the blood of the oppressed, would be more suitable.

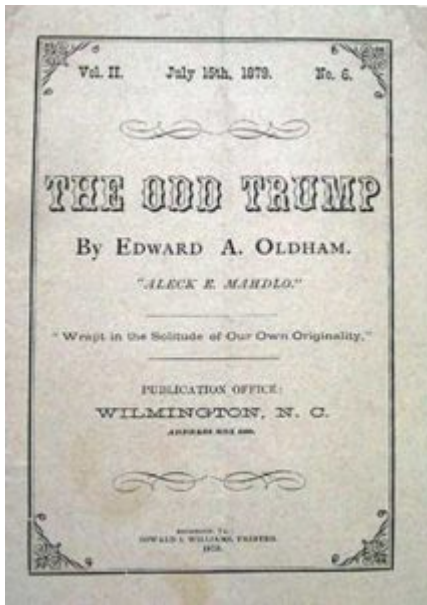


Fig. 11 Odd Trump (Wilmington, N.C.), Vol. 2, No. 6 (July 1879). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.

Clarke's reference to Oldham's nickname, in combination with his punning reference to Oldham's attempt to "*blacken* the N.A.P.A." by forming a whites-only rival organization, calls out Oldham's opportunistic blackness. Moreover, by explicating Oldham's invocation of Pluto, the god of the underworld, he identifies how this opportunistic blackness makes claims on subculture ("the *pit* of plutonian darkness"). Clarke delineates the relations between race and rebelliousness more soberly in his complaint about the proposed headquarters of the League. Suggesting that Oldham move the headquarters from Boston to Hamburg, S.C., site of a notorious massacre of black freedmen that ended Reconstruction in the state, Clarke accuses Oldham of confusing the revolutionary with the reactionary.

But egregious as his combination of opportunistic blackness and virulent racism was, Oldham was not alone among the amateurs in identifying, however fleetingly, as black. As noted earlier, one way amateurs enacted the intimacy of the 'dom was by making and circulating woodcuts of themselves and one another. Because few of them were very skilled engravers, however, they often cut away the negative space on the block and left the positive space to take the ink. In practice, this meant that they represented themselves as if in blackface, as in the case of the portrait of Richard Gerner above (fig. 6a). One of the earliest amateur papers, the *New Haven Boy's Herald*, bemoaned the phenomenon. In an otherwise admiring review of a guide to amateur journalism that included several portraits of "prominent amateurs," the paper complained that these were "the poorest caricatures we have ever had the misfortune to come across ... they all look like so many 'gentlemen of color,' or in plain language 'niggers,' (no offense to the persons whom they are intended to represent)." Yet if the *Boy's Herald* deplored the effect, the masthead to the *Nebraska City Phunny Phellow* suggests that other amateurs embraced it (fig.

12). The unusually proficient engraving of the masthead, as well as the oversize ears, lips, and teeth all too familiar from minstrel caricatures, indicates that its self-portrait in blackface might have been intentional, rather than accidental—a way of rendering what the paper elsewhere called the “naughty caper” of amateurdom.



Fig. 12 Phunny Phellow (Nebraska City, Neb.), Vol. 1, Nos. 3, 4, and 5 (July, August, and September, 1880). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.

By raising the specter of “civil rights,” Clarke’s election forced the question of amateurdom’s marginality—a question that the amateur press, with its tradition of oppositional forms without content, was not prepared to answer. The paths of the central players, Clarke and the North Carolina amateurs, illustrate how difficult it was to contain the controversy within the existing parameters of amateurdom. Up to this point, *Le Bijou* had been a pretty conventional amateur paper, printing news from the ‘dom, reviews of other papers, and some sentimental poetry, comic stories, and puzzles. The election controversy, however, evidently radicalized Clarke. He devoted the entire September 1879 issue to the debate, reprinting the North Carolina attacks, the responses they garnered from other papers, and his own vigorous rejoinders. *Le Bijou*’s tone, which had previously been very decorous, became considerably more caustic. In the next issue, Clarke taunted his attacker: “Ed. Oldham favored us with a tin-type of himself lately. We’ve placed it in our album opposite our black gal’s photo. Sh-sh—Ed—don’t run—she won’t hurt you!” The paper’s contents also became much more explicitly political. In subsequent issues, Clarke reported on educational disparities between North and South, the link between women’s rights and “the future of the American negro,” the relationship between wages and the length of the working day, and racial prejudice at West Point. The title page of the April 1880 issue endorsed a slate of candidates in the next N.A.P.A. elections under the unauthorized slogan, “EQUALITY, RIGHT,

