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Masks in Disguise:

Exposing Minstrelsy and Racial Representation within American Tap Dance Performances of the
Stage, Screen, and Sound Cartoon, 1900-1950

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of
Philosophy in Culture and Performance

by

Brynn Wein Shiovitz

2016

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Masks in Disguise:

Exposing Minstrelsy and Racial Representation within American
Tap Dance Performances of the Stage, Screen, and Sound Cartoon, 1900-1950

by

Brynn Wein Shiovitz

Doctor of Philosophy in Culture and Performance

University of California, Los Angeles, 2016

Professor Susan Leigh Foster, Chair

Masks in Disguise: Exposing Minstrelsy and Racial Representation within American Tap Dance Performances of the Stage, Screen, and Sound Cartoon, 1900-1950, looks at the many forms of masking at play in three pivotal, yet untheorized, tap dance performances of the twentieth century in order to expose how minstrelsy operates through various forms of masking. The three performances that I examine are: George M. Cohan's production of *Little Johnny*

Jones (1904), Eleanor Powell's "Tribute to Bill Robinson" in *Honolulu* (1939), and Terry-Toons' cartoon, "The Dancing Shoes" (1949). These performances share an obvious move away from the use of blackface makeup within a minstrel context, and a move towards the masked enjoyment in "black culture" as it contributes to the development of a uniquely American form of entertainment. In bringing these three disparate performances into dialogue I illuminate the many ways in which American entertainment has been built upon an Africanist aesthetic at the same time it has generally disparaged the black body. These three shows replaced the practice of blacking up with new (invisible) means of masking; by relying heavily on music, dance, narrative, and technology, and taking the focus away from the black and/or black-faced body, these shows offered national unity through the exclusion of an Other in a socially accepted manner.

I have constructed a theory of *covert minstrelsy* to describe a process that occurs when a choreographer, director, or animator utilizes a combination of invisible masks simultaneously in an effort—though not always a conscious one—to distract the audience from seeing all parts of the whole. In each of the performances I analyze, these different masks interact to produce an "agreeable" show that places artificial boundaries between the supposed threat of the black body and the alleged purity of a nation that favors its white citizens. I seek to illuminate how the very simultaneity of perceptible (yet invisible) components goes unnoticed under deceptive narratives and political charades; minstrelsy need not be blatant or even visible to construct a social paradigm of the "Other".

The dissertation of Brynn Wein Shiovitz is approved.

Yogita Goyal

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For anyone who has ever been forced to wear a mask, felt the need to hide who she is, or been vulnerable enough to uncover the person beneath.

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I cannot think of a cooler, smarter, more incredible committee than the one that allowed *Masks in Disguise* to come to fruition. Under the guidance of my chair, Dr. Susan Leigh Foster, I learned so much about the writing process and gained invaluable insight into academia. Susan, you believed in this project from its inception and have since offered generously your time, experience, and honesty to make me the best scholar I can be. Dr. Janet O’Shea, thank you for your optimism and overall support in this endeavor. You were a guiding force in the development of my prospectus and your class on corporeality shaped much of Chapter Two. Dr. Yogita Goyal, thank you for introducing me to the black Atlantic and offering a space to explore so many of this dissertation’s theoretical lenses. You have always made me feel like my voice matters and offered constructive vantage points from which to view relevant concepts. Dr. Anthea Kraut, I am so grateful for you taking on my project despite the geography that separates your campus from mine. Your attention to detail is superb and you have a knack for seeing things and sides others do not. Thank you for your feedback and your questions. They have been formative in cultivating this document and its future iterations. Professor David Roussève, thank you for responding under the wire and for making yourself available at crucial moments throughout this process. Lynn Dally, you have been a wonderful listener, teacher, and friend; my

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PROLOGUE

“A society which believes it has dispensed with masks can only be a society in which masks, more powerful than ever before, the better to deceive men, will themselves be masked” (Lévi-Strauss 20).¹

Masking can signify many things and refer to a range of behaviors. As a means of disguise, a mask seeks to hide one’s true character or attempts to temporarily conceal one’s feelings. As a method of protection, a mask aims to shelter its wearer from outside forces: this might be literal, wherein a healthcare professional wears a mask to shield him/herself from potentially harmful particles flying through space, or the case when a hockey goalie wishes to keep his teeth intact while on the ice. On the other hand, when the purpose of the mask is to make someone laugh, a “peek-a-boo” mask can have someone in stitches just as easily as that of a Groucho Marx mask. Fear might emerge in the presence of someone sporting Hitler’s mustache and side-swept bangs and others might be way more terrified by a bloody-faced trick-or-treater who shows up unannounced. Some attempts to conceal are subtle: wearing sunglasses at a funeral signifies someone in mourning but hides the extent of his grief. Some masks evolve out of an attempt to fit into society’s standards of beauty: one might feel compelled to apply makeup before being

¹ Lévi-Strauss, Claude. “The Many Faces of Man.” *World Theatre*. (1961): 11-20.

“seen” in public. Some masks are the result of ritual: avocado masks moisturize, the Yoruba *gelede* mask inspires worship, and a mask made of two contrasting sets of school colors rallies football fans from opposing teams for homecoming. But all of these masks share a necessary ambivalence: that which provides protection for one, might be interpreted as humorous or threatening for another. Or, one mask might serve two purposes for the same person simultaneously. Which is to say, wearing a particular mask might help someone to identify with one group of people or a single set of values at the same time that it distances him from another group and forces him to turn his back on a particular way of being in the world. In addition to providing a method of disguise—that is, temporarily turning the wearer into someone or something he is not in reality—the mask always incites slippage and arouses a continuous, oppositional multi-valence.²

The mask dates back to antiquity, if not further, and has been used in the service of everything from practical day-to-day functions, to religious ceremonies, to aesthetic enjoyment. While a mask generally refers to a face covering, some masks cover the entire body, while others cover just one part of it. Some masks are made of natural objects, while others are purely synthetic. Some are three-dimensional, while others are merely the result of paint or paint-like substances (e.g. mud, clay, or plaster) that have been applied to the face. Some masks are even invisible. *Masks in Disguise* is concerned with an array of masks, some visible, some not. Some of these masks manifest on the stage, and some on the screen. Some are heard, and some are purposely muted. Many of these masks require paint of some sort, and a few of them only necessitate a costume. A whole group of these masks are made possible only through language and the efficacy of some entail technologies of the body, the brain, and/or the machine. What all

² I use valence here in the way that psychologist Kurt Lewin used the term c. 1935, meaning the “intrinsic attractiveness (positive valence) or aversiveness (negative valence) of an event, object, or situation” (Frijda 207).

of these masks share, however, besides their ambivalent existence, is their codependency as well as their relation to performance: “Like performance [masking] invokes an idea of an authentic identity... only to dismantle the illusion of such identity. It is often used in the Bakhtinian carnivalesque sense of a possibility of being something other than what one is; as a dissimulation of authentic identities or a disarray of accepted roles” (Tseëlon 10). *Masks in Disguise* traces these different types of masking amidst several kinds of performance, and pays special attention to those illusions of identity related to race and a sense of national belonging.

This project stems out of my particular curiosity around types of masking that tend to go unnoticed. I remember watching Shirley Temple films as an aspiring white five-year-old tap dancer and thinking that it was strange to see her keeping up with someone almost a half-century her senior. I brushed this thought aside and instead used Temple’s perceptible talent as motivation to practice—all the time, everywhere, and to the detriment of my parents’ beautiful hardwood floors. Some years later, however, I decided to reevaluate: I watched and re-watched Robinson and Temple’s signature stair dance in *The Little Colonel*, and was crushed to discover that my role model was only executing half as many sounds as her partner. To an untrained ear the aural discrepancy in their footwork would likely not surface, especially because of the nature in which old sound technology has mystified various sonic pairings. But years of teaching young tap dancers the audible components of basic steps has attuned my ears to locate dropped sounds and missed beats. Temple was still incredible in light of her age, but it seemed unfair that I, and so many others, had given her credit for sounds I should have attributed to Bill Robinson, the master choreographer not only capable of choreographing complex syncopations to be performed on a staircase, but proficient in making choreography that *unequally* distributed the work *and*

covered up his masterful *double* labor. “Bojangles,” as he was called, did twice the work, and yet, took half the credit; such became a presage for my ensuing research.

I had never read anything about the sonic disparity that surfaced between these two dancers. Perhaps that was because it was invisible. I had heard of blackface minstrelsy, or the practice of an artist donning black makeup and performing the part of a “black” person through song, dance, and impersonation, but never had I been asked to reflect on someone getting credit on the stage for the work of someone black but going unnoticed because of his or her apparent whiteness. *Masks in Disguise* begins at this crossroads between knowing, deception, and acceptance: *knowing* that something is off; being *deceived* by what presents itself *visibly*; and *accepting* things at face value because they work in one’s favor.

The term “minstrelsy,” on its own, means a singer, or more generally a musician, who would recite poetry for the noble class during medieval times.³ Over the years “minstrelsy” has become shorthand for “blackface minstrelsy” which specifically denotes a performer who “blacks-up.” Within blackface studies, theorists distinguish between “black-on-white” minstrelsy, or the act of a white person donning black makeup, and “black-on-black” minstrelsy, which requires that the person under the mask identify as black. The branch of critical race studies that deals specifically with American blackface minstrel performance owes a great deal of credit to authors like Ralph Ellison, Dale Cockrell, Eric Lott, W.T. Lhamon, David Roediger, Michael Rogin, and Louis Chude-Sokei.⁴ These authors have been pioneers in moving such ideas forward and refining the myriad distinctions between these two forms of masking. Not only have these men identified

³ From the French *menestral*, meaning “entertainer, servant”, via the Latin *ministerialis*, meaning “servant” (OED).

⁴ This list is by no means exhaustive but captures those figures whose theories have been of primary importance to this project.

reasons for donning this specific mask, but each has also expanded the ways in which we think about identity in relation to performances of race.

Minstrelsy as a scholarly subject began with Ralph Ellison's fêted essay, "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke" (1958),⁵ wherein the author claims that the minstrel mask inverts shame into laughter through a process of identification with the audience. Ellison's essay catalyzes a movement in successive minstrel theory, of white authors who analyze the subject in terms of white racial identity. David Roediger, for instance, claims that race must be understood as relational, where one's identification with whiteness develops from distinguishing oneself from "Other". Roediger's study anticipates the work of Eric Lott, who argues that blackface minstrelsy demonstrates more about the way that "white working people lived their whiteness" than it reveals white people 'borrowing' from black culture (Lott 3-4).⁶ By tracing a history of minstrel acts and performances alongside various histories of class, gender, and race in America, Lott shows how the blackface mask signifies certain power relations and consequently mediates class, racial, and ethnic conflict by reproducing working-class relationships between the races, staging an "antebellum racial economy" (48). In presenting this racial economy, blackface stages a racial counterfeit; it stems from a racial desire to "try on" black culture and use it at one's disposal; a "white ventriloquism through black forms" (95). Thus, in keeping with Ellison's original essay, Lott's theory accounts for a psychological inversion that takes place between the audience and the performer. The idea that the blackface mask possesses the power to represent and re-stage social conflict remains at the heart of modern minstrel scholarship and

⁵ See Ellison (1964).

⁶ See Lott (1993).

provides one way in which we might view the mask as fundamentally ambivalent; a single disguise can mean different things for different people and “accomplish” several things at once.

Another common theme within minstrel scholarship is the way in which the mask can represent a desire *for* the Other at the same time it causes a (sometimes visceral) repulsion *away* from the Other. This can be seen in W.T. Lhamon’s work, particularly when he writes about the role of the Jim Crow figure that he believes instigates a system of imagined referents for the minstrel archetype. Accordingly Jim Crow becomes a site of fetish for Americans who simultaneously unite on the basis of class and/or circumstance, and yet still find cause for racial divide and excuses for mockery. I see a parallel between Lhamon’s work and that of Eric Lott, who puts forward a similar analysis of the minstrel stage arguing that it continuously plays out the dichotomy of “love and theft”. I continue to return to Lott’s notion of “love and theft” throughout *Masks in Disguise*, but have placed his work in dialogue with Julia Kristeva’s theories of abjection. I contend that the simultaneous attraction to, and repulsion from, the exotic Other and his aesthetics not only make the stage and screen primary sites for identity-making and nation-building, but further complicate the very notion of national representation.

A recurring theme of *Masks in Disguise* is the way in which a mask which serves to protect one person, or group of people, may at the same time work to undermine another or destabilize the identity of a group. Lott makes the case that the blackface mask was one way that Irish immigrants could identify as white. That is, one’s ability to don the black mask and become something one was not in reality, as well as one’s power to remove that mask, were ways of visibly marking one’s position as someone white enough to temporarily “become” black; to apply (or remove) the burnt cork thus washed away one’s immigrant (“Other”) status. Michael Rogin posits something similar when he defines the black mask as one way that Jewish

immigrants were able to take the focus away from their ethnic differences and instead shine a light on their perceptible whiteness. Likening this type of blackface performance to “racial cross-dressing,” Rogin shows how the blackface mask transitions various ethnic groups into the American mainstream “melting pot” while defining a larger concept of national identity and outlining the parameters of citizenship. An awareness of these foundational concepts related to minstrel studies will be most helpful when reading the subsequent pages of *Masks in Disguise*. Because so many of this project’s masks are invisible, understanding the audience’s role in the meaning-making process will be crucial. Furthermore, holding on to some of the reasons why a performer might don a mask in the first place could help to provide some empathy for those performers I identify as engaging in minstrel practices; it is easy to point fingers retrospectively and thus important to keep our common human desire for belonging in mind. Finally, recognizing the inherent ambivalence in all types of minstrelsy will support a deeper understanding of the *many* factors and thus complications involved in disassembling a practice that has existed for centuries.

While Roediger and Lott’s theories provide my study with its main theoretical bent (as it regards notions of masks and masking), Louis Chude-Sokei’s perspective informs another side of the minstrel equation which I take up in relation to the black performers who made very intentional decisions to either don or not don the mask. Chude-Sokei uncovers the potentially liberating powers and racial progress insinuated by the blackface mask worn by black performers like Bert Williams. Chude-Sokei explores how Williams erases his Caribbean identity as a means of gaining exposure in America; his “black-on-black” performance at least brings him recognition within a black-white binary. I will analyze this theory in relation to the visible masking of Williams and Walker as well as the non-visibility of Bill Robinson’s unique form(s)

of masking. If one is to decipher the meaning of a single mask, one must examine the mask from both sides *and* from multiple vantage points. The mask, after all, can signify many things and refer to a range of behaviors *simultaneously*.

Scholars have also begun to think outside the confines of blackness as the only site where racial masking takes place. Marvin McAllister has explored the phenomenon of whiteface minstrelsy as a deliberate attempt to challenge visible markers of whiteness. Sean Metzger has written on yellowface as it manifests in clothing and other forms of adornment that performance has utilized to signify the Chinese body. Juliet McMains has traced a history of brownface as it exists within the Latin ballroom community. While more subtle than the nineteenth century blackface mask, brownface often requires “browning up” at the tanning salon or the assistance of a full-body bronzer. Finally, redface, or the visible performance of “Native American-ness” has been established as a term, but not explored nearly to the extent that these other forms of becoming “Other” have been surveyed in relation to American performance.⁷

Dance scholar Susan Manning challenged the idea that minstrelsy had to be something literal with her theory of “metaphorical minstrelsy”, where one of the form’s defining features is corporeal. In *Modern Dance, Negro Dance* (2004)⁸, the act of “white dancers’ bodies referring to nonwhite subjects,” (10) differs from traditional forms of blackface minstrelsy in that these metaphorical minstrels *do not* engage in impersonation. She writes, “Rather, their bodies became the vehicles for the tenors of nonwhite subjects. Modern dancers did not mimic others but presented an abstraction or personification of Others—Oriental, Indian, Negro” (10). Thus the body and its ability to execute a specific choreography or set of choreographies becomes the

⁷ Philip Deloria’s *Playing Indian* (1998) marks one exception.

⁸ See Manning (2004).

primary signifier in this process rather than the costume or makeup that blackface minstrelsy scholarship tends to privilege.

Taking a cue from Manning and others who have approached the topic of minstrelsy in a non-traditional, not so “black and white” manner, I enter this conversation with the presumption that minstrelsy need not be blatant, nor even visible, in order to exist. Whether literal, metaphorical, visible, or not, the story of the “Other” has permeated the American stage for centuries. *Covert minstrelsy* is the term I offer to refer to theatrical practices that assist in creating national unity through the exclusion of an Other by way of masking. Unlike conventional forms of minstrelsy, covert minstrelsy relies on several layers of disguise—not just one thick coat of burnt cork—working together simultaneously to create a spectacle whose process remains hidden by the layers’ very synchronicity. That is, covert minstrelsy is a specific type of minstrel performance wherein body, visual appearance, sonic production, narrative, and technology work together to reinforce pre-existing notions of race as well as to create new stereotypes, but it does so covertly. In all of the cases I examine, one aspect of the performance distracts from another aspect. This process of redirection creates a masking effect, invisibilizing and silencing what would seem blatantly minstrel in a performance that was singularly visual or sonic. Unlike other forms of minstrelsy, the simultaneous modes, or processes of masking, at play in covert minstrelsy work together to obscure underlying aesthetic and racial ideologies. Thus covert minstrelsy refers not only to a particular type of masking, but requires that the masking itself mask the mask(s) at play. *Masks in Disguise* dissects the individual layers that go into the whole ensemble of masks at work in a single performance to expose the systems of belief *passing* underneath this invisible masquerade. I examine three performances that mark qualitatively distinct operations through which they each conduct masking and as such, constitute three tropes or fundamental models of

how masking occurs in many genres and in many historical moments. In this way, I hope to further the theorization of minstrelsy, demonstrating the various spaces and mediums in and through which minstrelsy can inhabit. Furthermore, I hope to demonstrate the possibility that the most potent forms of masking may in fact be the invisible ones that have yet to be theorized.

