

CARLTON MOSS AND BLACK RADIO

BY

RYAN ELLETT

The African-American presence in the radio industry during the Golden Age is scant at best, and much of that presence was confined to music-oriented programming. Black actors in dramatic roles were scarce. Perhaps the best-remembered black radio drama was Richard Durham's *Destination Freedom* broadcast from 1948 - 1950. Other relatively prominent African-American radio ventures included *New World A Comin'* (1944-1957) and the *Beulah Show* once the title role was given to Hattie McDaniel (then later Lillian and Amanda Randolph) from 1947 - 1953.

But before these shows was Carlton Moss, a black playwright who was penning ongoing radio dramas featuring black casts as early as 1930. Moss is barely remembered in the old time radio literature and he is rarely mentioned in wider world of radio studies. Nevertheless, his contributions are notable: At least three original dramatic series broadcast over the red and blue networks, with evidence hinting at two additional series. He also created and hosted two "forum" programs, discussing current issues first in New York City and later in Los Angeles. Just as important as Moss' written contributions was his casting, it seems, of all black actors to perform the programs. Performers over the years and across his series include Eva Taylor, Frank Wilson, Edna Lewis Thomas, Georgia Burke, Clarence Williams, Richard Huey, Al Simmons, Rose McClendon, and Ernest Whitman. While none of the players ever made a real name for themselves in radio they should all be acknowledged and remembered for their groundbreaking work in early radio.

Carlton Moss was born in 1909 and grew up in New Jersey and North Carolina before attending college at Morgan College (now Morgan State University) in Baltimore. By the late '20s Moss relocated to New York City, a writer enmeshed in the Harlem Renaissance. Moss' first ongoing radio effort (calling it a success might be too generous) was the weekly *Careless Love*. The series premiered at 8:00 p.m. on Saturday, November 15, 1930, over WEAJ, NBC Red's flagship station out of New York City.

So far this author has not discovered any scripts or first-hand accounts of *Careless Love's* content. In 1931, after nearly a year of being on the air, the black newspaper *The Chicago Defender* described it thus:

These are stories of Race life in the South, stories of yesterday and today, simple stories that throb with heart-beat and emotion - the character and feeling of the Colored people - written by a young Race boy, Carlton Moss.

Saturday night's sketch was called "Big Eddy's Partner." The history of a young Colored boy who came from an upcountry farm to the docks of New Orleans¹.

Various African Americans performed along with Moss on the historic effort. The most prominent was Eva Taylor, a singer who had radio experience under her belt by the time of her stint on *Careless Love*. Born Irene Joy Gibbons in St. Louis, Eva had toured worldwide as a singer in vaudeville by her teens, including a role with Josephine

¹ *The Chicago Defender*, September 4, 1931.

Gassman and her Pickaninnies. In 1920 she settled in New York and had a comfortable career in show business that lasted into the 30s. She and her husband, Clarence Williams (also a Careless Love performer) recorded many tunes during the 20s for such labels as Black Swan, Okeh, and Columbia. Taylor had at least one acting stint before Careless Love, a part in Bottomland, a Broadway musical written by her husband in 1927.

Eva Taylor

Clarence Williams, Taylor's long-time husband, also spent time on Moss' show. Williams was an interesting man who had his hands in many show business projects.

Unfortunately for Moss, Careless Love was frequently moved around the broadcast schedule, playing on different days of the week at various times. Records even indicate the program's length varied between fifteen and thirty minutes. Further, the series was switched to WJZ, the Blue affiliate, as of May 29, 1931. While any African-American project of this sort would have struggled to find a comfortable audience in that era, the constant broadcast shuffling could only have damaged efforts to find that audience. Careless Love left the air on May 15, 1932, eighteen months after it debuted.

Nevertheless, an eighteen-month run for a writer brand new to radio - even in this early era - should be considered a success. It was a success, however, that Moss would not surpass or even duplicate in his follow-up efforts.

