Abstract

From a constructionist perspective, this study considers the ways in which the black radio industry imagines and addresses African American audiences in the Obama age. Through an examination of the use of sound on air, interviews with station executives, and the analysis of an industry blog, I identified three constructed audiences within the black radio milieu – the culture of affluence, the culture of the mic, and the culture of grace, which also mapped onto the major formats Arbitron labels as “black” (urban adult contemporary, mainstream urban, and urban gospel). Efforts to construct audiences along class/status lines produce a bifurcated understanding of blackness as either sophisticated or street. This is an unproductive binary for many reasons, particularly in light of black radio’s claim to unite “the black community.” In addition to engaging with questions related to audience construction, the paper wrestles with the always-slippery processes of delineating the boundaries, however porous, of “authentic” blackness.