The work of Brenda Dixon Gottschild informs my identification of the Africanist aesthetics within this project's three featured performances and thus an understanding of her canon of codifiable traits will be primary. While she questions whether "blackness" is something essential and visible, she maintains that there exists a perceptible "Africanist" aesthetic in American culture.⁹ Borrowing from Robert Farris Thompson,¹⁰ Gottschild locates the following five Africanist elements (12): contrariety, polyrhythm and polycentrism, high-affect juxtaposition, ephebism, and the aesthetic of the cool. "Contrariety" denotes conflict: cacophony in music, discord, unresolved movement or asymmetry, or simply opposition fall under this category. "Polyrhythm" or "polycentrism" refer to the idea that movement can and does initiate from more than one locus (14). This holds for the Africanist aesthetic in music: the polyrhythmic aesthetic allows and/or requires the use of multiple simultaneous rhythms. The omission of smooth transitions, or rather the idea that harmonious juxtaposition need not exist, can be seen in "high-affect juxtaposition". Such contrasting juxtapositions manifest in music and movement. "Ephebism" refers to "kinesthetic intensity," or anything that demonstrates power and vitality (15). Gottschild notes rhythm's centrality to ephebism: one who exhibits rhythmic alacrity successfully demonstrates the traits of ephebism. The "aesthetic of the cool" exists in and contains each of the other four aesthetic principles. Coolness manifests when a performer

⁹ See Gottschild (1996).

¹⁰ See Farris Thompson (1966) and (1983).

combines clarity with a detached facial expression or when “hard and hot” movement surfaces via the performer’s cool and easy temperament (16). All five of these principles work together to produce the Africanist aesthetic; uncovering—or “digging up” to use Gottschild’s phrase—each of these principles is a formative part of dismantling instances of covert minstrelsy.

Tap dance plays a very important and specific role in all of the performances I survey. Not only has tap dance survived as one of the oldest and uniquely all-American dance forms, but also its history is inseparable from America’s complex chronicle of cultural hybridity. Furthermore, this narrative has run parallel—if not concomitant with—a history of blackface in this country. Because of tap dance’s mixed Irish and West African heritage, its ties to the black body that make it suitable for minstrelsy’s caricatures, were embedded long before T.D. Rice introduced blackface to American audiences c. 1830. I trace the significance of tap dance within covert minstrelsy showing that its Africanist presence is responsible for both its triumphs and tribulations: as a result of tap dance’s affiliation with minstrelsy and thus its ties to caricatures of blackness, tap dance on its own has come to signify not only “blackness” but a national identity that creates space for the white body through the exclusion of the black. Unlike blackface minstrelsy, the legacy of tap dance and its ability to place value on race, has survived because of its unique use of rhythm, lyric, label, and invisible/inaudible modes of masking that deliver claims about race and the nation in a way that is more aesthetically palatable and ethically sound to many of America’s white citizens than any performance that seeks to do the same solely through blackface makeup. *Masks in Disguise* examines the role that tap dance has played in shaping the national narrative, both as it has contributed aesthetically to American entertainment and as it has simultaneously qualified the Other’s body and place within the nation.

Despite the critical role that tap dance has played in shaping the American narrative, its theorization has been lacking in disciplines that might house obvious frameworks for its relatable history and generative concepts. While there seems to be a complete absence of tap dance scholarship in fields like American, African American, and cultural studies, more surprising is its scant presence within dance, theatre, and performance studies. Marshall and Jean Stearns' *Jazz Dance* (1968) marked the first scholarly attempt at chronicling the history of tap dance in any *written* capacity, and while exceedingly dated (i.e. primarily in how it deals with race, gender, and class) and clearly biased, it was, and is, one of the best collections of oral histories and attempts to chronologize a very complex story of the art. Aside from short published essays, biographies, and interviews on the topic of tap dance, no one endeavored the project of updating the Stearns' work in a scholarly fashion for several decades; Constance Valis Hill was the first to mount such a feat in manuscript form with *Tap Dancing America* (2010). In addition to filling in for some of the Stearns' historical gaps and updating her audience on the half century succeeding the Stearns' 1968 publication, Valis Hill really foregrounds the role of gender within tap's legacy, including some of the major disparities that existed between men and women who danced. By far the best resource on tap to date, *Tap Dancing America* tells a history of tap that includes some of the profound inequalities that have existed between the bodies of black and white as well as those of men and women, thereby proposing some factors that have necessarily shaped the form and its reception. Most recently the *New York Times* Dance Critic, Brian Seibert, has published an encyclopedic account of tap dance in *What the Eye Hears* (2015). While the text makes a significant contribution to the limited canon of texts that already exist for this lesser-theorized genre, the book is a perfect example of the way in which journalism often takes a more judgmental approach to storytelling than that of academia and frequently neglects dealing

with the types of macro-contextualizations that undoubtedly frame the “facts”. *Masks in Disguise* departs from all three of these approaches to tap dance scholarship, but like the work of Valis Hill, attempts to document the *counter-narratives* and bring various inequalities to the surface.

As these authors have explained, the project of pinning down origins within the history of tap dance is difficult and potentially not the most important facet of passing down the dance. Yet, most tap dancers will agree that understanding the form’s rich history is a crucial part of being able to embody the form. Stearns, Valis Hill, and Seibert have all understood the importance of tap’s history and documented the dance in a way that captures the form’s richness, alludes to its complexity, and begins to tell a story of its role in shaping the American narrative. Even though my research has required a firm grasp of these different histories, my intent is neither to string together the product of copious interviews nor to re-hash the nuanced biographies of famous tap dancers; I will leave that work to others. *Masks in Disguise* attempts to situate tap dance within a larger discussion of race and representation in America. That is, rather than contributing another chronology of tap dance and drawing attention to the way that race has figured into the form and its reception, I hope to offer a study of race and representation that utilizes tap dance as a primary form through which we come to understand larger issues of masking, history, and identity formation. In other words, rather than writing a book that documents tap for the sake of dance history, I wish to bring tap dance into dialogue with other disciplines so that it might be, for once, recognized as a valuable site for scholarly attention.

While I firmly believe that covert minstrelsy predates the twentieth century, my analysis begins at the *fin de siècle*, c. 1895 with George M. Cohan and his work on the American stage. His long-standing ties to blackface performance and coon song composition prime my study of invisible forms of masking that transpire in *Little Johnny Jones* (1904), the nation’s very first

Broadway¹¹ show. Building on the themes and concepts established in this first chapter, I make another case for covert minstrelsy in the 1939 film, *Honolulu*, where Eleanor Powell pays “tribute” to Bill Robinson, in her rendition of his famous stair dance. Here narrative takes on a central role and covers up other modes of masking that would have had difficulty sliding under the stringent parameters of the Hays Code without narrative’s assistance. The Hays Code, or Motion Picture Production Code, was a set of moral guidelines ascertained by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America to ensure that the images American audiences saw on the screen were free from “offensive” material. As I will continue to argue, Hollywood found ways around this set of guidelines by involving a set of invisible masks, one of which was to shroud an image in a deceptive narrative or camouflage its transgression with a misleading label. I develop the types of masking characteristic of filmic interpretations of covert minstrelsy in Chapter Three but complexify certain aspects of its visual and sonic components by turning to drawn caricatures in place of live action impersonation. This brings my analysis to 1949, where I analyze an animated tap dance sequence within Terry-Toons’ *Heckle and Jeckle* short, “The Dancing Shoes,” whose existence as a cartoon allows it to masquerade around as something far more innocent than what lies beneath its pen and ink. The use of animals in place of humans in this chapter further distances the “character”—e.g. a talking magpie—from the caricature—e.g. Jim Crow—even if the character on the screen represents a long lineage of racial stereotyping. While this study is by no means exhaustive, I have picked three performances that I think offer diverse yet complementary cases for the existence and prevalence of covert minstrelsy during the first half of the twentieth century. While each of these productions exemplifies three significant paradigms of how covert minstrelsy can and does operate, each of the models I have chosen also

¹¹ While other “Broadway” shows premiered prior to 1904, *Johnny* was the first show on Broadway as we still know it today in 2016. That is, with Cohan the aesthetic changed drastically; we still use many of the conventions he introduced in 1904 today.

reflects the array of genres covert minstrelsy inhabits and furthermore, speaks to the ways in which specific genres are themselves reflections of particular historical moments.

Each of my examples marks a distinct period in American history—politically, socially, and aesthetically. The historical context I provide helps give shape to some of the overarching themes relevant to each chapter and offers guidance for reading the unique aesthetic choices and narratives operating within these three disparate performances. I situate Chapter One against a backdrop of great national expansion and exposure. Not only did America’s geography shift with the addition of Hawaii in 1900, but also the fastest and greatest influx of European immigrants came during the 1880s and 1890s. These shifts greatly impacted the nation’s racial and ethnic make-up and greatly affected individual relationships between disparate groups of people. This helps explain why so much of the nation’s entertainment from this period expressed resentment towards immigrants, offered gross caricatures of anyone who was considered “Other”, and provided many U.S. citizens with their only viable source of income; who better to reiterate stereotypes than the victims themselves? The stage—minstrel, vaudeville, Broadway—made space for anyone willing to subject herself to the nation’s white narrative.

Chapter Two takes place on the heels of The Great Depression and at the dawn of World War II. During this period, the United States experienced the biggest social and economic changes it had seen since the Civil War. Unemployment rates reached new heights in the decade’s first few years and after only a few months of being elected to office, President Roosevelt had instituted unprecedented legislative shifts. He inaugurated the New Deal, pulled the nation out of the depths of fiscal darkness and, under the Works Progress Administration, rekindled the nation’s interest, exposure, and accessibility to *all* of the arts. Between this and the ensuing World War,

the movie theatre became a source of escape for many Americans, regardless of their financial status; *Honolulu* premieres at the peak of this Golden Age in Hollywood.

I position my final chapter one decade later, just a few years after the most destructive war in history. During this period, film played a particularly important role, as it mediated public knowledge of the war and the opposing Axis. After the war ended, film continued to provide Americans with the vast majority of their knowledge, including the dissemination of various sentiments held by the white majority towards specific groups of Others. While some of these stereotypes shifted after the war, and the government established new laws “protecting” various minorities, racism, anti-Semitism, and gender inequality prevailed across the globe. Everything from Apartheid to Jim Crow Laws set a precedent and affected the images and narratives Hollywood circulated on the screen.

America’s dependence on media as a primary form of transmission should indicate that technology also plays a huge role in the efficacy of covert minstrelsy’s spectacle. As a result, the leading “machines” of each of these periods becomes a central focus of my critiques. I have chosen to highlight one or two dominant forms of technology in each of the chapters: the phonograph record and gramophone cylinder I examine in Chapter One allowed for the disembodiment of sound, making it possible for auditory consumers to hear something at home that neither corresponded to the visible words on Cohan’s printed sheet music nor his choreographed bodies onstage. For such an analysis I turn to the work of Lisa Gitelman who argues that “new objects” incite a certain level of inattention or “blindness” to the media technologies themselves because of the inherent entertainment value of their content. In this way technology helped Cohan’s music take on a life and authority of its own. In Chapter Two, the camera becomes the primary object of technologic focus. By 1939, the camera had gone through

many shifts since filmmakers' early experimentation with the form in the late 1880s. Not only could the camera capture things that a single stage production could not, but certain special effects could be fulfilled on film that would never be realized on the stage. I look at several of these "effects" in *Honolulu*, including its doppelgänger plot, concurrent American mainland/Hawaiian Island setting, massive scale dance productions, and choreographed gaze. Unlike creations of the stage, the camera had the ability to guide its viewers towards certain images and parts of the body; the camera could tell someone how to look and on what to focus. In addition to technologies that shaped audience *viewing*, the 1930s saw exciting new inventions related to sound. The soundtrack plays an important part in filmic illustrations of covert minstrelsy. I am specifically concerned with the way in which the soundtrack achieves a certain inaudibility when coupled with image. For this I turn primarily to the work of Katherine Kalinak, Claudia Gorbman, and Jeff Smith. As Gorbman's analysis suggests, a soundtrack signifies according to certain musical, cinematic, and cultural codes. These codes help shape what it is an audience hears, which, as Kalinak asserts, forces audiences to engage in a "quasi-magical" process of transference and slippage between sound and image. It is precisely this process that produces meaning for *Honolulu's* audience at the same time the process itself (both visual and sonic) becomes obscured through sound synchronization and technologies of the brain, phenomena specific to the period between the premiere of the first sound-synched film in 1927 through the 1940s. Sound technologies remain a central focus in Chapter Three, as does the camera, but I add animation technologies—both of the body (e.g. persistence of vision) and of the machine (e.g. rotoscope). Here technology mediates the quick succession of images presented on the screen to read as one seamless stream of movement. Action, imagery, and

sound occur too quickly for audiences to register the individual parts, or layers, contributing to an imperceptible meaning-making process.

History and technology provide this project with its overarching framework and dictate the various spaces, means, and content of each of these highlighted productions. However, the smaller-scale substitutions and veneers are what give each show its particular momentum as both aesthetically significant pieces of art *and* highly deceptive means of projection. Here I mean ‘projection’ in three senses of the word: “projection” acts as a presentation of an image on a stage or screen, also the ability to make sound, and further, the unconscious transfer of one’s desires or emotions to another person or group of people. In addition to each show’s organizing technologies and historical frameworks, each chapter contains within it one—if not multiple—narrative disguises, a corporeal element, at least two sonic components, as well as several visual—though likely invisible—masks. As stated, covert minstrelsy relies on concurrent modes of expression and thus simultaneity of sense perception. Yet, while each of these processes works together, every instance of covert minstrelsy requires a dominant mode of dissimulation. I have given names to each of these forms, which I will refer to as specific subsets of covert minstrelsy. That is, each of these constituents is the dominating mode of expression—and thus distraction—in a given performance, but its power does not supersede that of the governing system of covert minstrelsy; the combination of various modes and their necessary synchronicity is primary for “success” of the whole. Furthermore, each one of these techniques can and will surface in less prominent ways in other chapters and genres.

Thus covert minstrelsy is defined by two structures simultaneously: covert minstrelsy can occur almost anywhere that art and technology intersect and will be most convincing in the spaces where the visual, sonic, narrative, and corporeal interact. The modes of dissimulation (i.e.

each of the subsets of masking that I discuss) provide this project with its most important framework, as an understanding of *how* each of the individual masks at play contributes to the overall functionality of covert minstrelsy will allow for the application of these theories across disciplines regardless of time or space, thereby changing the way we think about the concept of masking and its relation to identity. Nonetheless, taking the historical context into account when examining instances of covert minstrelsy enriches a study in virtue of the fact that particular genres which are representative of not only the popular, but the “new,” add an element of inattentiveness for the audience that might not exist if the performance in question were to be an outdated form. That is to say, considering the historical moment is important insofar as its governing values and technologic modes offer insight into the reasons why certain masks may have gone unnoticed and clue us in to what were the dominant modes of *seeing* the world at the time of the show’s inception. Each of the performances I have selected is characteristic of a particular moment in history, both narratively and technologically; I illumine how masking works in different genres of entertainment, perhaps ones never explored in either critical race or dance studies; each performance analyzed builds on the performance of the previous chapter, both as it follows an aesthetic genealogy and as its modes of masking get increasingly more complicated; and the three examples I use are illustrative of the first half of the twentieth century, they exemplify who and what were popular and how Americans conveyed a set of values to the masses. While I have been intentional in my selection of performances, and each chapter follows chronologically, the theories I offer may be applied to any genre at any historical moment.

Chapter One offers a critique of covert minstrelsy as it plays out on George M. Cohan’s Broadway stage. I have chosen to commence with *Little Johnny Jones* (1904), in part because of what the show represented to the United States, and partially because of Cohan’s long-standing

ties to blackface minstrelsy. Cohan played a pivotal role in shaping America's unique formula for the stage. While Cohan and his family of four (i.e. the famous "Four Cohans") held a privileged place on the vaudeville circuit for more than a decade, George was determined to do something more. He began writing skits for his family act in his early teens and composing music at an early age; he published his first song at just sixteen. He wrote his first Broadway show, *The Governor's Son*, in 1901 for the family act, but his real success came in 1904 with *Johnny*, a musical theatre production composed, "choreographed," directed by, and starring, none other than Cohan himself. Furthermore, this show brought Americans from opposing political parties together on the night of one of the biggest elections in history.

Until the advent of Cohan's unique style, vaudeville made up the majority of American musical theatre. With Cohan's new musical comedy style, Americans had something more linear and cohesive that they could call their own. This new theatrical structure became the foundation upon which the future of American musical theatre would be built. Cohan's contribution was to unify an American way of thinking *and* representing. *Johnny* is the first show to put these ideas into practice and the first of Cohan's productions to neglect the use of blackface makeup *and* coon songs, an intriguing decision on Cohan's part given his history and success with these two practices. Cohan made no perceptible references to the black body: he composed "marches" rather than pieces of ragtime, he used very patriotic lyrics (e.g. *I'm a Yankee Doodle Dandy, a Yankee Doodle do or die...*) rather than relying on derogatory name calling and audible caricature to carry his tunes, he neither blacked up nor employed the black body, and used absolutely no "negro" slurs¹² throughout the entirety of *Johnny's* script.

¹² I have made a conscious decision to capitalize the word "Negro" in all instances where one might substitute the word "black" today. The word "Negro" did, for a time, exist as an adjective no different than any of those Americans have used at other historical moments in order to describe the black body (e.g. "black", "African-American", "Afro-American"). When I keep the word "negro" lower case, I mean to imply that it was being used as a derogatory slur. Thus, when I cite song lyrics or scripts that use the word "negro" in a derogatory sense, I will stay true to a libretti's original intent, keeping the lower case "n" to signify

Everything Cohan had produced up until this point was dependent upon his use of a predominantly aural Africanist aesthetic. The tap dances he performed on the vaudeville stage were polyrhythmic, his ragtime compositions were highly syncopated, and all of his performances included at least some improvisation. I frequently return to the Africanist notions of polyrhythm, syncopation, and improvisation in this first chapter. These attributes, along with a list of others I will discuss in more detail in the coming pages, belong to a canon of codifiable aesthetic traits that dance scholars like Brenda Dixon Gottschild and Jacqui Malone believe apply to most, if not all, “black”, “African American”, or “Africanist” art. I intend to make clear how the individual perceptible components—narrative, sonic, technological, corporeal, and visual—of *Little Johnny Jones* have each done their part to distract the audience from Cohan’s continued engagement with an Africanist aesthetic and use of the black body. Just because the audience cannot see the black body does not mean Cohan’s production is devoid of its presence.