Moss' sophomore effort for NBC was entitled Folks From Dixie and it debuted May 7, 1933. The show replaced Moonshine and Honeysuckle, a "dramatic series of the Kentucky mountains" which had run for nearly two years.² Like Careless Love, details of the program are sketchy. Contemporary newspaper accounts describe it as "a series of comedy sketches using colored performers".³ The premise of the show was a "negro mammy" named Jennie Jackson who inherits a sizable fortune⁴. At least one critic who was initially skeptic saying "it'll have a tough job" replacing Moonshine and Honeysuckle⁵ admitted after hearing the premier of Folks From Dixie proclaimed the show "a worthy successor to the Moonshine and Honeysuckle skit."⁶

Moss' effort did not catch the public's imagination. Folks From Dixie ran weekly beginning May 7, 1933, until August 6, 1933, a run of a mere fourteen weeks. An early Sunday afternoon timeslot (12:30 - 1:00 initially, then 1:30 - 2:00) likely did not help.

Moonshine and Honeysuckle, the Sunday WEAH-NBC dramatic series of the Kentucky mountains, will close at the end of the month after a run of 132 weeks. In its place is to be a series "Folks from Dixie" written by Carelton Moss. The story centers around Jennie Jackson, negro mammy who inherits a fortune. Evening Huronite, Huron, SD 4/20/33

Moonshine and Honeysuckle will be replaced by Folks From Dixie a series of comedy drama sketches using colored performers. Carlton Moss, who authored the "Careless Love" sketches, wrote the new series. Monessen Daily Independent, Monessen, PA 5/4/33

11:30 – 12:00 WMAQ Sunday, May 7 Sheboygan Press, 5/5/33

² Evening Huronite, Huron, SD, April 23, 1933.

³ Monessen Daily Independent, Monessen, PA May 4, 1933.

⁴ Evening Huronite, Huron, SD, April 23, 1933.

⁵ The Times, Hammond, IN, May 6, 1933.

⁶ The Times, Hammond, IN, May 10, 1933.

Folks From Dixie skit replaces Moonshine and Honeysuckle tomorrow (12:30, WMAQ) and it'll have a tough job. 5/6/33 The Times, Hammond, IN

12:30 – 1:00 Folks from Dixie WGY, CKGW Syracuse Herald, 5/7/33

Folks from Dixie a worth successor to the Moonshine and Honeysuckle skit. The Times, Hammond, IN 5/10/33

WEEL Boston 5/13/33 Lowell Sun, Lowell, MA

WLW 12:30 5/27/33 Van Wert Daily Bulletin 5/27/33 Van Wert, OH

5/7

5/14/33

5/21/33

5/28/33

6/4/33

WEAF

Folks From Dixie – Dramatic Sketch 1:30 – 2:00

6/11/33

6/18/33

6/25/33

7/2/33

7/9/33

7/16/33

7/23/33

7/30/33

8/6/33

WAAB Boston 8/26/33 for Sun. 8/27 Lowell Sun

Red chain

CFCF montreal

CKGW

KFI LA

KFSD sandiego

KFYR bismark, nd

KGO san fran

KGW Portland, or

KHQ Spokane, wa

KOA

KOMO seattle, wa

KPRC houston

KSD st. louis

KSTP st. paul mn

Denver

KTBS Shreveport, la
KVOO tulsa
WAPI Birmingham, AL
WBEN buffalo ny
WCAE pittsburg
WCKY Covington, ky
WDAF kc, mo
WDAY fargo, nd
WEAF nyc
WEBC superior, wi
WEEI boston
WFAA dallas
WFBR baltimore
WFI philadelphia
WGY Schenectady, ny
WHO des moines
WIBA Madison, wi
WIOD Miami, fl
WIS Columbia, sc
WJAR providence, ri
WJAX Jacksonville, fl
WKY okc
WMAQ chicago
WOAI san antonio
WOC davenport, ia
WOW omaha
WRC dc
WRVA Richmond, va
WSAI cincinnati
WSB atlanta
WSM nashville
WSMB new orleans
WTAG Worcester, ma
WTAM cleveland
WWJ detroit
WWNC Asheville, nc

Careless love eva taylor, Georgia burke, edna Thomas, carlton moss, Wilson 3/20/32
Zanesville Signal, Zanesville, OH

A tribute to the fiftieth anniversary of YMCA's serving the colored youth will be paid in a radio broadcast over WOR and the MBS Nov. 6, fro 2:30 – 3. General Secretary Pat Smith has been advised. A dramatization "Into the Light" written by Carlton Moss, young negro dramatist, will present Rex Ingraham and Frank Wilson both from "Green Pastures." The play will depict the growth and present needs of the Y's work with colored youths. 10/31/38 Delta Democrat-Times, Greenville MS

Meeting House 4:00 eastern Dramatic WJZ Lima News 6/23/36 Lima, OH
Meetin' House WJZ Sketch; Music to be aired 6/23/36 5:00 per 6/21/36 NYT, However,
6/23/36 NYT lists Stemm orch.