JUSTICE!" Yet amateurdom was evidently less willing to adopt equality, right, and justice as its guiding principles, and Clarke issued *Le Bijou* more and more irregularly, eventually discontinuing it in 1881. In 1882, he left amateurdom entirely and founded the *Afro-American*, the first Democratic African American newspaper in the U.S., and according to historian Paula Petrik, he began the first African American newspaper in Indian Territory, as well.

The Amateur Anti-Negro Admission Association took a different route. Where Clarke took his battles outside the world of amateurdom, they continued to operate within it but moved underground. In 1884, the *Nova Scotia Boys' Folio* printed an article titled "The A.A.A.A.—An Association Whose History Has Not Been Recorded." It revealed the membership structure and activities of the A.A.A.A., which had apparently reinvented itself as a secret society devoted to infiltrating regional and state amateur press associations and preventing the admission of African American members. The *Boys' Folio* reported, "New members silently and secretly signed" the membership pledge daily, and as a result, the word "white" was quietly added to amateur press association constitutions. The article ended ominously, "It is a question whether the association is still alive."

Shaken, perhaps, by this crisis in its self-definition, by the end of the 1880s the amateur press largely abandoned its experiment in teenage print culture and opened its doors to adults, including women. But as transitory as it was, the amateur press contributed to a fashioning of rebelliousness as adolescent that still frames our understanding of adolescence—and indeed, rebellion—today. In their noisy editorializing, their mannered unruliness, and their appropriation (but ultimate refusal) of difference, the amateurs strip the underground of its politics and make it available as a style. The emergence of their subculture thus points us toward a revaluation of cultural capital in the late nineteenth century—specifically, to a moment in which it becomes possible to produce cultural capital out of a lack of cultural capital. Amateurdom consolidated its teenage members' privilege through a collective expression of being unjustly deprived, making a virtue of their exclusion from power. The fact that this exclusion is false is exactly to the point, for it helps us ask with due wonder why a group that, by the usual criteria of race, class, and gender, enjoys all of the privileges of mainstream culture, might reimagine that community as a counterpublic.

## Further Reading

The most comprehensive overview of amateur journalism is former amateur Truman J. Spencer's *The History of Amateur Journalism* (New York, 1957). (Spencer's work was printed by The Fossils Inc.; "fossils" was the amateurs' term for members who aged out of amateurdom.) Amateur newspapers have received very little scholarly attention, but see Paula Petrik, "The Youngest Fourth Estate: The Novelty Toy Printing Press and Adolescence, 1870-1886," in *Small Worlds: Children and Adolescence, 1850-1950*, ed. Elliott West and Paula Petrik (Lawrence, Kansas, 1992): 125-142; Ann Fabian, "Amateur Authorship," in A

*History of the Book in America, Vol. 3: The Industrial Book, 1840-1880*, ed. Scott E. Casper, Jeffrey D. Groves, Stephen W. Nissenbaum, and Michael Winship (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2007): 407-415; Jessica Isaac, "Youthful Enterprises: Amateur Newspapers and the Pre-History of Adolescence, 1867-1883," *American Periodicals* 22: 2 (2012): 158-177. The classic studies of counterpublics remain Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 56-80, and Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (Brooklyn, 2002). On late-nineteenth-century transformations in the understanding of adolescence, see Howard Chudacoff, *How Old Are You? Age Consciousness in American Culture* (Princeton, N.J., 1989), and Karen Sánchez-Eppler, *Dependent States: The Child's Part in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Chicago, 2005). Characterizing racial groups as permanent children precludes recognizing childhood as an actual experience—one reason that African American children were considered "nonchildren," as Robin Bernstein explains in *Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York, 2011).

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