In order to “uncover” the Africanist in Cohan’s very white musical, I investigate the show’s musical elements, the dances Cohan improvised, and the role of narrative within each of these modes. The element of ragtime within this production’s compositions sits at the root of this show’s success. Ragtime is imbued with the Africanist qualities of syncopation and improvisation and the coon song is essentially a piece of ragtime to which derogatory lyrics have been assigned. I argue that, while not labeled a “rag”, *Johnny*’s featured song, “The Yankee Doodle Boy,” contains a series of syncopated choruses and calls for a syncopated cakewalk in its breaks. The fact that Cohan uses patriotic lyrics in lieu of derogatory libretti helps disguise his use of the Africanist aesthetic by way of *sonic minstrelsy*, Chapter One’s dominant mode of masking. In other words, what one hears—the line, *A real live nephew of my Uncle Sam*, for

insult. Furthermore, when citing other authors, I will keep the “N” intact as it was originally printed. (E-mail correspondence with Anthea Kraut 29 April 2016).

example—creates a façade for the underlying instrumentation. I use the term “sonic minstrelsy” to describe the act of substitution that takes place when one element of sound attempts to conceal another. Here Cohan substitutes the more pejorative language he used in all of his published coon songs with words that convey a very nationalistic (and white) sentiment. Such lyrics mask the fact that the underlying composition is similar to the rags and coon songs he wrote through 1903. This argument is further complexified when we examine the ways in which Cohan labeled this music. In published versions of “The Yankee Doodle Boy,” Cohan labeled this work a “tempo di marcia,” implying its very straight rhythm. Here the label seeks to draw attention away from the composition’s highly syncopated nature. As if that were not enough, Cohan’s tap dancing both confirms the work’s polyrhythm and aids in the efficacy of the show’s sonic layer. Cohan’s three improvised dances, namely the cakewalk, buck-and-wing, and Virginia essence, require an element of syncopation and are enhanced when improvised within a call-and-response context. As such, I analyze Cohan’s feet as the final percussive element in this show’s score. That is, even in moments where Cohan’s “march” did not *appear* to be syncopated, Cohan’s tap dancing necessarily syncopated the rhythms heard by his audience(s). When these three elements perform together, as they did in *Little Johnny Jones*, Cohan can espouse the Africanist tradition without leaving any visible trace of the black aesthetic and cover up his own engagement with an audible form of invisible blackface.

Sonic minstrelsy returns in *Johnny*’s final furtive layer: Cohan uses the Chinese body as a substitute for the black. By replacing visibly black and black-faced bodies with those of Chinese caricatures, Cohan satisfies his viewers’ need for both the “exotic” and their desire to *see* the “Other”. Cohan’s use of yellowface depends on everything from the very visible stereotypes he offers in the form of makeup and costume, to more subtle ethnic identifiers buried within the

score's transitions and dialogue. For example, Cohan inserts catchy audible eight-bar tom-tom phrases that accompany the entrances and exits of the show's four Chinese characters. This corporeal mask, in the form of yellowface, thus succeeds in virtue of its visibility, audibility, and narrative context that interact simultaneously, but further camouflages all of the show's other masks as well as Cohan's dependence on black culture.

Hollywood continued to satisfy its viewers' need for the "exotic" in *Honolulu*, the 1939 musical starring Eleanor Powell and Robert Young, about two lookalikes living opposite lives who then get switched and have the entire nation fooled by the status of their "real" identities. Doppelgänger plots such as this, as well as films that made an "exotic" locale the center of their story, were popular in the 1930s. The appeal of such subject matter was likely the result of new freedoms afforded by film technology: the same actor could play two different characters, believably, and two disparate locales could occupy the screen at the same time. One could argue, as I do, that these two scenarios also reflected America's fascination with identity and the nation's margins—both geographic and social—a hypothesis confirmed by the reality that in 1939, Americans witnessed destruction all around them and it would only be a couple of years before they too joined the war. Hawaii's idyllic landscape made the Islands a popular site for films that sought to provide a "safe" getaway for their audiences and the "ethnic" brown body acted as the perfect mediator between black and white. But unlike *Johnny*, that featured the yellow body *in place* of the black and used the white body to cover up references to blackness, *Honolulu* relied on the juxtaposition of cultures and the privilege of some bodies to take on multiple identities simultaneously, to convey similar messages.

Hollywood sanctions three identities for Eleanor Powell's body during the film: Powell is white while on the American mainland, black while on the ship headed for Honolulu, and

“native” or brown, once she arrives on the Island. I examine these three different identities in relation to Powell’s costume and makeup, her dancing body, and the music that accompanies both of these features. The dance that Powell performs on the ship’s main deck reinforces a set of social norms regarding the performance of gender, race, and tap dance. This routine shows off her skill, her femininity, and her whiteness by dint of her *lack* of colored makeup, her classically-styled dress and high-heeled tap shoes, her commanding body language and gaze, the angles at which the cameramen shoot her body, the way other men in the on-screen audience watch and take delight in her performance, Powell’s use of space on the ship’s deck, the very light sonic quality of her tapping, and finally, the very subtle references she makes to both the black community of tap dancers with whom she has studied and the very whitened hula gestures she has likely observed in popular dance manuals and postcards. These signature qualities provide Powell with the material for her opening dance number and gently remind her audience of her “authentic” characteristics before she tries on the identities of a “black man” and an “exotic brown woman”.

Shortly after Powell introduces herself as white and the ship leaves the mainland’s port, Powell offers the ship’s audience a “tribute” to Bill Robinson, the “King of Harlem,” during the Seaman’s Fund Costume Ball. This piece is significant for several reasons, including the fact that Powell *blacks up* in order to reference the famed-black tap dancer. While there is nothing covert about Powell’s use of burnt cork, I am interested in how this performance slipped under the stringent parameters of the Motion Picture Production Code, which specifically stated that all images which included “willful offense to any nation, race, or creed,”¹³ must be avoided. I argue that the “tribute” label assigned to this dance, and her “Tribute to the Hawaiian Islands” just a

¹³ See Lewis Jacobs (1968), pp. 301-302.

few scenes later, allowed Hollywood to negotiate the laws of the Production Code at the same time it justified the exploitation of an Other.

“Tribute minstrelsy,” or the practice of paying tribute to someone/something that a performer deems intrinsically raced and thus incapable of signifying without his/her use of makeup as its primary signifier, thus becomes the dominant mode of masking I undertake in Chapter Two.

Tribute minstrelsy uses sound, narrative, and visual spectacle to assign to tap dance black authenticity while simultaneously reassigning to it national ownership. Not only does this routine’s label give Powell an excuse to use blackface makeup in the late 1930s, but also the makeup itself strengthens her ability to play up certain “Negro” caricatures to a greater degree than Robinson would have ever been willing to embody on the stage. I explore Powell’s choreography from the perspective of what presents itself visibly (i.e. her gestures, gaze, use of space, and posture) as well as those qualities which present themselves sonically (i.e. her tempo, weight, use of syncopation, and use of the foot as it manifests audibly), and study the ways in which her visible choreography distracts from the quality of her sound and vice versa. Because tap dance requires the senses of both sight and sound, Powell’s use of the form necessarily wears two masks at once.

Just as Cohan’s tap dancing in *Little Johnny Jones* confirmed the score’s use of polyrhythm and aided in the efficacy of the show’s sonic layer, Powell’s tap dancing augments the meaning of *Honolulu*’s soundtrack: at the same time that tribute minstrelsy obscures parts of Powell’s dance, the dance—and specifically its audible parts—makes the layers of disguise in the soundtrack more obstreperous, if one listens. Powell’s tap dancing provides *Honolulu*’s soundtrack with one element of disguise but the routine’s medley says a lot about the work’s relationship to nineteenth century minstrelsy. Robinson often danced to Stephen Foster’s “My

Old Kentucky Home,” but Hollywood instead chose to use Foster’s “Swanee River” and “Old Black Joe” in the background of Powell’s stair dance. I challenge this decision and question whether the film’s creative team was responding in some way to Foster’s complicated ties to both Negro Spirituals and minstrel tunes. I pick up on a discussion of Foster’s “folk” music that I began in the first chapter, but use Powell’s soundtrack as an opportunity to explore the similarities I notice between Foster and Cohan and each of these composer’s ties to blackface, including the intentional act of lyric substitution in which both men participated. Recall that lyric substitution was at the root of sonic minstrelsy’s achievement in Chapter One. Instead of substituting patriotic words for derogatory ones, Hollywood’s creative team removes Foster’s lyrics altogether, further distancing his music from blatant references to the fictional black body.

The use of medleys as the dominant mode of accompaniment in *Honolulu* provides the final sonic layer in Powell’s stint as a black man. The score for Powell’s tribute is comprised of four different works, two of which were written by Foster and the other two of which were composed by the black songwriters Shelton Brooks and Richard Milburn. I study each of these songs individually but conclude that the most important aspect of this portion of the soundtrack manifests when we hear these four songs together. Because the musical arrangement blurs the beginnings and endings of each of these four songs, the audience has no clear understanding of which songs belong to whom and receives no clue regarding where one song begins and where another one ends. These four songs, two written by black men and two written by a white man pretending to write from the perspective of all black men are supposed to signify “authentic” blackness. Hence, Brooks and Milburn’s music attempts to qualify Foster’s music as “true” to the life of black folk. Similarly, the “Hawaiian medley” written by Andy Iona serves to qualify Powell’s hula dance as “authentically” brown when she dances on the Island.

The act of donning and removing the colored makeup used to signify race is an important feature of tribute minstrelsy. The performer must demonstrate to her audience that blackness (or any other color) is only a mask, not something permanent. We see this visibly when the camera cuts to Powell's dressing room before the Seaman's Fund Ball, capturing her application of the burnt cork to her white face. Directors edited out the removal of this makeup for continuity but her subsequent performance as a brown "native" implies that her blackness was only temporary. Once on the Island Powell learns the art of hula almost immediately and becomes a well-respected "native dancer" within days of her arrival. Furthermore, in both her hula dance and hula tap routines, the choreography features Powell's body while the alleged natives serve as her backup dancers and musicians. While Powell never browns her skin, I analyze her hula performances as demonstrations of brownface. Here I expand on Jane Desmond's notion of "Physical Foundationalism" as it applies to song and dance tourism and draw on Juliet McMains' concept of brownface. I read Powell's body on the Hawaiian Islands as "binding notions of 'facticity'" and authenticity so that Powell's brownface comes to represent "real" native-ness in a manner akin to the way her blackface mask was thought to signify something intrinsically black. Even though McMains defines brownface as a performance practice wherein performers artificially darken their white skin in order to seem more "ethnic," I contend that Powell's costume, choreography, and the film's Hawaiian medleys are on par with the brown makeup used by competitive Latin ballroom dancers.

While each of these dances—(i.e. Powell as white, Powell as black, Powell as brown) contains within it a complex masquerade, the juxtaposition of these three creates a narrative of its own, further working towards covert minstrelsy's goal of corralling a national spirit while at the same time defining the Other. In other words, Powell becomes whiter as a consequence of her

ability to be both black and brown; Powell's ability to impersonate the tap dancing of a black man gives her more credibility as a white woman on the tap dance stage; Powell's "mastery" of native-ness reinforces that her blackness was only temporary; and the very locations at which Powell performs each of these dances classifies the land and its inhabitants: the mainland is white, the brown body is part of the nation but not quite,—i.e. owned by the white; "marginal"—and the black body is somewhere in between the two—not quite American, but not quite exotic. Powell's whiteness not only affords her the capacity to try on multiple identities, but it allows her body to dictate the ways in which Others' bodies get interpreted by the rest of the nation.

I analyze Powell's dancing body in terms of a Structuralist notion of sign and signifier and discuss how her body as sign is capable of attributing meaning to the Other. Drawing on a Lacanian understanding of the signifying chain I posit that tribute minstrelsy assists in reducing the Other to metonym by way of Powell's body, the soundtrack, and the film's overarching narrative. Reading Powell's body and the rest of the signifying chain in this way augurs my reading of cartoons as Baudrillardian *simulacrum* in the next chapter. Covert minstrelsy is so powerful that the bodies—real or animated—presented on the screen generally offer viewers more "truth" than copy. That is, the projections of Otherness that these productions proffer are so convincing and their fictions so shrouded, that the "truths" offered by these actors are often more real than reality itself.

Chapter Three's overarching framework requires less explanation than those of Chapters One and Two because it utilizes most of the previous chapter's technologies and builds upon notions of sonic and tribute minstrelsy previously established. While these two components play critical roles in covert minstrelsy of the animated screen, *protean minstrelsy* operates as the dominant mode of masking in this chapter. I use the word "protean" in the same way that the "sonic" in

sonic minstrelsy refers to sound and the “tribute” in tribute minstrelsy refers to narrative. The mutability of cartoons is the most important guise of substitution that takes place in this third chapter. Unlike other words that denote change like “morphic” or “mutable”, “protean” captures an aspect of being able to take on or play *multiple* kinds of roles. “Dancing Shoes” presents Heckle and Jeckle, a pair of magpies, in a series of roles, some shaped by the ways in which their black bodies signify age-old archetypes of the minstrel stage and other roles formed by the ways in which they mark a significant moment in the long signifying chain of magpies qua caricatured black bodies. ‘Protean’ also implies an ease with which a figure or object can change. Not only can Heckle and Jeckle reference the Jim Crow, Zip Coon, and Jim Dandy archetypes at the same time, but their ability to change with the blink of an eye allows them to become something different from what they just were, too quickly for an audience to register their transformation.

The 1940s marked a huge aesthetic shift for the screen in terms of what was appropriate, politically, socially, and even ethically. Neither live action nor animated films were absolved of the guidelines set forth by the Hays Code, but animated films and shorts seemed to get away with a lot more debatable content than did live action films made in the same year. With the exception of a collection of blackface “tributes” that infiltrated live action films between 1936 and roughly 1942, Hollywood saw a diminished use—if not a complete absence—of the blackface mask on screen. Animated films, however, found new and creative ways to include blackface makeup. I trace the use of blackface in cartoons throughout the 1930s and then examine the innumerable methods animators used to keep the blackface mask present in the 1940s despite complaints from the NAACP and explicit parameters set by the Production Code. Like the “tribute” marker that purportedly justified the use of blackface in *Honolulu*, narrative adjustments like the insertion of quick sight gags and faulty contraptions excused the blackface

mask in animated films long after their popularity declined on the live screen. I trace this history, along with animators' use of the "tribute" label, within mid-century cartoons to show the similarities between covert minstrelsy of the stage, live screen, and drawn screen.

In addition to presenting flagrant caricatures of the black body, animators used the screen as an outlet to comment on a range of other marginalized bodies. I discussed Cohan's use of the yellow body as a replacement for the visible black body in Chapter One and Powell's masquerade in brownface as a mediator between blackness and whiteness. In Chapter Three, the red or "native" body becomes the focus of covert minstrelsy's corporeal element. In addition to a wealth of redface caricatures present in 1930s and 1940's animation, I recognize a pattern of conflating stereotypes of redness with those of blackness. That is, animators often coupled moments of redface minstrelsy with traces of blackface; their juxtaposition, I posit, says something more powerful about the bodies of each than an isolated caricature of blackness or American Indian-ness could accomplish on its own. Like blackface, redface caricatures involved coloring the skin of the colonized red or brown—an act that found great advantage in working with a medium whose primary tool was paint. Like yellowface, redface caricatures included a set of stereotypical props—e.g. drums, elaborate headdresses, and feathers—that could be worn by red characters to enhance their "native-ness" or used on their own to signify a part of the whole. In "Dancing Shoes," Heckle dons a blackface mask of black paint and ivory earrings at the same instant that Jeckle dons red paint and a feather headdress. As I argued earlier, this presentation, or change, happens quickly—too quickly—such that the audience watching has no time to register this collocation. While one could extrapolate several meanings from this two-second projection, I focus on the ways in which this "innocent" act of masking adds a layer of meaning to the cartoon's overall storyline and enhances the utility of the film's soundtrack.

It was common for animators to make almost imperceptible references to the black body when showing redface caricatures. Some of these more invisible references were of the aural nature, for example playing “Oh Susanna!” or “Swanee River” in the background of a scene featuring a big red chief living in harmony with nature. Such references were often obscured even more when screen composers laced Foster’s tunes with persistent beats of the tom-tom or “native” howling. Placing a series of visible redface caricatures alongside a series of sonic references to the minstrel stage at once interfuses the Native American body with those of the African and African American *and* distracts audiences from seeing the countless references the cartoon makes to the nineteenth century minstrel stage. I locate the pervasiveness of this phenomenon in mid-century animation and show how this specific form of sonic minstrelsy functions in “Dancing Shoes”: Philip Scheib’s “Listen to the Mocking Bird” medley becomes the magpies’ soundtrack for “Dancing Shoes” and recurring theme song in subsequent episodes.

The relationship between “Listen to the Mocking Bird” and the minstrel stage will become clear after reading my second chapter, as will its specific contribution to sonic minstrelsy in the third. I return to the work of Jeff Smith to show that the soundtrack has the potential to, “smooth over gaps and roughnesses, cover spatial and temporal discontinuities, and mask the recognition of the frame through its own sonic and harmonic continuity” (234).¹⁴ That is, while the cartoon appeases its audience visually, “Listen to the Mockingbird” masks incongruities and deficiencies that may have surfaced had the film been silent. In this way the sonic works to enhance the efficacy of the visual as it did in both of the previous chapters. But Heckle and Jeckle’s voices further complicate the sonic element, providing the soundtrack with yet another veneer. This final sonic layer relies heavily on the medium’s protean aspects as well as the cartoon’s visual effects. Looking at the figure of the dandy as it has surfaced in relation to the black body, I

¹⁴ See Jeff Smith (1996).

explore the role that voice plays in figuring such caricatures. Terry-Toons gives the magpies two very atypical black dialects, which, as I demonstrate, invisibly recounts old black archetypes of the minstrel stage and reinforces new parallels between blackness and magpie-ness.