Meetin' House WJZ
4/9/35 10:30 – 11:00 pm

5/24/35 10 – 1030 fri
5/31/35 10 – 1030 fri
6/7/35 10
6/21/35 10
6/28/35 10 – 1030 fri
7/19/35 10 fri Carlton marries Annie L. Savage 7/19
7/26/35 10 fri
8/2/35 10 – 1030 fri
8/9/35 10 -1030 fri
8/16 1030 fri
8/23/35 1030 -11 fri
9/6/35 10 – 1030 fri
9/20/35 10 fri
9/27/35 10
10/4/35 10
10/18/35 10
12/3/35 3:15 -3:45 pm tue
12/10/35 315 345 tue
12/17/35 315-345
12/31/35 315
1/7/36 315 – 345
1/14/36 315
1/21/36 315
2/4/36 3:15 – 3:45
2/11/36 3:15 – 3:45
2/18/36 315
2/25/36 3:15 – 3:45
3/10/36 5:00 – 5:30 tue
3/24/36 4:45 – 5:00 tue
4/7/36 5 530 tue
4/14/36
4/21/36
4/28/36
5/12/36
5/19/36
5/26/36
6/2/36 tues
6/9/36
6/16/36 5:00

8/25/36 930 -10 tue

WEAF Meetin House – Drama Poughkeepsie Eagle-News Wed. March 10, 1937

3/3/37 1130 – 1200 pm

3/10/37 “

3/17/37 “

3/24/37 “

3/31/37 “

Rose McClendon and Ernest Whitman acted in his programs - Visions of Belonging by
Judith E. Smith

2/14/31

Careless Love

Written by Carlton Moss

Broadcast on WEA

2/21/31

Radio dramalogue

Monday evenings at 7:30

22 years old

graduate of Morgan College, Baltimore

2/28/31

F Carlton Moss

Guest of honor at Civic club and addressed the group.

4/18/31

Featured Eva Taylor, Frank Wilson, Edna Lewis Thomas, Georgia Burke

Early Black American Playwrights and Dramatic Writers: A Biographical and Catalog of
Plays, Films, and Broadcasting Scripts. Bernard L. Peterson, Jr. NY: Greenwood Press,
p. 18 describes Careless Love as a soap opera.

p. 148 Also featured “clarence williams”

also wrote Folks From Dixie and Noah radio play

p. 147 In 1931 one of his plays was produced by the Harlem Players He also wrote and
acted in a radio series, “Community Forum,” which was aired on WEVD. Also
performed in a number of plays, presumably with the Lafayette Players, and in some of
the early films of Oscar Micheaux.

9/4/31

These are stories of Race life in the South, stories of yesterday and today, simple stories
that throb with heart-beat and emotion - the character and feeling of the Colored people -
written by a young Race boy, Carlton Moss.

Saturday night's sketch was called "Big Eddy's Partner." The history of a young Colored boy who came from an upcountry farm to the docks of New Orleans. The music is furnished by the famous radio quartet, the Southernaires.

9/26/31

Careless Love opened on Broadway a week after Sep 1, 1931

10/3/31

Southernaires are William Edmondson, Jay Toney, Lowell, Peters and Homer Smith.

Only Colored group used by NBC.

Heard on W 8 - 8:15, Su morn 10 - 10:30, Sa nights 9:15 -9:30 with Careless Love sketches.

11/5/32

Weekly radio programs will be announced by Carlton Moss, chairman of the executive committee of the university scholarship foundation. Begins thur. evening Nov. 10, 1932.

Broadcast from WEVD, 44th and Broadway

6/22/35

Richard Huey played on Careless Love

Short bio

11/22/30

Carlton Moss will be heard over Weaf every Sat. at 8:30. He will read his own productions.

