Paddy and Pickaninny:
A Comparative History of Irish and African-American Stereotypes on Food Packaging

This study examines the use of racial and ethnic stereotypes on seed, plant, and food packaging from the late 19th to the early 20th century. While an array of ethnic images are considered, the focus is on the parallel uses of offensive Irish-American and African-American caricatures in particular. From the English and Scottish, to the Dutch and Italian, the Tahitian and Native American, the use of ethnic images on food packaging became a well-worn Victorian Era marketing trope, but only with the Irish and the African-American were the depictions, by turn, ridiculous, villainous, animalistic and monstrous. While the study touches touch upon some well-known advertisements, such as those of the Aunt Jemima brand, it largely draws upon the hundreds of lesser-known label crates and trade cards produced in the late 19th and early 20th-century to promote all matter of food product. The evidence will draw upon advertisements found in archival collections, edited volumes, and several internet depositories. Of particular interest are those advertisements that feature anthropomorphic depictions of the product that created or reinforced their link with a specific ethnic group. The study argues that the products linked with the Irish and African-Americans drew not upon cultural associations of love or warmth, but upon those of pain and oppression. With food companies and restaurants apologizing for racist and/or insensitive practices in their marketing past and present a look back demonstrates the deep-seated historical origins of these problems.