Although protean minstrelsy remains this medium's predominant mode of masking, the protean itself relies most heavily on the performance's visual content, this chapter's final element of disguise. I have divided this component into two parts: first, I use Paul Wells' notion of "bestial ambivalence," to trace a long history of the use of animals on the screen and the process of anthropomorphism that occurs when animators give animals roles that traditionally belong to humans. Most important to my argument is the use of the magpie as a signifier of blackness; I trace the history of this signifier and the ramifications that ensue from such a pairing. Second, I look at some of the tricks afforded by animation technology which allow for a suspension of reality that neither Cohan's stage nor the screen of Powell's day could have achieved: the amputation of body parts and the animation of inanimate objects becomes a major theme in 1940's Africanist-inspired animation.

I locate several moments of amputation, beginning with Terry-Toons' "Mississippi Swing" all the way through "Dancing Shoes." In all of the examples I survey, the black dancing or singing subject goes through a protean transformation where animators detach one element of the performer's body for the duration of the song or dance. After the music stops, the body part either disappears or re-attaches itself to another part of the body to create a new form, unrealistic by presentation—like an abstract Picasso painting— but believable in virtue of the expediency with which it morphed. Because animators control cartoons, this change can be made easily. Because of animation technology, this transformation can appear seamless. Thus the magpies and others' protean qualities distract spectators from seeing the inconsistencies and allow an

audience to accept the sound and image for what they “appear” to be. I read this practice as an example of what Saidiya Hartman has referred to as the fragmented or “amputated” black body. If, as Hartman contends, African American music and dance of the antebellum period both recognized the subjectivity of the black body and also sought to heal it, then 1940’s animation which amputates feet and hands during tap dance breaks and jazz choruses reopens the wounds of the Middle Passage by re-rupturing the site(s) of subjection.

I do not engage directly with Hartman’s work until the end of this last chapter, but her ideas are no less relevant to Chapters One and Two as they are to Chapter Three. One of the aims of this project is to try to illuminate the ways in which America has appropriated an Africanist aesthetic—quietly—and remapped its practices onto the nation’s white bodies while rewriting a history of the Other *without* acknowledging the wounds which have been inflicted—i.e. physical and emotional—upon the bodies that carried these forms across the nation’s borders. I have specifically chosen performances that present the white or amputated body as the primary vessel through which the Africanist aesthetic presents itself. I offer a counter-narrative throughout *Masks in Disguise* that speaks to the black bodies that performed contemporaneously with Cohan, Powell, and Terry-Toons’ menagerie, but lived out of the spotlight. This counter-narrative attempts to shed a different kind of light on the bodies of Others whose participation in what has become a uniquely “American” aesthetic were responsible for the forms’ transmission into the mainstream but also written out of History. This goes to show that visible markers do not always capture the whole story.

As I alluded to earlier, ambivalence is a hallmark of minstrelsy, and covert minstrelsy is no exception. Ambivalence plays a major role throughout *Masks in Disguise*, manifesting in everything from the way in which the institution itself simultaneously stabilizes and destabilizes

racial categories to the way that a single mask can pose multiple meanings at the same time. Homi Bhabha's theory of mimicry can be seen as embodied in everything from Cohan's cakewalk to the protean minstrelsy performed by Heckle and Jeckle. Slippage occurs constantly between and amongst different masks at play throughout these pages; the success of covert minstrelsy in fact depends upon such deception and uncertainty. *Masks in Disguise* is riddled with contrariety and double meaning. It manifests systemically in covert minstrelsy, and singularly within individual performances and minds. I frequently come up against performers that seem to validate W.E.B. Du Bois' theory of double consciousness. Williams' personification of the coon and Robinson's embodiment of the butler necessarily point to a double standard, an "unreconciled striving" in "one dark body" even when that dark body smiles or refuses to wear burnt cork. Images deceive, but digging allows counter-narratives to surface. If we take a cue from Fred Moten and listen between the cracks, "the visual emerges as that which is given in its fullest possibility by the aural: you see...most clearly in hearing the space and silence" (172-173).¹⁵ Covert minstrelsy does not follow a single path, nor does it always look the same. With these three chapters I hope to offer a foray into what it means to examine less visible, sometimes completely invisible, modes of masking in order that we turn up the volume on a historical branding that continuously reiterates, inscribes, and re-ascribes the tortured black body at the same time it seeks to silence that pain by way of masks, makeup, and disguise.

¹⁵ See Fred Moten (2003).

CHAPTER ONE

Exchanging “Coon” for Cork:

Covert Minstrelsy, Sonic Slippage, and George M. Cohan’s Stage

Mis-en-scène

November 7th, 1904. 7:55PM. New York City theatregoers anxiously await the opening of George M. Cohan's newest production, *Little Johnny Jones*.¹⁶ The house is just about filled but the well-dressed ushers hustle a few stragglers to their seats. It is a Monday evening and some of the theatre's usual patrons have been held up late at work while others are too consumed by Clifford K. Berryman's¹⁷ political cartoons in the *Washington Star* to attend the performance. After all, it is a big night for America: polls for the 30th presidential election¹⁸ will be opening in less than twelve hours. Theodore Roosevelt represents the Republican Party while Alton B. Parker heads the Democratic. While no results will be set in stone until the close of the November 8th election, Roosevelt's recent success in office upon the assassination of William McKinley gives him a political boost. Likely, the average white man living in New York City has no doubts about which name he will be checking off on the ballot come morning; Roosevelt has carried every region but the South in his campaigning efforts thus far. Nonetheless, Broadway occasionally attracts a few guests from the slightly less liberal neighboring states of Maryland and Pennsylvania.

A nervous excitement fills the room; a combination of political gossip, predictions about how Cohan's first Broadway musical will compare to his earlier comedic works and vaudeville skits, and occasional gasps and awe-stricken sighs from spectators who are seeing the inside of the Liberty Theatre for the first time since its very recent grand opening on 234 West 42nd Street.

¹⁶ *Little Johnny Jones* did a trial run on October 10, 1904 in Hartford, Connecticut and because of its great success in Connecticut, opened on Broadway less than a month later.

¹⁷ Clifford Berryman (1869-1949) was a Pulitzer Prize winning political satirist and cartoonist. Within his fifty-year career he worked extensively for the *Washington Star* and *Washington Post* but is perhaps best known for accidentally inventing the famous Teddy Bear that would forever be associated with Theodore Roosevelt. See Appendix B.

¹⁸ Theodore Roosevelt represented the Republican Party while Alton B. Parker headed the Democratic. While no results would be set in stone until the close of the November 8th election, Roosevelt's recent success in office upon the assassination of William McKinley gave him a political boost.

The 20,000 square foot theatre, with its dramatic stage, extensive balconies, and striking cathedral-like ceilings is the perfect home for the unfolding of Broadway, a theatrical form and style that America will come to call its own. As the house lights dim and the violins hum a piercing *A* note, other members of the orchestra slowly begin tuning their individual instruments. As the oboists finish adjusting their pitch, the conductor taps his music stand: musicians tilt their gaze to the front of the pit, audience members sink into the velvet of their plush seats and begin to quiet their chatter. *Black out.*

The lights come up on the stage, outside of the Cecil Hotel in London, England. Little Johnny Jones (the show's lead character played by George M. Cohan and based loosely on the life and career of the famous jockey Tod Sloan) has traveled to England to participate in the English Derby. Johnny loves the heiress Goldie Gates (played by Cohan's wife of five years and famous performer, Ethel Levey) but unbeknownst to the jockey, Goldie's aunt, Mrs. Kentworth (played by Cohan's own mother Helen Cohan) has already arranged for her niece to marry the Earl of Bloomsbury (also played by Ethel Levey). Goldie, however, has beaten both Johnny and her aunt to the punch and has already arrived in England disguised as a French mademoiselle (Rosario Fauchette) and will later pose herself as the British Earl. Amidst all this, the head of San Francisco's Chinese Lottery, nefarious Anthony Antsey (played by Cohan's own father Jerry Cohan) has asked to marry Mrs. Kentworth in order that he may inherit her riches and destroy all of her reform efforts.¹⁹

The audience giggles whenever Mr. Antsey makes an entrance. It is the same response evoked when the characters Sing Song (editor of the Pekin Gazette), Chung Fow, or Hung Chung enters the stage. Perhaps the catchy audible eight-bar phrase that accompanies the entrances and exits of these four Chinese characters invites the audience in on a little national

¹⁹ See Appendix B for 1904 program.

joke; the gong and tom-tom drum leitmotiv that comes to represent “Chineseness” in *Little Johnny Jones* unifies the politically divided audience members that fill the seats that evening. After all, it has been twelve years since Congress lifted a law suspending Chinese immigration. No matter how much labor the Chinese contribute to the American railroad system, middle and upper class white citizens generally seize any opportunity to distinguish themselves from what they perceive as the “Other”; sonic labels such as leitmotifs allow Americans to theatrically redirect pent-up immigrant resentment and establish an unwritten social hierarchy.

Leitmotifs and comedy aside, Johnny soon realizes just how many Americans have come to see him win the derby, and thus decides to let his spectators in on a little tip in the form of a song: “The Yankee Doodle Boy” presents the musical climax of Act One and showcases Cohan’s most signature dance moves, including a strut and Virginia essence. The conductor taps his music stand three times and a large orchestra begins an upbeat tune in 2/4—a march-like intro—eight for nothing. The stage is filled with dozens of women in voluminous hats and satin gloves, a handful of men exchanging dollar bills and bets, as well as a horse in post position, all against the painted backdrop of a filled grandstand and dirt track. On the seventh bar of music, the ensemble clears the stage so that the slight Little Johnny Jones may be seen upstage alongside his horse. *I’m the kid that’s all the candy, I’m a Yankee Doodle Dandy, I’m Glad I am*, belts Cohan’s character in a half spoken, half sung cadence. The chorus then responds to Johnny’s call: *So’s Uncle Sam*. The audience breathes a collective sigh as if, though engulfed in Cohan’s production, tomorrow’s election is ever present on their minds. Johnny continues his *Sprechgesang*²⁰ and the chorus frequently responds with familiar American phrases: *Oh say can you see*. The choreography is minimal: a flick of the umbrella from the women in the ensemble

²⁰ A musical form in which lyrics are spoken in a manner similar to speaking but the vocalist still changes pitches, as if singing. This *recitative*-like style was popular in late nineteenth/early twentieth century German operas and American musical dramas.

or a tilt of the head from the men. Cohan continues to sing but begins to strut across the stage, occasionally acknowledging the derby props held by other jockeys on stage left. He picks up a bat and begins to strut using his newly-acquired whip as a conductor's baton. He tosses the whip off stage left and announces: *I'm gonna give America the English Derby cup!* Johnny then abandons the recitative style and belts, *I'm a Yankee Doodle Dandy, a Yankee Doodle do or die; A real live nephew of my Uncle Sam, born on the fourth of July* in a fully-sung manner. A few members of the audience versed in Cohan's biographical details laugh when they realize Cohan's lyrics not only construct this musical's plot, but tell America a little bit about Mr. George M. Cohan, who claims also to have been born on the fourth and believes it his moral obligation to construct America's national identity through song and dance. Cohan continues to sing and as the instrumentation picks up, he begins to pulse evenly on the beat of the music as a chorus of women sway on the horizontal. The chorus then breaks into song as Johnny begins performing a strut across the stage with a syncopated triplet step on every eighth count. He continues to strut in a manner that was most often associated with eccentric dancing,²¹ a forte of Cohan's, with an occasional *soutenou* turn or waltz clog on the syncopated sixth or eighth note. The dance continues to evolve and the audience roars with laughter and applause. Cohan begins his typical schtick—a combination that loosely resembles an Irish jig, cakewalk, and the kind of hoofing one might see in the streets. The chorus stops singing, but Cohan continues to fill the orchestral break with crowd-pleasing steps—perhaps a bell kick or what appears to be an excerpt out of a Russian *Troika*—and then, all of the sudden, the orchestra ceases to play and the room becomes silent with all audience members perched on the edges of their seats. Cohan begins a syncopated

²¹ "Eccentric dancing" is the name given to any style of dancing that contains out of the ordinary, comical, grotesque, acrobatic, or "schticky" movement. Cohan possessed a certain rubber-like quality as he moved, which is one of the reasons that James Cagney was a good dance replica of Cohan in the 1942 film. Earl "Snakehips" Tucker was known as one of the most famous eccentric dancers. I explore this style of dance in more depth later in this chapter.

tap dance, which upon first listen seems to break the 2/4 rhythm presented thus far. After one bar of tapping, the orchestra joins Johnny and the lead's feet engage with the skilled orchestra in a bout of perfectly synched stop-time.²² A call-and-response of sorts between feet and winds, brass, strings, and horns. As the volume of the orchestra escalates so does the fury of sounds emanating from Cohan's feet. His movements become bigger and finally, he breaks away from the standard proscenium planes and begins walking and dancing up and down the walls that divide the apron from backstage, interrupting the distance that typically divides the performers from the spectators: Cohan struts across the stage for counts 1, 2, 3, he does a small switch leap on *and a 4e and a*—changing planes, so that by the fourth beat Cohan's strut takes place on the proscenium stage's left wall. He uses an *over the top* and gravity to assist his return to the floor by count 5. While Cohan never breaks the fourth wall, he treads new ground for the Broadway stage: his dance up the wall destabilizes a Western dance tradition, offering American musical theatre a new way of using space and the body. Furthermore, he has danced a tap routine in 6/8 to a song played in 2/4. The whole house is ecstatic; patrons can barely hold back their applause. This is musical theatre as they have never really seen it. And yet, they cannot quite put their fingers on what makes this number so enjoyable.

As Johnny leaps off the stage, the audience begins applauding vigorously; they are completely satisfied with what they have seen but hungry for more. An ensemble of male jockeys begins to dance allowing Johnny enough time to do a quick costume change and re-enter mounting a horse. The tone shifts as Johnny begins riding and the ensemble breaks into *sprechgesang* again, relaying the results of the race in real time: *That's Yankee Doodle on the end, a wonderful position....Come on Yankee Doodle, we have bet the whole caboodle on*

²² Stop-time is a form of accompaniment in tap dancing, jazz, and blues music that interrupts, or stops, the normal time and features regular accented notes on the first beat of each or every other measure. The musician or dancer will then alternate these beats with silence(s) or (usually improvised) solo(s). See the *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, ed. by Don Michael Randel (2003).

you...Come, hurry up, hurry up! The tone then shifts from excitement to melancholy as the race is called off; Little Johnny Jones it seems has thrown the race. The audience, paying no attention to the melancholic turn the plot has just taken, rises to their feet to applaud the fine work of art they have just witnessed. The curtain closes on Act One as well as on Johnny's shot at Goldie and honor in the eyes of the American public.

Acts Two and Three tie up all of the plot's loose ends and introduce several more American musical staples. "Give My Regards to Broadway" marks the culmination of Act Two wherein Johnny is forced to stay in England to defend his reputation while all of his friends sail back to America. The routine opens with an ensemble of women dancing a can-can-like sequence downstage. The men, dressed as sailors, dance an athletic routine that signifies the work they do on the ship. After this clear delineation of the two sexes, the ensemble clears the stage for Cohan. The Americans board the ship upstage while Cohan recites a familiar *sprechgesang* downstage. Johnny waves goodbye to his friends, blows his fictional wife (who just happens to be his wife in real life as well) a kiss, and begins to reference famous New York City landmarks that simultaneously invite his New York audience into the performance but also tie his name to the entertainment capital for years to come: *...Remember me to Herald Square. Tell all the gang at Forty-Second Street, That I will soon be there.* The orchestra suspends its notes for another one of Cohan's famous tap solos. Following this climactic song in Act Two, the undercover investigator, Whitney Wilson (played by Tim Lewis) makes it known that Antsey has framed Jones. Johnny returns to America with his name cleared and ready to marry Goldie, who, unbeknown to him, has been kidnapped by Antsey. Act Three's "March of the Frisco Chinks" has the whole audience roaring with Jingoism and laughter. Wilson continues to take down the whole Chinese Lottery and the two men find Goldie in San Francisco's Chinatown; Johnny and

Goldie reunite and America the beautiful lives happily ever after—confident, strong, and in control of foreign invaders. Thus if in Act One Cohan draws a connection between his roots and Uncle Sam, in Act Two he brings in New York City—and specifically the parts of it associated with entertainment and Broadway—to represent all of America. Act Three seals the deal for Cohan and bundles the nation into an evening’s length work: when the curtain closes that evening at the Liberty Theatre, the public knows the composer has opened up endless possibilities for the nation.²³ On November 7, 1904, George M. Cohan officially writes himself into the American narrative, identifies New York City as its entertainment capital, and gives the nation a uniquely American theatrical experience.²⁴

²³ I have based this reconstruction on the show’s libretto, score, original program, and a few reviews that followed *Johnny’s* opening performance.

²⁴ On September 11, 1959, the George M. Cohan Memorial Fund dedicated the George M. Cohan statue in Duffy Square (Central Time Square at Broadway and 46th Street). Architect Otto Langman and Sculptor Georg John Lober constructed a monumental 8’ 7” figure which sits atop a 6’ 11 ½” pedestal and 5 ½” base. Cohan’s presence literally oversees New York City’s theatre district (See NYC Parks’ official website).