7/10/35

Married Annie L. Savage

"Meetin' House" now being heard every Fri. at 10 pm over NBC

Al Simmons had three parts in the first three programs of Careless Love then appeared on Admiral Byrd's program. Received \$15 for each appearance.

Carlton Moss

2/14/09 Newark, NJ - 8/10/97 LA

only major film as a director was the short documentary Frederick Douglass: The House on Cedar Hill. Formed an acting troupe at Morgan State University. Wrote The Negro Soldier for Frank Capra. Became an important figure in black cinema. Later taught at Fisk University. Wiki

But then one thing that made him a hero was that at a time when blacks were largely excluded by the Hollywood establishment, Mr. Moss worked almost constantly, and always on his own terms. Guest lecturer at Fisk, professor at UC-Irvine. College troupe was "Toward a Black Theater" became a fixture in the Federal Theater of the WPA.

<http://www.nytimes.com/1997/08/15/arts/carlton-moss-88-who-filmed-the-black-experience-dies.html>

In the late 1920s, actor-writer Carlton Moss launched a weekly African American drama series, *The Negro Hour*, on WJZ. The series was short-lived, but its dramatic group evolved into the highly acclaimed Lafayette Players, which continued to be involved in black radio drama throughout the 1930s. William Barlow, *Voice Over: The Making of Black Radio*, 1999, Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Eva Taylor

Jan. 22, 1895, St. Louis - Oct 31, 1977 Mineola, NY

Born Irene Joy Gibbons

Toured New Zealand, Australia, Europe by the time she was in her teens.

Toured as part of the Josephine Gassman and her Pickaninnies vaudeville act.

Settled in NY by 1920

Married Clarence Williams soon after, entertainer and businessman.

Recorded together throughout the 20s and into 30s.

Members of the Blue Five in mid-20s which included Louis Armstrong and Bessie Smith.

1922 made first record for black-owned Black Swan Records, billed "The Dixie Nightingale"

also recored for Okeh and Columbia

1927 appeared on Broadway musical *Bottomland* written by her husband, 21 performances

1929 had her own show *Cavalcade* on NBC wiki

Check Contemporary Black American Playwrights (Peterson)

11/15/30

WEAF

8:00 Salon Singers: Concert Orchestra

8:30 Careless Love, Sketch

9:00 GE Symphony Orchestra

replaces Sign of the Shell; Wendell Hall. Songs; Ray Perkins

11/15/30

11/22/30 radio listing Saturday 8:00

11/29/30 radio listing

12/06/30 radio listing

12/13/30

12/20/30

12/26/30 Fridays, 9:30 after Clicquot Eskimos Orchestra and before Crime Prevention Program

1/2/31

1/9/31 now 9:45 to 10:00 called "Love - Sketch" Enna Jettick, Songbird gets other 15 minutes

1/16/31 now 9:45 to 10:00 Enna Settick, Songbird gets other 15 minutes

1/23/31

1/30/31

2/2/31 now Monday 7:30 between Questions and Answers with James G. McDonald at 7:15 and How's Business with Merle Thorpe at 8

2/9/31

2/16/31

2/23/31

3/2/31 7:30 - 7:45

3/9/31 7:30 - 7:45

3/16/31 The Opera Wozzeck - Leopold Stokowski during the time

3/23/31 7:30 - 7:45

3/30/31 7:30 - 7:45 on 3/29's week schedule but not on 3/30's schedule. Snoop and Peep instead

4/13/31 7:30 - 7:45

4/20/31 7:45 - 8:00

4/27/31 7:45 - 8:00

5/4/31 7:30 - 8:00 Sketch - The Story of the Star-Spangled Banner

5/15/31 9:30 - 9:45

5/29/31 8:45 - 9:00 now on WJZ

6/12/31 8:45 - 9:00 on 6/7's week schedule but not on 6/12' schedule. Black's Orchestra instead

6/19/31 Black's Orchestra again

Listed on 6/21's week schedule but no on 6/26's schedule 8:30 Contract Bridge instead