An Introduction

George M. Cohan believed that he exemplified the prototypical “all-American” boy and that it was his responsibility to represent America on the national stage. Cohan performed this “God-given” task²⁵ by invoking two figures on the vaudeville stage: his references to Uncle Sam captured an affinity with American patriotism and pride, while his embodiments of the “Negro” character gave a face to the unavoidable presence of blackness, while simultaneously demonstrating his distance from, and power over, America’s darker bodies. These two sides of Cohan’s identity continue to surface alongside one another, yet time and space determine the manner in which these identities manifest.²⁶

While Cohan’s use of blackface makeup was yet another move to try and dissociate himself from his Irish roots²⁷ and become more white by donning the mask of the black “Other,” I find his use of burnt cork during the late 1890s particularly significant because of the exchange of masks he maneuvered in the years following. While blackface represented the popular, and normalized white immigrants (e.g. the Jews and the Irish) through a process of disidentification with “blackness” in the nineteenth century, it gradually came to represent the unpopular, the

²⁵ George M. Cohan was *born on the fourth of July* 1882, or at least that is the narrative that has been written and sealed in the archive. His birth certificate actually states it was the third, but Cohan told the world a different story. John McCabe writes of this confusion, “There was a mystique, a self-created mystique, in which he identified himself indelibly with everything elemental to American life”(McCabe 2). In an interview, Cohan remarked that, “The American flag is in my heart, and it has done everything for me” (2).

²⁶ Despite numerous biographers who have claimed the devoutly Catholic Cohan family would have ever done or said anything fraudulent, historical records have shown several instances where the Cohans were seen to cover-up or change their family narrative, either for economic gain or social uplift. The very name “Cohan,” for instance, which was originally “O’Caomhan” then changed to “Keohane” which finally became “Cohan”, pronounced “Co-HAN”, but then was later re-invented by George to be read as “CO-en”(McCabe3). McCabe has attributed this decision to change the pronunciation from Co-HAN to CO-hen to Cohan’s close association with many Jews involved in theatre (3).

²⁷ In the 1942 film, *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, the blackface montage scene represents some of the only existing evidence that the Cohans performed in blackface makeup. Thanks to copious photographs and musical scores provided to Warner Brothers by George himself, all costumes and musical numbers stayed true to their original form. One gets a taste of the young Cohan’s vaudevillian style in his rendition of Jerry’s “Dancing Master,” routine during this montage. After the young George and Josie perform their staple routines—“Dancing Master” and “Strolling through the Park One Day,” respectively—the camera cuts to a few years later where The Four Cohans perform one of their famed minstrel dances in blackface.

uncouth, and something too proximal to blackness itself. Thus Cohan's need for makeup in the nineteenth century never vanished, but his relationship to it changed.

Until the advent of Cohan's unique style, American musical theatre fell into one of three categories: opera, vaudeville, or farce (McCabe 50), with vaudeville being the most popular. Vaudeville peaked in popularity during the last two decades of the nineteenth century and continued to attract viewers into the first decade of the twentieth. Albert McLean has described the national interest in vaudeville as akin to something like ritual. He writes, "Vaudeville...stood in relation to the American dream of human progress and personal achievement as primitive ritual stood in relation to primitive myth" (McLean IX). That is, the United States had no one unifying race or ethnicity, and as such had to cultivate a space and create a practice that unified a diverse set of beliefs under a basic, common ritual; vaudeville unified the American public and housed the nation's "folk" culture. McLean argues that although America had other representative modes of culture (e.g. literature, scholarship, and art), vaudeville represented a "primitive" substrata of society: vaudeville sought to make sense of "the new" and the masses that rapidly penetrated the country in a raw and symbolic fashion. Vaudeville productions modeled the exciting yet fragmented world which was the United States at the turn of the century. The vaudeville show staged magic, animal acts, song-and-dance, burlesque, and blackface, successively, rapidly, under the same roof, all for one price (7). The fast-paced, eclectic narrative that vaudeville offered audiences mirrored the energetic and diverse new world; a symbolic offering to the folk hungry for a unifying culture. Yet vaudeville was far too fragmented to continue to represent the growing nation.

With Cohan's new musical comedy style, Americans had something more linear and cohesive that they could call their own. This new theatrical form replaced the heterogeneous nature of

vaudeville's disparate skits and one-acts and replaced such theatrical miscellany with a full, evening-length work comprised of several acts that all coalesced under an overarching story with a handful of subplots. This new theatrical structure, as popularized by Cohan, became America's new model for the stage, and the foundation upon which the future of American musical theatre would be built. Cohan's contribution was to unify an American way of thinking *and* representing. As Roger Hammerstein remarked of Cohan, "Cohan's genius was to say simply what everybody was subconsciously feeling" (qtd. in McCabe 51). Cohan's new style came to define America: Cohan's shows theatricalized American values, touting the country's independence and superiority over other nations. Of all the shows that Cohan produced, *Little Johnny Jones* epitomized American values at the turn of the century. On November 7, 1904, the nation's leading "song and dance man," made his Broadway debut with *Little Johnny Jones*. While *Johnny* was neither Cohan's first experience with musical theatre nor America's first Broadway musical, the show changed the Broadway stage forever.

Although *Johnny* marked the beginning of a new era on stage, it recapitulated an overall trend in American pride and nationalism. The year 1904 marked a big year for the United States—both in terms of its own internal sense of national dignity and in terms of the esteem it came to hold internationally. Two key events demonstrate this swell in national recognition: the 1904 World's Fair and the summer Olympics. The World's Fair brought a tremendous number of visitors from across the globe to experience all types of culture through an American lens. The summer Olympics—the first to be held on American soil—not only brought other nations to the country, but also exemplified the ways in which America had finally been recognized *as* a nation by the rest of the globe. These two events gave the States an economic boost, but more

importantly, put the country on the map. The nation's new visibility, however, required that it perfect the light in which it was seen.

The conventions of this new form of theatre allowed Cohan various techniques for defining the nation through covert means of masking. Broadway's longer theatrical time-slot allowed for plot and character development in a way that vaudeville's fifteen-minute slots did not. In addition to changing the structure—temporal and otherwise—the Broadway stage required an adapted style, one which viewers would see as more sophisticated than crude: Broadway did away with the apparently clownish, grotesque, and abject, and figured ways to use these stylistic types in a covert manner. Included in this paradigm shift was a removal of the blatantly black and/or black-faced body. *Covert minstrelsy* thus enters at this moment in theatrical history where America depends on the Other as much as ever yet fears its incorporation into the national narrative. This chapter opens with my unpacking of the ways in which the minstrel stage, prior to 1904, succeeded in pairing blackness with the abject, and how it would take a theatrical revolution to elevate Broadway to the status of a national art.

Covert minstrelsy is the term I am using to refer to theatrical practices that assist in creating national unity through the exclusion of an Other or group of Others by way of masking. Cohan used covert minstrelsy as a means of dis-membering the nation in pursuit of re-membering United States history differently, specifically by borrowing and re-fashioning a large number of African-American song and dance practices. By simultaneously mis-labeling music, changing lyrics, and performing certain rhythms with his naturally white face, Cohan defined the nation by incorporating a diverse set of aesthetic practices, while shielding his audience from seeing the ways he re-mapped Africanisms onto a white narrative, devoid of certain social stigmas associated with the black body. Cohan therefore removed all visible traces of blackness from the

main stage, but still remained tied to a set of aesthetic values inscribed through the African diaspora. Covert minstrelsy allowed Cohan to unify whiteness as something bereft of difference but diverse in style. Cohan's musical would teach the audience to see syncopation and improvisation in a new light—as white, as American, as free. Thus covert minstrelsy facilitated national unification at the expense of *visible* national diversity.

In order to understand the ways in which Cohan succeeded in re-focusing and re-memembering the nation, I have divided this chapter into three subsections, each of which speaks to a different layer of masking involved in Cohan's process. This chapter examines how the individual perceptible components—narrative, sonic, technological, corporeal, and visual—of *Little Johnny Jones* have each done their part to distract the audience from Cohan's continued engagement with an Africanist aesthetic and use of the black body. While Cohan never once applied burnt cork to his face in *Johnny*, made no mention of coons or crows,²⁸ and produced a musical as red, white, and blue as America had ever seen, the show remains dense with deception. By employing a multitude of masks, Cohan redirected his white audience's attention from the abject black body, —as it still haunted the vaudeville stage—to the patriotic and “pure” space of Broadway. In what follows, I uncover the individual layers Cohan utilized during his opening performance of *Johnny* and investigate every vehicle²⁹ and iteration of Cohan's script, musical score, and choreography (or lack thereof), that has continued to account for Cohan's unique use of the Africanist aesthetic.

²⁸ Of the many stock characters that found their way onto the minstrel stage, the Jim Crow, Zip Coon, and Long Tail Blue figures were the three most popular archetypes: Jim Crow is the simpleton or dumb fool, Long Tail Blue the dandy figure, and Zip Coon the ambivalent character that straddles both these worlds, with ostentatious dress, and undignified speech. For an analysis of how the juxtaposition of these three archetypes on the minstrel stage simultaneously created and threatened racial and class binaries, see Barbara Lewis' “Daddy Blue: The Evolution of the Dark Dandy” in *Inside the Minstrel Mask*, ed. Annemarie Bean (1996).

²⁹ By vehicle I am referring specifically to the various bodies and spaces Cohan uses to narrate his story.

Chapter One as a whole tells the story of how Cohan worked with the slippage already inherent to minstrelsy and racial representation and used his artistic genius to protect the powers he already possessed as a white man by slipping one mode of masking in for another. In his earliest career, he replaced the word “coon” with that of his visible use of burnt cork³⁰ on the stage and in printed sheet music until the year 1903. In 1904, Cohan took his “masking” to the next level, this time not only substituting burnt cork with the aural of the coon song, but substituting the words “Uncle Sam” for that of “coon”, placing yellow bodies on the stage in place of black, and labeling his ragtime variations as “marches.” Cohan’s use of all of these masks accounts for what I am identifying as his engagement with covert minstrelsy. That is, Cohan’s ability to use multiple (invisible) masks simultaneously effectively distracted his viewers from seeing what was really taking place on the Broadway stage.

The chapter’s first section, “Staging the ‘Other’ History,” situates Cohan’s 1904 production against a backdrop of race relations in the United States. This contextualization includes positioning *Johnny* within a larger history of American theatre, namely that of vaudeville and minstrelsy, which presented negative stigmas surrounding the black body at the same time that it was dependent upon the use of Africanist aesthetics. Nineteenth-century theatre was built upon a fragile, complex, and ironic structure: while it incorporated certain Africanist aesthetics such as syncopation and improvisation, these aesthetics were presented alongside derogatory fictions of the black body and black culture. America (both black and white) developed a way of *seeing* “black” in a negative light through popular theatre. Furthermore, nineteenth-century theatre

³⁰ In the film *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, the Four Cohans perform one of their famed minstrel dances during a highly edited montage scene. According to the script notes in McGilligan’s book, this comes from the Cohan’s “Lively Bootblack” routine. Young George shuffles on in full blackface, followed by Nellie and Jerry. The four do a quick act in blackface makeup, wearing outfits one might see on a slave plantation. They rattle their tambourines, pose, and then shuffle off in unison. Though short, this clip provides enough of an image to show the Cohans’ involvement with minstrel acts and blackface performance. But the family’s visible ties to minstrelsy, and specifically the act of blacking up, slowly disappear from the Four Cohans’ repertoire and vanishes altogether when George separates himself from the family act. George M. Cohan develops his own style that is based in comedy, music, and error.

conditioned (white) America to fear the black body and all elements associated with its culture. I analyze this process by situating Eric Lott's notion of "love and theft" alongside Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. I contend that the simultaneous attraction to, and repulsion from, the exotic Other and his aesthetics not only make the theatrical stage a primary site for identity-making and nation-building, but further complicate the very notion of national representation. That is, the very images that ostensibly stand for the (white) nation are deeply indebted to the African diaspora's conditions and processes and thus inseparable from the black body.

Section one examines this phenomenon primarily through three visible forms of minstrelsy: black-on-black, black-on-white, and yellow. I first look at blackface minstrelsy as it manifests on both the black body and the white. I consider the various reasons around why blackface minstrelsy flourished at the turn-of-the-century as well as the rationale behind its slow decline on the main stage. I conclude this section with an analysis of what I consider to be one of two corporeal elements involved in Cohan's covert minstrelsy at this time: by replacing visibly black and black-faced bodies with those of Chinese caricatures, Cohan satisfies his viewers' need for both the "exotic" and its desire to *see* the "Other". Cohan's 1904 audience seems to be less fazed by yellowface on stage and more willing to share the national space (both geographically speaking as well as theatrically) with the Chinese body than the black.

I allude to the sonic element of covert minstrelsy in the first section, but section two, "Underscore", makes Cohan's sonic minstrelsy its focus. While the audible constituent surfaces in various "ethnic" leitmotifs in the yellowface portions of *Johnny*, the element of ragtime within this production's compositions sits at the root of this show's success. In section two I explore both ragtime and the notorious sub-genre of the coon song as musical forms steeped in the Africanist traditions of improvisation and syncopation. I then demonstrate the ways in which

I have interpreted *Johnny*'s climactic song, "The Yankee Doodle Boy" to be a piece of ragtime rather than a "Tempo di Marcia", as Cohan labels the song in published versions. By slipping in multiple syncopations under the guise of a "march", Cohan can espouse the Africanist tradition without leaving any visible (black) trace.

I approach the final layer of sonic minstrelsy in the last section, "Moving Notes", wherein I look at Cohan's dancing in *Little Johnny Jones*. The Africanist presence returns with Cohan's improvised dances, namely the cakewalk, buck-and-wing, and Virginia essence. These three dances require an element of syncopation and are enhanced when improvised within a call-and-response context. As such, these unwritten dances offer *Johnny*'s musical score two more covert layers; one visible, one heard. Cohan's tap dancing in *Johnny* adds yet another sonic layer to the already syncopated moments of "The Yankee Doodle Boy". I analyze Cohan's feet as the final percussive element in this show's score. That is, even in moments where Cohan's "march" did not *appear* to be syncopated, Cohan's tap dancing necessarily syncopated the rhythms heard by his audience(s). Furthermore, because of the ephemerality of improvisation, Cohan was able to manipulate dance steps and public memory over time.

Cohan offers the stage further finesse through a technological mask. Technology plays a crucial role in *Johnny* but unlike the majority of Cohan's other masks, functions off stage. In each of the aforementioned sections, I explore the ways that various turn of the century print and sound technologies contributed to Cohan's re-shaping of musical theatre in America. In other words, the shift in entertainment that *Johnny* activates is the result of a whole cultural matrix, a confluence of factors that no man, and no single stage production were capable of producing alone. Printed sheet music allowed Cohan to publish and circulate a version of music that had a misleading label, thereby giving literate consumers a different version of history from that which

they had initially heard on the Broadway stage. Similarly, the phonograph record and gramophone cylinder allowed for the disembodiment of sound, making it possible for auditory consumers to hear something at home that neither corresponded to the visible words on the page nor bodies on the stage. Each section therefore examines the intricate dynamics of masking employed by Cohan in *Johnny*. When presented in combination with Cohan's various other modes of masking—sonic, narrative, visual, and corporeal—technology continues to succeed in exchanging the image of the white body in for that of the black such that certain aesthetics lose their ties to the African diaspora and instead come to represent the (white) American nation.

While I analyze the inner-workings of one specific show and composer, the covert minstrelsy that continues to unfold in the presentation and re-presentation of *Little Johnny Jones* acts as a metaphor for the ways in which technology and multi-sensory experience distract viewers from ever seeing the whole story. With this chapter I offer a glimpse into one instance of covert minstrelsy that occurred on the Broadway stage at the turn of the century. In offering this deconstruction of *Johnny*, I hope to bring attention to the fact that minstrelsy need not be blatant, or even visible, to exist. Whether literal, metaphorical, visible, or not, the story of the “Other” has permeated the American stage for centuries. *And now, lights up on the bodies and stories the American stage has hitherto buried under the mask.*

Staging the “Other” History: Black-on-White; Black-on-Black; Yellow

The significance of *Johnny* begins to manifest when one examines this production as a reaction—in part—to a moment of great national expansion and exposure. As the nation grew physically,³¹ the sheer number of bodies constrained by its borders not only increased, but also diversified. Such diversity contributed to minstrelsy’s pull, not only affecting Cohan’s aesthetic practices, but impacting audience response as well. With blackface minstrelsy deeply embedded in the American way of entertaining, and the slow demise of performers “becoming” Other, Cohan’s task of captivating his public would involve not only a new artistic form, but would require that his audience *see* its performers in a new light.

Vaudeville, the most popular form of entertainment in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, exemplified what became of America’s *homeless, tempest-tossed*.³² The fastest and greatest influx of European immigrants came during the 1880s and 1890s (5.5 million in the 1880s and 4 million in the 1890s); immigrants competed with each other for wages, space, and status (Zinn 266). While a potato famine drove Irishmen and women to America earlier in the century, this new wave of immigrants was composed primarily of Italians, Russians, Jews, and Greeks (265). The result was a rising economic competition between classes with the Irish in more powerful positions than Jewish immigrants, and both visibly white groups (Irish and Jewish) significantly above Chinese immigrants, Native Americans, and African Americans respectively.³³ The vaudeville stage was one way these immigrants could make money, and one

³¹ America physically expands in 1900 when Hawaii becomes a U.S. Territory.

³² See Emma Lazarus’s “The New Colossus” (1903).

³³ 1890 marked the year that Jacob Riis published his famous study, *How the Other Half Lives*, and instigated movements to reform living standards across the nation. The United States Immigration Bureau opened Ellis Island in 1892 to speed up the immigration process. This included thorough medical evaluations that determine whether or not someone is “fit” for entry.

way the rest of America's white citizens could make fun of America's "Other" citizens. Given the established racial and ethnic hierarchy that developed out of this influx of bodies, it made sense that the stage would come to represent the nation's social values on a micro level.

Vaudeville was an economy built on social and economic disparities between various immigrant bodies, where sometimes a performer's only means of survival was to subject him or herself to the ridicule of others, as was the case in one aspect of the vaudeville circuit, blackface minstrelsy. But, as I will show, sometimes performers used the mask not only to put down another racial group, but in fact as a way of bolstering a concept of whiteness. In what follows, I draw attention to two common practices on the vaudeville stage that have had lasting impacts on American theatre and on a more macro level: black-on-white minstrelsy and black-on-black.

Black-on-White and Black-on-Black Minstrelsy

Blackface minstrelsy dominated the American stage for the majority of the nineteenth century. While the practice of "blacking up" can be seen as early as 1604 when Shakespeare wrote the part of Othello for a white actor who would then perform the part of the dark-skinned Moor in blackface makeup,³⁴ many credit T.D. Rice as the "originator" of blackface minstrelsy (c.1830), as he was likely the first actor to perform in blackface makeup while simultaneously adopting a "negro dialect" alongside his full embodiment of the Jim Crow character.³⁵ From Rice's first performances in the 1830s up through the 1890s, blackface minstrelsy as such dominated the American stage. Following in the footsteps of Rice, white actors—and black actors by the 1840s—began performing caricatures of various fictional "negro types". These

³⁴ See Ayanna Thompson. "The Blackfaced Bard: Returning to Shakespeare or Leaving Him?" (2014).

³⁵ See Eric Lott's introduction in *Inside the Minstrel Mask* (1996).

performers' credibility rested upon their abilities to portray these characters visibly and aurally. They would don burnt cork or shoe polish, adopt a negro dialect, which consisted of broken English and various racial and gendered slurs, sing or play syncopated ditties that paired the Africanist aesthetic with various racial stigmas, and likely do an improvised tap dance or cakewalk. The tunes these performers sang not only fortified racial stereotypes that had existed since before the Civil War, but actively created them. Their dances on the other hand, helped to introduce forms that had since been associated with black bodies and plantation life, and assisted in a general re-mapping of these forms onto white bodies. The acts of blackface performers who sang about a scripted and farcical "black" identity and redirected the kinds of bodies associated with an Africanist aesthetic, reinforced white male power and allowed the identities of black men and women to be written, and re-written, by the white bodies privileged enough to define the nation. Furthermore, white immigrants often used the mask to distinguish themselves from black people in order that they might move up the social ladder.³⁶

Cohan, who came from a family of Irish working-class immigrants, engaged in black-on-white minstrelsy on stage and off. While performing with his family act on the vaudeville stage, he performed standard nineteenth-century rep, which included tapping to syncopated tunes with blackface makeup. Off the stage, Cohan engaged in a less visible form of blackface minstrelsy, composing coon songs that other vaudeville performers—black and white—would then perform in blackface. Over time, however, the makeup's potency "tainted" ³⁷ all who donned the mask,

³⁶ For an understanding of how, in promoting "identity exchange", Jewish immigrants' blackface performances transitioned various ethnic groups into the American mainstream "melting pot" at the expense of other racial groups, see Michael Rogin's *Blackface, White Noise* (1996).

³⁷ A note about my use of the word "taint": In using this word, I absolutely do not want to reify alleged white purity. What I am hoping to do is to show the weightiness of what it meant to actually embody perceived similarities of the black body in the nineteenth century. This is not to say that there was any rational reason for someone to believe that painting oneself black made one *become* black, but merely to show that this was the fear and consequently a reality for white performers in this era. Donning blackface in many cases was understood as adopting (corporeally) the qualities of blackness.

leaving a mark not only on the black bodies subjected to these stereotypes, but also on the white bodies cast in close proximity to blackness on stage.

The practice of “blackening up” served a deep psychological need for both its performer and its spectator. With or without burnt cork, minstrelsy’s plural masking made space for projection, fiction, and fantasy: its makeup encouraged hiding and its ambivalence promoted slippage. While the practice of minstrelsy came at the detriment of primarily black bodies and the nation’s “Other” identities, it stemmed from a place of lack, desire, and instability; minstrelsy exhibited a process of what Eric Lott has explained in terms of, “love and theft”.

The love and theft phenomenon partially accounts for the manner in which something as feared as the black body can also be the very “object” through which American entertainment redefines itself. Lott argues that blackface minstrelsy demonstrated more about the way that “white working people lived their whiteness” than it revealed about white people ‘borrowing’ from black culture (Lott 3-4). By tracing a history of minstrel acts and performances alongside various histories of class, gender, and race in America, Lott shows how the blackface mask signified certain power relations. Important for my analysis of minstrelsy will be Lott’s understanding of minstrelsy as a mediator between various class, racial, and ethnic conflicts, by reproducing working-class relationships between the bodies who perform and those who spectate. One example of this can be seen in the way that white men from various classes together have historically partaken in the spectacle of minstrelsy: in Cohan’s time, men from varying classes identified with one another, not on the basis of class, but rather on the basis of skin color and privilege. That is, the difference between “us and them” was a matter of the “white us” who poked fun at the “black them.” This is but one of many iterations that ensues within the economy of minstrelsy. It is what Lott refers to as staging an “antebellum racial

economy” (48) so that the antebellum stage³⁸ of blackface minstrelsy in New York City became a site of contradictory commodification: *Little Johnny Jones* is a case in point.

Little Johnny Jones achieved the same sort of mediation about which Lott speaks by bridging the divides between opposing political parties. Members from the liberal and conservative parties identified with each other on the basis of their whiteness and in virtue of their United States’ citizenship. The men and women³⁹ that filled the Liberty Theatre on the eve preceding that major political election suspended their opposing views in favor of a common racial bond, as Cohan’s staged politicism bridged the white nation’s political bipolarity, for at least the duration of the show. Glowing reviews and notes on the ways in which the audience unanimously welcomed this new stage experience address the ways the audience bonded over its whiteness, foregoing class, ethnic, and political distinctions and instead laughing and gasping collectively, as citizens of a nation. *Johnny*, in effect, brought varying shades of whiteness closer together while distancing whiteness from anything “other” than pure. As was the case during the premiere of *Johnny*, and continues to be the case over a century later, minstrelsy as such not only has the power to subsume American politics into a matter of white versus black, but also it also successfully collapses the notion of blackness into a series of stereotypes and fallacies.⁴⁰

Over time, the (white) public’s response to songs and dances, paired with the black body, have exemplified many of its fears around blackness in the form of the abject.⁴¹ In the same way

³⁸ Eric Lott’s critique looks primarily at the pre-Civil War “antebellum” stage whereas I will be referring to this antebellum stage as the one which preceded World War I.

³⁹ My knowledge of the audience’s make-up is based on photographs from the period.

⁴⁰ Within this structured racial economy is also a “gendered logic of exchange”, adding to the force and threat of blackface (Lott 49); masculinity is at stake in minstrelsy. For Lott, the white working male identified with the black male under the guise of blackface makeup. Minstrelsy’s conflicted economy therefore simultaneously celebrates and exploits black culture. Blackface minstrelsy appealed to the American masses because it gave the nation a non-European identity and appealed to the working class men who could identify through the black bodies on stage by enforcing white male power.

⁴¹ As Julia Kristeva writes of abjection, “Abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture..” (Kristeva 2). The abject, like this song and dance as well as the bodies associated with its performance simultaneously disturbs the identity of

that Julia Kristeva has defined the slippery pull of abjection, minstrelsy has the ability and power to simultaneously attract and repulse those individuals with whom it comes into contact. Its sublime embodiment of fear and horror sanction it to the realm of the “almost-but-not-quite”,⁴² the ambivalent, and the unstable. The power of minstrelsy, and specifically the minstrelsy of Cohan’s era, is thus found in its irony: it “primes” culture at the same time that it exposes the fiction of race. With every instance of applying the black cork, the white performer enters into a slippery territory, straddling the line between the sublime instantiation of asserting power over his “Other” and risking full incorporation with and into the abject. This state of abjection invoked through various minstrel practices, combined with the ways America has been taught to “see” the black body, gives minstrelsy its power: minstrel performances, with or without the aid of burnt cork, bring a disturbance to white identity while simultaneously establishing American identity on the national level.

For years, American entertainment presented the coon song in conjunction with the black and/or black-faced body on the vaudeville stage. American entertainers could not perform “blackness” without the use of a syncopated ditty, or coon song. Images of the coon, as I just discussed, began permeating the covers of sheet music. The image of the “coon” appeared on the covers of musical scores that then set the stage for the musical (and textual) encounter inside.⁴³ The purpose of this pairing was no different than before; print media shaped social values and promoted capital gain. The black body—as grotesque, as fascinating, as exotic—

individuals, racial groups, and that of the nation. It disrupts a social order and neglects the rules and values society already has in place in virtue of its slippery and ambivalent nature. Both the coon song and cakewalk occupied a certain ambivalent and ambiguous in-between space for the stage and for American society at large. These performance mediums represent, on a small scale, the slippery sentiment towards blackness at this time but also contribute to furthering the dynamic pull between attraction and repulsion.

⁴² This is a play on Homi Bhabha’s coinage. See “Of Mimicry and Man” in *The Location of Culture* (1994).

⁴³ Lyrics included both broken English and caricatures of African Americans, as in this stanza from Hogan’s *All Coons Look Alike to Me*: All coons look alike to me, /I’ve got another beau, you see, /And he’s just as good to me/As you, nig! Ever tried to be, /He spends his money free. (Hasse 73)

sold. Its abject nature increased its market value. After years of this pairing, syncopated tunes began evoking the same kinds of unconscious responses that had initially only been elicited by the corporeal presence of blackness. Thus, whether or not the black body, black-faced body, or lyrics about the black body accompanied the coon song on stage, the reviews found in white newspapers evidence a rising fear of the black body and a consequent trepidation around what it meant to have these forms represent American culture. Even though Cohan severed his blatant and visible ties to the black body, (white) American consumers still read Cohan's corpus as primitive and taboo because of the unconscious fear that had evolved out of a paired association with the black or black-faced body and certain types of music.

Adding to this new stigmatization and consequent fear aroused by the black body was the fact that, beginning around 1840, black performers began engaging in blackface minstrelsy as well. While white performers blacked up on the white vaudeville circuits, black performers blacked up on the black circuits. While subsequent moments in this chapter will examine the artistic and social roles of some of black-on-black minstrelsy's earlier performers, here I highlight the most famous of the black-on-black minstrels, both in Cohan's era, and, potentially ever: Bert Williams was the most famous "real coon" to ever grace the American stage.

The juxtaposition, albeit on separate stages, of "real coons" and white performers pretending to be real coons blurred the line between what constituted real and what constituted a mask. Williams, and his lifelong theatrical partner George Walker, were the two most famous African American performers of the ragtime era. They were two black performers who subjected themselves to the stereotypes that white performers had established on the white vaudeville stage; they billed themselves as "two *real* coons" with an emphasis on the real, as opposed to

that which white men who merely wore the mask and costume of blackness performed.⁴⁴ Black newspapers from the period evidence that these two black-on-black minstrels were seen as sellouts by many of the nation's black citizens, but paved the way for black performers who wished to be recognized by the American public. Their believability as the fictitious characters of American lore both paid their bills and pleased white audiences. The more "real" coons that appeared on the stage, the higher the competition was for white performers who merely pretended to be black. White audiences sought "authenticity" and would consequently pay more to see the real deal. White performers would have to up their ante or give up the mask altogether. As white performers became more indistinguishable from their black contemporaries, the line between what constituted real and what constituted fake became even more difficult to decipher. Consequently the act of blacking up and "becoming" black became more taboo, even if such blackness only lasted until the stage lights dimmed every night.

I want to draw attention to the fact that abjection works on two levels in the case of blackface minstrelsy. Karen Shimakawa has written about this dual process, which she claims is at once "a specular and affective process" where the theatre not only makes the abject 'safe' but can at the same time trouble notions of self and Other. She writes, "one abjects (that is, becomes a deject) through a process of *looking at* (which may or may not result in *seeing*) that which is designated abject and recognizing one's own bodily relation to abjection" (Shimakawa 19). On one level, the presentation of "blackness" as performed by the white body affects the performer of color's sense of self: the American stage presents Bert Williams with his own position as a deject. His

⁴⁴ Marshall and Jean Stearns have an interesting take on Williams and Walker's decision to label themselves "Two Real Coons". They write: "In 1898 Bert Williams and George Walker, during a forty-week run at Broadway's top variety theatre, Koster and Bial's, brought the cakewalk to its peak of popularity. They had met during the early nineties in San Francisco, and still in their teens, put together an act at the Midway theatre billed as 'The Two Real Coons.' Although the title smacks of minstrelsy, the emphasis was upon the 'Real' and not the 'Coons,' for they were consciously rebelling against minstrel stereotypes" (Stearns and Stearns 121). While several theories exist on the intentions of these black-on-black minstrels, Stearns and Stearns' theory represents a certain 1960's sentiment, as their book was published in 1968.

looking reinforces the stigma around his own black body so that he *sees* his “corpse” in a different light. Williams transforms himself into the “real coon” that American entertainment has taught him to *know*. At the same time, however, as Williams abjects, the competition on stage increases, forcing white bodies to more fully embody the abject. As black-on-white minstrels gain proximity to “blackness”—in effect “becoming” their Other—the line between *seeing* and *being* grows to be more faint: to incorporate the abject Other is to deject oneself so that the stage is no longer safe, but rather exposing.

Theorizing Lott and Kristeva together implicate the relationship between abjection and appropriation. If not for the initial pull of the exotic Other and a simultaneous attraction to various Africanist aesthetics, there would have been no real use in usurping diasporic culture for nation-building ends. Cohan’s job was to seek out the palatable elements of the minstrel show and re-present them on his white body. Cohan was to construct a space wherein the white nation could pilfer the Africanist aesthetic and present it in a manner that neither threatened the white nation nor posited the existence of black. The infinite possibilities of Cohan’s sonic mask thus allowed the performer endless possibilities of creation, and the audience limitless room for projection; this was “love and theft”⁴⁵ of the early twentieth century.

Part of the potency of minstrelsy lay in its ability to stage a racial counterfeit. As Lott observes, it stems from a racial desire to “try on” black culture and use it at one’s disposal; a “white ventriloquism through black forms” (Lott 95). For the first decade of George M. Cohan’s career on stage, he and his immigrant family profited off of America’s love of non-European culture and identified with the black male under black makeup. This served (at least) two functions for the four Cohans: on one level they experienced capital gain and commercial success in “appropriating” skin color. On another level, their ability to “try on” blackness served

⁴⁵ See Eric Lott’s *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*. (1993)

to qualify their whiteness as something distinct from “authentic” blackness. As many scholars have contended, this was and remains, a typical practice for most visibly white immigrants, who often secured their whiteness through anti-black sentiments.⁴⁶ While minstrelsy has allowed white working males a means of enforcing white male power through a performance of blackness, it has also qualified black male power. This simultaneous slippage has occurred for performers and audience members alike, in all bodies and spaces that minstrelsy has inhabited. Lott writes, “The blackface image...constituted black people as the focus of the white political Imaginary, placing them in a dialectic of misrecognition and identification... achieved by a doubled structure of looking” (Lott 152). That is to say, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the blackface mask granted white performers and white audience members an opportunity to construct a racial fantasy—political, social, and otherwise—and to create a palatable and desirable image of blackness that neither intimidated the white male nor threatened the white nation. The infinite possibilities of the mask allowed the performer endless possibilities of creation, and the audience limitless room for projection.

At the turn of the twentieth century, white men held the power and privilege of language.⁴⁷ They ran the press, the recording industry, and the market and could bolster their market by

⁴⁶ In 1877, a series of labor strikes (known as “the other Civil War”) transpired in response to one of the country’s greatest Depressions: “In the year 1877, the signals were given for the rest of the century: the black would be put back; the strikes of white workers would not be tolerated; the industrial and political elites of North and South would take hold of the country and organize the greatest march of economic growth in human history. They would do it with the aid of, and at the expense of, black labor, white labor, Chinese Labor, European immigrant labor, female labor, rewarding them differently by race, sex, national origin, and social class, a skillful terracing to stabilize the pyramid of wealth” (Zinn 253). Thus, as Eric Lott explains, minstrelsy served to unify white workers through their enjoyment of blackface. The same bonds that existed between workers (classes) and ethnicities (Irish immigrants for example) also produced and procured a certain racist mentality.

⁴⁷ The Africanist presence, which exists in everyday American modes, movements, and trends but fails to be named, falls subject to Europeanist discourses of power. Gottschild writes, “...forces, trends, languages, movements, modes—texts, in other words—of previous and contemporary societies influence us, live within and around us, and form the threads through which we weave our ‘new’ patterns. They are the unauthored codes of the culture” (*Digging* 3). She argues that the “subliminal” nature of America’s hybrid culture—its inter— and trans— ness—, make the search for exact sources and origins of culture difficult, but worthy of research nonetheless. She digs up the Africanist presence in order to show how invisibilization feeds silence, and silence in turn justifies avoidance; avoidance is modern-chic for racism. The uneven playing field that results from invisibilization manifests in the English language and in American aesthetic values.

labeling black bodies and black dance as “primitive”.⁴⁸ Certain labels surrounding black performance simultaneously attracted white Americans for the exotic factor and further distinguished these art forms from those of white performers, marking black and white bodies as distinct. Furthermore, by controlling the language of black bodies and black dance, white America could easily co-opt artistic styles, re-present them on white bodies, and take ownership of the very forms that had evolved out of an Africanist aesthetic without labeling them black. In other words, diaspora music and dance could exist as something white—and therefore American—if and only if a white body executed the song or dance.

The political Imaginary that minstrelsy enacted in Cohan’s time also evoked an ambivalent process of slippage, destabilizing the colonial authority it set out to sustain. Identification and disidentification occurred and continue to occur through minstrel performances, between performers and audience members, black and white. The minstrel mask, qua object, in many ways mediates between colonizer and colonized,⁴⁹ yet its stability deteriorates as soon as its subject (the blackface performer) puts the mask into play; the minstrel performance falls prey to minstrelsy’s fundamental ambivalence and thus stages the “almost but not quiteness” of representation. Minstrelsy alienates all who come into contact with the mask.