Same for 6/28

7/10/31 8:30- 8:45

7/17/31 8:30

7/24/31 11:30

7/31/31 11:30

Listed on 8/2 schedule but not 8/7's 11:30

Listed on 8/9 schedule by not 8/16's

8/29/31 9:00 moved to Saturdays

9/5/31

9/12/31 9:15 - 9:30

9/19/31

9/26

10/03/31

10/10/31 9:00 - 9:30

Listed on 10/11 schedule but not 10/17's

10/24/31

10/31/31

11/8/31 2:15-2:30 moved to Sundays

11/15/31 2:15-2:30

11/22/31

11/29/31

12/6/31

12/13/31

12/20/31

12/27/31
1/3/32
1/10/32
1/17/32
1/24/32
1/31/32
2/21/32
2/28/32 12:30-12:45
3/13/32
3/20/32
3/27/32
4/3/32
4/10/32
4/17/32
4/24/32 12:00 - 12:30
5/1/32
5/8/32 12:15 - 12:30
5/15 12:00 - 12:30

May 1931

WEAF - NYC, WCSH - Portland, ME, WTAG - Worcester, MA, WGY - Schenectady, NY, WOC - Davenport, IA, WHO - Des Moines, IA, WOW - Omaha, WEEI - Boston

January, 1932

KDKA - Pittsburg, WBAL - Baltimore, WCKY - Covington, KY, WJZ - NYC, WREN - Lawrence, KS

March, 1932

WBAL - Baltimore, WCKY - Covington, KY, WGAR - Cleveland, WJZ - NYC, WREN - Lawrence, KS

April, 1932

KEX - Portland, OR, KGA - Spokane, WA, KJR - Seattle, KOA - Denver, KOIL - Council Bluffs, IA, KPO - San Francisco, KPRC - Houston, KSL - Salt Lake City, KTAR - Phoenix, WCKY - Covington, KY, WHAM - Rochester, NY, WJZ - NYC

May, 1932

KEX - Portland, OR, KGA - Spokane, WA, KGIR - Butte, MT, KJR - Seattle, KOA - Denver, KOIL - Council Bluffs, IA, KPO - San Francisco, KPRC - Houston, KSL - Salt Lake City, KTAR - Phoenix

Midsummer, 1932

KOIL - Council Bluffs, IA, KWCR - Cedar Rapids, KWK - St. Louis, WCKY - Covington, KY, WHAM - Rochester, NY, WZ - NYC, WREN - Lawrence, KS

On Friday, October 11, from 4 to 4:30, p.m., over WOR and the Mutual Web, a special Founder's Day broadcast will be presented by the New York

Free, Adult, Uncensored: The Living History of the Federal Theatre Project (Washington, D.C.: New Republic Books, 1978) John O'Connor, Lorraine Brown, eds.
Arena (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1940) E. Quita Craig

Black Drama of the Federal Theatre Era: Beyond the Formal Horizons (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1980)

African American Theatre Directory, 1816-1960

Frank Wilson wrote a folk drama "Walk Together, Children" in 1936 for the Negro Theatre Project located at the Lafayette Theatre in Harlem. Part of the Federal Theatre Project. (70)

The Philadelphia Negro Unit, Philadelphia, PA, produced Prelude in Swing, a musical documentary of Carlton Moss (1939). (71)

Harlem Players, Harlem Library Little Theatre, Harlem, NYC. Little theatre group, also called a stock company, 1931. This short-lived group followed the Harlem Experimental Theatre in presenting plays in the basement of the 135th St. Branch of the NY Public Library. Plays included Sacrifice by Carlton Moss and Richard Huey. (89-90)

Carlton Moss was a resident director at the Harlem Y in 1934. (93)

By 1932, the Lafayette Th. Had reverted to a movie theatre, with only an occasional venture into musical shows. However, it once again returned to its former glory during its five-year resuscitation from 1935-1939 as the home of the New York Negro Unit of the WPA Federal Theatre Project. First headed by John Houseman and Orson Welles, later by Edward Perry, Carlton Moss, and HFV Edward. (121)

Carlton Moss, Frank Wilson, Rose McClendon on executive committee of Negro Repertory Theatre, NYC. Short-lived theatrical organization, 1932/33. Organized as a Negro unit of the Repertory Playhouse Associates for the purpose of training and development of black actors, directors, and stage technicians, in order to establish a definitive folk theatre for the production of worthwhile black plays. (150)

Jerre Mangione, The Dream and the Deal: The Federal Writers' Project, 1935-1943 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972).

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