⁴⁸ Nadine George-Graves explains the relationship of ragtime dances to “primitivity” as both ambivalent and “fraught with racial biases” (George-Graves in Malnig 65). She writes, “...the constant association between the ‘ethnic’... and the ‘primitive’... may be traced back before ragtime dances developed; however, the prominence of the animal dances of the ragtime era and the influence of Darwin on social theory at this time leads to a particular reading of the movement style and its originators that has had resonant consequences. The association between blacks and animals in these dances is seized upon as further evidence that blacks exist at an earlier stage of biological development, somewhere between apes and whites. They are therefore considered cruder, simpler, and baser. The irony and complexity is evident, however, in the fact that primitivity is celebrated at the same time it is disparaged... Also, even though primitivism is the belief that so-called primitive cultures and ways of living are inherently better than more technologically dependent ones, this does not translate into direct social power” (65-66). Thus, in this sense, language is used as a form of social hegemony.

⁴⁹ See Bhabha’s *Location of Culture*.

As I will continue to argue, minstrelsy—in all forms—is a process of appropriation and racial reification through performance. That is, whether literal or metaphorical,⁵⁰ intended or not, any performance which appropriates a form as a means of concretizing categories of difference, while at the same time muddying the distinctions it sets out to establish, *can be* minstrel. It is a theatrical process, which produces disgust and desire, stability and cracks, and ultimately, ambivalence. Minstrelsy thrives on its own constant slippage, at times blurring lines and at others, creating divides. Minstrelsy constantly folds back upon itself, defining new incongruities, and troubling old epistemologies with every passing performance. For the duration of the nineteenth century and into the first few years of the twentieth, blackface and its pairing with the coon song prevailed.

The blackface mask was used by members from various class and racial backgrounds as a means of identification. While several white (immigrant) performers tended to use this mask as a means of distancing themselves from blackness, black performers used the mask as a means of gaining popularity amongst white audience members and/or as a means of becoming more “black” in virtue of subscribing to the archetypes that the nation had outlined as acceptable markers for black people living in America. Bert Williams, for example, was aware of minstrelsy’s global reach and consequently exercised the mask as a means of entry into national visibility. The Bahamian Bert Williams found, at one level, common African American heritage in his denial and covering up of his Caribbean roots,—becoming more “African American”—

⁵⁰ Susan Manning offers a definition of “metaphorical minstrelsy” in *Modern Dance, Negro Dance* (2004), wherein she distinguishes literal minstrelsy from metaphorical. She defines “metaphorical minstrelsy” as, “the convention of white dancers’ bodies making reference to non-white subjects” (Manning 10). According to Manning, metaphorical minstrelsy stands in contrast to the impersonations of “black folk” upon which blackface minstrelsy relies. While Manning traces the work of white modern dancers like Helen Tamiris and Ted Shawn, Manning shows how these white dancers created dances based on abstract representations of African American subject matter, such as slavery, segregation, and spirituals, either as a means of expressing solidarity or as a means of producing a certain emotionalism. This means of representing blackness stands in contrast to the kind of black self-representation employed by black dancers such as Edna Guy, who contextualized such themes historically and culturally. While the “metaphorical” aspect of this definition absolved some of the older blackface caricatures of such blatant racism, the severance of “black” subject matter from its historical and cultural context may in fact reiterate similar problems.

and at another level attained American citizenship by feeding into white standards and systems of power—performing the minstrel character (Chude-Sokei 81); ambivalence thus sat at the heart of his citizenship, as it did for many (visibly) black people who had come to America via the slave trade. It is therefore imperative that I understand the minstrel show, and the use of the mask, as products of the African diaspora and as responses to America’s changing social, political, and technological milieu.

As Daphne Brooks has argued, mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century performance mitigates the anxieties of a changing scientific, social, and political landscape by negotiating the racial ambivalence pervasive to a transatlantic imaginary. “Black” spectacle points to the ways that embodied practice exposes the fallacies of race and points to new means of self-recognition and identity formation. Brooks writes, “[This]...startling and paradoxical movement toward self-recognition and a kind of alien(ated) awareness of the self...confronts and transforms...turning that estranged condition into a rhetorical and social device and a means to survival” (Brooks 3). Thus, historically speaking, African American performance has been used to transform ways of knowing both the (black) self and race through its simultaneous troubling of race as a concept and its ability to affirm blackness as something positive. This strategy of black Atlantic performance, or “Afro-alienation acts,” as Brooks calls them, is both characteristic of and a tactic for marginalized groups of people (4). Reading Brooks’ theory of performance in light of Lott’s theory of an antebellum racial economy and Kristeva’s theory of abjection, opens up new possibilities for understanding covert minstrelsy’s psychological, social, and economic appeal. While it is easy to ridicule the men and women who wore the mask, deconstructing its make-up plays a necessary role in understanding its contribution to identity formation and nation-building.

Despite the mixed reviews Bert Williams received from his own black community, it often behooved black men and women to perform in blackface for social and economic reasons. The great success that blackface minstrelsy granted people of color in the United States also challenged the success of white performers and undermined their status on the national stage at this time. Bert Williams' plural masking, that is, his ability to become two things at once (i.e. more African American for himself and more coon-like for his white audience) exemplified a method of ironic copying through a mastery of disguising his Caribbean identity through blackface performance, or the copying of African American caricatures. He studied the "dialect of the American Negro" and "escaped one mask by revealing another" (Chude-Sokei 57). In his own way, Williams mediated between the colonizer and the colonized; he made manifest a conflicted self process by wearing the mask of something indefinable. In retrospect, Bert Williams' performance shows how minstrelsy simultaneously stabilizes and destabilizes racial categories: the colonizer's "stable" identity deteriorates with a figure like Williams because he is neither African-American nor white; both colonizers and colonized must reconsider a space for the rest of the black Atlantic.⁵¹

The mask served the function of entertainment, put a wall up—physically and emotionally—between the audience and the black body, and allowed the audience a blank slate with which to

⁵¹ Bert Williams and George Walker's—the men who billed themselves as the "Two Real Coons"—*In Dahomey* opened in Connecticut in 1902, and had a successful run in the States and abroad until 1904. The show opened on Broadway on February 18, 1904, and ran for 53 performances. Not only was it Broadway's first full-length musical written and performed by black men, but it exemplified the concept of the New Negro. See Camille Forbes' book, *Introducing Bert Williams: Burnt Cork, Broadway, and the Story of America's First Black Star* (2008).

Williams epitomized the ways in which many black performers used minstrelsy as identity affirming. This can be seen clearly in Williams' most famous show, *In Dahomey*, which exposed an array of contradictions: it challenged prevailing racial assumptions by pushing the boundaries of "self and black 'nationhood'" (Brooks 212). As Daphne Brooks writes, "...the musical played fast and loose with conventional racial and gender images, walking a fine line between disrupting the master narratives of theatrical 'race' performance and simultaneously capitulating to familiar and debilitating caricature" (213). You need briefly to describe this performance and explain how it staged tension. The staged tension of *In Dahomey* and its performers thus perfectly captured the conflicted aspirations and practices of Williams and Walker. The two dedicate their performance life to expanding the margins of prototypical "black performance" (218). Brooks writes, "...[In Dahomey] ...revised the classic site of phonotypical colonization and abjection...into a source of fluid and parodic play" (Brooks 231). The two used the stage as a site of innovation; their performances allowed them to show America a different "Negro" face.

read into the black body what it wanted. The mask was therefore a tool for white members of the nation to use at their disposal, for the purpose of retaining power and for the goal of building a white nation. However, as is the case with any master/slave narrative, the master depends on his slave, without which, he is nothing. Read in light of this dialectic, America was built on this dynamic of power; American “culture” reflects both sides of this relationship. One example can be seen in the way that the “black Atlantic”⁵² has shaped modernity and the values inscribed in its wake. As Patterson and Kelley note, “racial capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism” simultaneously created the African diaspora⁵³—its bodies, identities, and culture—transforming all of Western culture. Within this value system, European narratives have invented “fictions of superiority and racial purity” as means of exercising white privilege and exorcising blackness. American culture thus exhibits diaspora as it speaks to both black bodies and white. The African diaspora has in this way shaped not only the identities of black people living in America, but also the identity of America itself.

As I will show in the following sections, the dance and music of the ragtime era represented one of the most vivid expressions of diaspora’s process. The coon song, cakewalk, and tap dance continue to make manifest the movement, migration, and travel of the African American experience through the middle passage, on slave plantations, and post-emancipation. The music and the dance emphasize hybridity, mimicry, and an Africanist aesthetic unique to the diaspora.

⁵² The “black Atlantic” is a term used to describe diasporic traffic that crosses the Atlantic Ocean. This includes anything that comes out of the Americas, Caribbean, and Great Britain. While some scholars hold that the black Atlantic as such disregards numerous influences and “transactions” that occur as a result of the Middle Passage (e.g. The Indian Ocean and other parts of Europe), viewing diaspora studies in light of the black Atlantic opens up a larger space for examining syncretism and hybridity as necessary processes and conditions of the slave trade and its aftermath, than would analyzing African American identity alone.

⁵³ See “Unfinished Migrations” (2000): “Racial capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism— The processes that created the current African Diaspora— Shaped African culture(s) while transforming Western culture itself. In saying this, we are not speaking on the ‘black Atlantic’ as merely ‘countercultural,’ but as an integral part of the formation of the modern world as we know it. What reason that new world black cultures appear ‘counter’ to European narratives of history is that Europe exorcised blackness in order to create its own invented traditions, empires, and fictions of superiority and racial purity” (Patterson and Kelley 13).

The bodies—black and white—that executed these forms participate in cultural production and political struggle. The specific bodies chosen and allowed to perform certain aesthetic forms speak to the politics of representation—individual and national—as well as to the circulation of culture as it has existed in and through bodies, print media, and sound technology. Consequently two identities have been shaped, that of the individual and that of the nation. Such identities are “contingent and constantly shifting” (Patterson and Kelley 19). The stability of such identities is not only contingent upon the specific travels and migrations of its bodies, but the bodies themselves play a role in the process.⁵⁴

While black men and women might have felt survival was incumbent upon engagement in black-on-black minstrelsy—that is, it secured their ability to find a decent paying job—it also served a psychological function: like white performers who blacked up as a means of reifying their (white) identity, black-on-black minstrels simultaneously upheld the (white) colonizer’s aesthetic *and* negotiated different kinds of blackness.⁵⁵ This very distinction (between the white man performing blackness and the black man performing blackness) determined the new face of minstrelsy at the end of the nineteenth century. Yet although black performers, like Williams,

⁵⁴ I must stress how the Africanist elements present in ragtime music, the cakewalk, and nineteenth century tap dance are unique to the African diaspora as it manifests in the United States and thus do not depend solely on a “mother Africa,” “single Africa,” or a black body. While the term “diaspora” comes from the Greek word for “dispersal” and has been used to denote “the scattering of Jews throughout the west”, its relationship to the African American experience can be traced back to the bible and the idea that Ethiopia represents a “black worldwide movement against injustice” as well as a trend in scholarship from the middle of the twentieth century: “The term ‘African Diaspora’ in its more modern usage emerged clearly in the 1950s and 60s. It served in the scholarly debates both as a political term, with which to emphasize unified experiences of African peoples dispersed by the slave trade, and also as an analytical turn enabled scholars to talk about black communities across national boundaries” (Patterson and Kelley 14).

See also St. Claire Drake’s, “The American Negro’s Relation to Africa” (Dec. 1967). “Mother Africa” is the misconception that the whole African continent is comprised of a single culture, single language, and single way of being in the world.

⁵⁵ Louis Chude-Sokei presents a critique in line with Brooks, suggesting that Williams’ masking complicates a relationship between different black identities. Both Brooks and Chude-Sokei see Williams and Walker’s blackface as negotiating pre-existing relationships between performer, audience, and caricature. Chude-Sokei’s theory illuminates some of the less obvious reasons Williams and Walker may have subjected themselves to the stereotypes of the white man’s making, and lays the groundwork for why I believe it actually behooved black men and women to perform in blackface at this time. See Chude-Sokei’s argument in the introduction of *The Last “Darky”*.

may have used the mask, the mask was not created *for* the black man. Black diasporic peoples adopted the mask out of necessity.

Cohan spent his early years in vaudeville as a black-on-white minstrel; this type of performance served Cohan the way it served most white men at the end of the nineteenth century. But as I have alluded to throughout this section, the mask carried with it a certain stigma, regardless of the performer's actual skin color. If Cohan was really going to establish himself as America's "song and dance man", he would have to do away with the visible presence of black bodies, and this included eliminating the mask. I conclude this section with a look at one of Cohan's first encounters with transracial performance: Cohan used yellow bodies in place of black thereby redirecting his twentieth-century audience's focus away from his (in)visible love and theft of Africanist aesthetics. The result was an invisible, or covert, use of minstrelsy.

Yellowface, or the Other "Other"

While the practice of blacking up had become customary on the American stage, the visible disparagement of Chinese bodies was a comparatively new phenomenon. Recall, however, that outlined in the unwritten social hierarchy at this time, Chinese bodies stood only two rungs above African American bodies. Sean Metzger has described the popularity of the "Chinaman"⁵⁶ on American stages in the late nineteenth century as one of a series of phenomena within a larger national practice of "yellowface performance".

Beginning around 1880, persons of Chinese descent living in America were the subjects—or objects—of violence and abuse. Along with the influx of Chinese immigrants that Americans experienced during the late nineteenth century came domestic competition: more immigrant

⁵⁶ Metzger invokes the term "Chinaman" to indicate "a theatrical construction" which runs "counterpoint to the lived experience of Chinese men" (Metzger 31-32).

workers meant fewer jobs for white citizens. Thus, like America's view of black bodies, they saw yellow bodies as a threat. In keeping with this fear of "Other" bodies of color, the government legally denied the voices of these two groups of people, as the law officially prohibited black and Chinese/American people from testifying in court (Metzger 39).

Furthermore, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 represented a national desire to exclude bodies of Chinese decent from even entering the "United" States. The Supreme Court argued that Chinese immigrants held an unfair labor advantage because they took away jobs and did not spend enough money to justify their income: "Chinese immigrants gained an (unfair) advantage in competition for labor opportunities because 'they were generally industrious and frugal,' and 'they remained strangers in the land, residing apart by themselves and adhering to the customs and usages of their own country. It seemed impossible for them to assimilate with our people or to make any change in their habits or modes of being'" (qtd. In Shimakawa 6). Thus the United States had to limit the number of Chinese bodies that entered not only because the country believed they were bad for the economy, but because they threatened the notion of a collective national identity. The result, as was the case with African and Caribbean-American performers, was a removal of their autonomy on the stage.

I recognize a general trend in American history where a decrease in the political, social, and geographic rights of a particular group of people is proportional to an increase in the number of derogatory images and stereotypes (directed towards that same group) that appear on the stage. If a black man were to perform in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, he had to perform the "coon". Likewise if a Chinese/American was seen on stage during this period, it was in the role of "Chinaman". Moreover, in both cases, this caricature could be performed either by someone white or by someone of color. The Chinaman performed the American archetype of

Chineseness, as the black man played the coon. Metzger writes, [The Chinaman], “both depends on and informs hegemonic constructions of Chineseness” (Metzger 32). And moreover, as Karen Shimakawa reminds us, “Asian American performers never walk onto an empty stage...that space is always, already densely populated with phantasms of orientalism through and against which an Asian American performer must struggle to be seen” (Shimakawa 17). That is, the character, or stereotype, both depends on and helps to uphold pre-existing notions of Otherness and helps to create a corpus of (white) American ideals.

Historically, America—as a nation—has searched for an “other” onto which it could project its fears, yet such bodies and images have remained in constant flux. White people living in America have mitigated their own anxieties around immigration, power, and the “real” Chinese body by placing a stereotype of the “exotic” Chinaman body on stage in place of the black primitive; neither body, however, is ever free of the colonizer’s fetishizing gaze. Deflection of this nature took the power away from the economic threat of real Chinese body at the same time it removed the corporeal threat of the visible black body. Substituting the visible Chinaman body for the black on the Broadway stage of Cohan’s era not only made a statement about Chineseness, but covertly enhanced Cohan’s own image in the eyes of the nation.

While blacking up was not a part of the Chinaman’s character, the makeup, costume, and hairdo played an important role. Little evidence of the three Chinamen’s costumes in *Little Johnny Jones* has survived; these three characters seem to have gone missing from the only two archival photographs taken of the “whole” cast in 1904. I did find, however, a pencil sketch of one of the Chinamen on the back of the Oboist’s musical score. According to this sketch, each of the Chinamen in *Johnny* wore a baggy tunic, pointed shoes, and skullcap, all of which were standard costume choices in the portrayal of Chinamen. Metzger, and others have written about

the importance of the queue;⁵⁷ this sketch shows the chinaman wearing a long braid down his back.⁵⁸ But the most telling element of these characters' costumes, is the fact that all three of the men who dressed as Chinamen donned very exaggerated makeup as in that which might have been outlined in nineteenth-century texts on makeup application for "Orientals".⁵⁹

The three actors who played the parts of Chung Fow, Hung Chung, and Sing Song were white and relied on the costume and makeup to make them more "Chinese". Furthermore, in 1905, less than a year after *Johnny* debuted, the original cast remained intact, with only the Chainmen's characters exhibiting new faces. By 1907, all of the programs leave those roles blank, insinuating that these three roles are somehow interchangeable in a way that the rest of the cast is not. Thus, like the blackfaced body, the Chinaman is seen less as an individual subject and more as a replaceable object. Moreover, in Cohan's case, it seems that the replaceability of bodies applies not only to members within a certain group, but applies to *all* "others".

Chinese/American bodies at the time of *Johnny's* inception held a higher status on the social ladder than those of black bodies. Much of this had simply to do with degrees of skin color; the lighter one's skin, the higher he climbed on the ladder. Additionally, as I have suggested throughout this section, the black and/or blackfaced body had become so feared that its presence was thought to "contaminate" a particular production.⁶⁰ Cohan could not risk his Broadway debut with such a tainted subject, and thus used a different kind of "exotic" other in his "All-American" production. Unlike the "coon", however, the Chinaman did not sing.

⁵⁷ Queue, also spelled cue, refers to a hairdo worn typically by men. This exceedingly long ponytail or braid was adopted by the Manchu people (Qing Dynasty) in the seventeenth century. See Michael Godley's "The End of the Queue," (1994).

⁵⁸ Whether or not this musician's sketch depicted what Cohan's three Chinamen wore on the stage is unclear, but what is clear is the general sentiment towards Chinese bodies at this time. The most obvious clue is contained on one of the two pails of water this man carries. The right pail reads, "SLOP Chewy," a play on Chop Suey, and on one of the actor's lines that appears in scene three.

⁵⁹ For more on this particular type of makeup application see Metzger pp. 42-43.

⁶⁰ See, for example, some of the white reviews of contemporaneous shows that included blackface acts.

Several critical race theorists have taken up the denial of voice as a colonial tactic for mapping meaning onto racialized bodies.⁶¹ Metzger follows through with this trend as it manifests in the “text of muteness” within yellowface performance. According to Metzger, muteness, accompanied by various material signifiers and their repetitive use on the stage, creates a fetishistic logic wherein the white audience can simultaneously acknowledge the phoniness of the Chinaman on stage *and* “invest” enough belief in the caricature in order to temporarily take pleasure in it (Metzger 57). In other words, the repetition of the Chinaman’s farce on stage procures its “authenticity”. While the Chinamen in *Little Johnny Jones*, do speak, their speech is contrived:

“Sing.

Come, my little ones, it’s time to chop suey.

(*Sing and girls go up stage with music and off door left.*)

Wilson.

(*Wilson and McGee go over to R. table and sit down.*)

They run like a lot of ducks.”⁶²

Lines such as these, as well as the plot, construct the Chinamen as comical, clever yet naïve, and as possessing a penchant for “dirty” business. The lines and lyrics in *Johnny* therefore say something about both America and its Others.

In addition to this musical’s lines and lyrics, Cohan constructs a theory of nation and of the outsider through music. Though not completely mute, the character Sing and his gang of Chinamen, are silenced through song. Recall the fetishistic leitmotiv that accompanies each of

⁶¹ See, for example, Saidiya Hartman’s *Scenes of Subjection* (1997).

⁶² Excerpt From Libretto: Cohan, George M. “Little Johnny Jones.” iBooks. (Act 3, p. 66).

their entrances and exists, as well as the (anti) climactic song in Act 3, “March of the Frisko Chinks”: rather than rendering *Little Johnny Jones*’ Chinamen completely mute, Cohan composed a sonic void under which other “Others” could be slipped. That is, with every beat of the tom-tom, the audience could hear the trope of the other. The fetishized Chinamen (in image and in speech) continued to accompany each orchestrated repetition of “exotic”. Everything else played by the orchestra in Cohan’s original production that did not include the tom-tom, referenced, and arguably continues to reference, the exotic’s opposite: white America.

Whether conscious or not, Cohan’s use of yellowface within *Johnny* has continued to palliate suspicion amongst the show’s listeners: why, after all, would Cohan have fetishized two groups of Others within the same performance? In replacing blackface with that of the yellow, Cohan avoided visibly “tainting” his American stage with the abject black body. Beginning on November 7, 1904, Cohan’s audience saw yellow bodies and heard tom-toms. In the same way old ways of entertaining conditioned Americans to associate black bodies with the coon song, Cohan trained the audience of this new era to associate yellow bodies with this “exotic” sounding tom-tom. In addition to classically conditioning the theatre-going public, Cohan’s production distracted the audience from perceiving anything remotely Africanist. In other words, the Chinaman character fulfills the audience’s desire to experience the exotic Other on stage. Once this need had been met, they could stop looking for other manifestations of Otherness. Cohan could therefore engage with Africanist elements like syncopation and improvisation without his audience sensing any of the myths that surrounded their fears around the black body. Thus Cohan’s legacy elides the attribution of certain Africanist elements to the black body by remapping the role of the exotic and subordinate Other onto that of the Chinaman’s body. When *Johnny* debuted, the counterfeit black body did not hold the same

market value as that of a Yankee Dandy or “Real Coon”⁶³.

By 1904, blackface makeup seldom produced its initial shock value, and “authentic” black bodies began claiming great success as “Real Coons,” on the Broadway stage; Cohan avoided competition by removing visible clichés of black representation and fostered an audience that considered themselves to be above “that kind of” vaudevillian farce: Broadway had class and offered the middle class less dangerous proximity to the “uncouth” black body. In 1904, if white audiences were to have flocked to a blackface performance, then it would need to have been a performance of black-on-black minstrelsy because the alternative had become too dicey and had produced far too much anxiety for Americans wishing to come to the theatre for comic relief. Apply to this the ways in which Cohan’s language and music have survived the archive—sound, print, and otherwise—and Cohan’s relationship to the Africanist aesthetic and engagement with minstrelsy is even more abstruse. Cohan’s libretto and lyrics put his American public at ease and corralled political enthusiasts from opposing parties. Yet, while Cohan’s legacy may owe much of its *name and fame and boodle* to Cohan’s catchy lyrics and lines, a vast majority of its success concerns the music itself. I turn now to the musical score, both as Cohan composed the notes, and as the notes have gone missing from American history.

⁶³ Williams and Walker’s—the men who billed themselves as the “Two Real Coons”—*In Dahomey* opened in Connecticut in 1902, and had a successful run in the States and abroad until 1904. The show opened on Broadway on February 18, 1904, and ran for 53 performances. Not only was it Broadway’s first full-length musical written and performed by black men, but so too did it exemplify the concept of the “New Negro”. See Camille Forbes’ book, *Introducing Bert Williams: Burnt Cork, Broadway, and the Story of America’s First Black Star* (2008).

Underscore: The Syncopated, Improvised Notes that Vanished from the American Songbook

Ragtime and Coon Songs

Cohan's compositions directly reflect the growing national interest in ragtime music—its polyrhythmic complexity and the organic spontaneity of its improvised structure—as well as respond to the incessant need for white America to find security and entertainment value in the visible and /or aural disparagement of black bodies. In the years following the Civil War, ragtime became the most popular musical form in America. John Edward Hasse has defined the form as, "...a dance-based American vernacular music, featuring a syncopated melody against an even accompaniment" (Hasse 2). Rhythm unifies the four main types of ragtime: instrumental rags, ragtime songs, ragtime or syncopated waltzes, and the practice of "ragging" classics and pre-composed songs.⁶⁴ Although ragtime rhythms went through small changes as the form developed over time,⁶⁵ the use of syncopation remains a constant and helps to distinguish "ragtime" from other musical forms written in the 2/4 time signature. While the American vernacular often conflates the terms "ragtime" and "rag", the two carry very different meanings for music theorists and musicians. "Ragtime" represents a broad style of music, while "rag" specifically labels "an instrumental composition, usually for the piano, in duple meter, with syncopated melody against a regular, *oom-pah* or march-style, bass" (Hasse 2).⁶⁶ A rag typically follows the formal structure **AA BB A CC DD** and uses "conventional European harmonies"

⁶⁴ Hasse writes, "It was rhythm that gave ragtime its musical distinctiveness and much of its appeal" (Hasse 2).

⁶⁵ Hasse explains that rag rhythms undergo changes around the turn of the century. Before 1900, composers preferred untied syncopations and after 1900, composers begin tying syncopations and increasing their use of a melodic motif (2).

⁶⁶ Music scholars and popular culture still recognize Scott Joplin as the most prolific and well-known piano rag composer of his time. His pieces are amongst the most well preserved, widely distributed, and studied pieces of the ragtime genre.

(2).⁶⁷ In *instrumental ragtime*, the rhythm defines the melody, and represents the most syncopated and musically elaborate type of ragtime music.⁶⁸ Scott Joplin fathered this particular style, and white composers popularized the form on the Broadway stage.⁶⁹

More popular to the public ear around the turn of the century was the *ragtime song*, which found its roots in the popular syncopated “coon song” of the 1890s (Hasse 4). 1896 marked a particularly prolific year for ragtime songs including Ernest Hogan’s “All Coons Look Alike to Me”⁷⁰ and Ben Harney’s “You’ve Been a Good Old Wagon But You’ve Done Broke Down”.⁷¹ While such songs were labeled “rag time” they were no different than other ragtime songs published around the same time and classified as “coon songs”. The “coon song,” or “Ethiopian song” was the label⁷² given to syncopated songs that included a “Negro dialect” (71). Such songs were common repertoire within the minstrel and vaudeville traditions.

The minstrel stage had insidious ties to racial stereotyping long before ragtime’s presence became known. It is thus no surprise that lyrics were soon put to ragtime melodies that further promulgated derogatory images and notions of what it meant to be a black body in America. Everything from the covers of sheet music to the lyrics in songs created and reiterated the “Negro” as the source of all American problems: “The choicest jibes are rudimentary and consist basically in reiterating fears and hostilities of white society. One song sums it up in chorus (and

⁶⁷ Each letter indicates a separate strain (sixteen measures) with its own melody, rhythm, and harmony (Hasse 2).

⁶⁸ While such syncopations and irregular rhythms are typical of most African musical forms, this musical style would have been uncommon to American ears prior to the African slave trade (Hasse 3). Due mainly to these compositions’ rhythmic complexity, scholars focus their attention on instrumental rags, while other subsets of the ragtime genre actually hold more public interest.

⁶⁹ An example of this can be found in Irving Berlin’s famous “Alexander’s Ragtime Band” (1911), which although popular, does not exhibit the rhythmic complexity of Joplin’s syncopated piano rags (Campbell 42).

⁷⁰ Officially Copyrighted 3 August 1896.

⁷¹ Berlin writes that Harney’s piece was, “originally published in 1895 by Bruner Greenup of Louisville” but is, “reissued by Witmark in October 1896 with a new cover and banner announcing, ‘Original Introducer to the Stage of the New Popular ‘Rag Time’ in Ethiopian Song’” (Hasse 71). While these songs are recognized as the first of their kind, *The Darkies Patrol* (1892) by E.A. Phelps marks one of the earliest published rags.

⁷² Terms like “characteristic”, “patrol”, and “cakewalk” are also frequently used to describe songs of the coon ilk (Hasse 7).

title) by linking ‘a watermelon, razor, chicken, and a coon.’ In translation this might read: ‘Gluttony, murder, thievery, and stupidity’ (Schaefer and Riedel 25). Yet these caricatures said more about the white men (and nation) controlling these stereotypes than they did about the subjects they chose to target. The stereotypes that came to define black men as “lazy, stupid, and helpless yet simultaneously sly, murderous, and powerful” and black women as “sexually desirable, promiscuous, presumptuous, and also cleverly malicious” (25) actually embody, I believe, the fears and neuroses of white American culture. I posit that hiding at the root of all of these negative images, lyrics, and labels, is the deeply embedded fear of losing control of the power white men had spent centuries trying to procure.

One way that white men secured their status through song was by writing lyrics that conjured up a nostalgia for the South and its slave-owning past, which included projecting an equivalent nostalgia on to the “souls of black folk” who clearly experienced slavery from a very different vantage point than their white masters. As I have mentioned in the context of blackface performance, black artists were forced to subscribe to the same masks that their white contemporaries donned if they were to be noticed in this white world. The same standards held for coon song composers, such that a black man who wished to be recognized by white society had to subject himself to the myth of longing to be a slave again. One of the best examples of this can be seen in James Bland’s “Carry Me Back To Old Virginny.”

.....

There’s where the birds warble sweet in the springtime,

There’s where the old darkey’s heart am long’d to go,

There’s where I labor’d so hard for old massa

.....

I was born in ole Virginny

Where the fields of cotton grow,

Such lyrics did their part to idealize the South, glorify its crops, and conjure up the image of a black man longing to return to slavery. Coon songs, in general, helped to create this Southern myth, especially as it pertained to “Old Virginia.” I draw attention to this myth-creating tactic for a few reasons: aside from these songs’ broader social implications, “Old Virginia” has a special place on the vaudeville stage of Cohan’s era. As I will show in the following section, the tap step called the “essence of ‘Old Virginny’” plays an important role in the shaping of Cohan’s image as a dancing man. A song titled “Virginia”⁷³ marks one of the first instances where Cohan takes a popular coon song, that he likely performed on the Vaudeville stage—no doubt this song had different lyrics when the Cohans performed it in the 1890s on the vaudeville stage—and then modifies the lyrics to suit a twentieth-century audience and the Broadway stage. While Cohan tweaks the melody, and the lyrics no longer reference the “old darkey,” Cohan preserves the musical structure of the song as well as the underlying myth of an idealized Southern state. This is the first of a series of minor coon song manipulations Cohan makes before writing “Yankee Doodle Boy,” the song I posit to be his most covert and successful attempt at sonic minstrelsy. When situated within the whole *Johnny* production, the song “Yankee Doodle Boy” does its part to cover up Cohan’s relationship to the coon song, past and present, and contributes to Cohan’s overarching engagement with covert minstrelsy.

The rise in popularity of the coon song coincided with a larger trend in science to see the relationship between behavior and race: eugenics explained social problems and black tendencies as a matter of heredity. Not only was 1896 the year that Hogan published his famous coon song, “All Coons Look Alike to Me,” but it also marked the year that Frederick Hoffman published,

⁷³ See Appendix A

Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro, which was the most widely-read book on race to be published in the late nineteenth century (Forbes 47). Thus, as America was reading about the relationship between cranial size and social disposition, citizens were also listening to songs that stated, “*All coons look alike to me, /I’ve got another beau, you see, /And he’s just as good to me/As you, nig! Ever tried to be, /He spends his money free*” (qtd. In Hasse 73).⁷⁴ As the social sciences continued to construct a worldview that posited a relationship between moral corruption and biology, the appeal and “value” of coon songs increased; they further justified the claims around blackness made by the scientific community. As the songs’ popularity increased, Americans—both black and white—flocked to see, hear, and purchase this “coon” mentality.

The 1880 census showed an increase in the number of black bodies that inhabited the American south, and by the 1890 census, this number had grown even greater. The number of black bodies in the South had surpassed that of white thereby increasing the threat of black bodies in the States. 1896 consequently also marks the passing of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which resulted in the establishment of racial segregation in public institutions. Along with this Jim Crow mentality came a lowered tolerance for black people in general, an increase in the number of lynching,⁷⁵ and a “subscribe or die” mentality for black citizens. Thus, in a manner similar to the way in which a sheer increase in the numbers of Chinese/American bodies threatened the nation and called for the Supreme Court’s 1882 decision to ban Chinese immigrants from entering, a growth in the number of black bodies inhabiting America called for drastic measures to remove the threatening presence of the black body, through lynching and segregation.

Labeling the black body as something harmful was another means of extinguishing black from the national narrative. In the 1890s Americans called ragtime “whorehouse music,” and

⁷⁴ Lyrics include both broken English and black caricatures as in this stanza from Hogan’s *All Coons Look Alike. to Me*.

⁷⁵ According to Forbes, the number of lynching of black people averaged over 100 a year between 1889 and 1902 (46)

“nigger music” (Schafer and Riedel 5). Americans viewed syncopation as sinful, crude, and grotesque. Moreover, although nobody spoke overtly about ragtime’s moral implications, it was always understood as subpar to the music created by white men and women. Frequent portrayals of the “niggah” as thief, as gambler, as violent, and as cowardly, permeated the musical stage from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century.⁷⁶ Caricatures of black men and women set to music defined the coon and ragtime genres as well as musical theatre in America: “In the late 1890s virtually any Negro dialect song with a medium to lively tempo, or a syncopated rhythm, was called a ragtime song” (73). One irony of ragtime, however, lay in the fact that although the form is steeped in a “black” or Africanist tradition, a key component of its style lay in the hybridity intrinsic to Africanist forms created on American soil. I have touched upon some of the ways in which an increase in the number of black people populating the United States led to an increased desire for coon music, but the increase in black citizens also allowed the Africanist aesthetic to infiltrate mainstream culture: ragtime, a product of this aesthetic appealed to American ears, even if the images this music conjured up did not appeal to their hearts.

Ragtime finds its roots in the lived experience of the African diaspora. Although I have been stressing the syncopated nature of ragtime, its form is of utmost importance: “...it is a formation, an organization of folk melodies and musical techniques into a brief and fairly simple quadrille-like structure, written down and designed to be played *as written* on the piano” (Schaefer and Riedel 5). In other words, early piano rags represent an Europeanist aesthetic formally and an Africanist aesthetic stylistically. Consequently, ragtime evolves as a hybrid form: black bodies mimicked the quadrille-form to which they came into contact with on American soil, and infused it with African American folk melodies and aesthetic qualities such

⁷⁶ See numerous examples of this verbiage in *Scandalize My Name*.

as syncopation and polyrhythm.⁷⁷ Hybridity sits at the core of this process and consequently produces a mixed set of value systems that run parallel to the forms' aesthetics.

The polyrhythmic nature of the ragtime genre gives ragtime music its distinctively Africanist quality. Recall the definition of ragtime: "An instrumental composition in duple meter, with a syncopated melody against a regular, *oom- pah* or march-style bass" (Hasse 2). Add the layered syncopations of tap dancing, and the result is an even more polyrhythmic piece of music.

Furthermore, the way in which rhythm and physicality can stem simultaneously from the right and left hands (as in the pianist's hands) and from both feet (as in the syncopated percussion of the tap dancer accompanying the musician), further complexifies the work's rhythm.⁷⁸

Accordingly, the growing interest in ragtime led to the piano's increased popularity.

The piano for American families, both black and white, came to represent class and culture. According to Hasse, the piano, "provided a center for family and self entertainment, it contributed to musical education, and it served to instill discipline and 'culture' in the youth of America" (Hasse 14).⁷⁹ The piano entertained both within the home and outside of it, in saloons, restaurants, and theatres. It became a staple to American music and symbolic to American culture. The piano acted as a standard against which individuals and families could be measured: it served as a tool for evaluating one's commitment to culture and the American nation; it

⁷⁷ While ragtime to the modern listener might not seem very syncopated, due to his/her exposed ear, ragtime sounded extremely syncopated to the listener of the 1890s. Schaefer and Riedel write, "To a modern listener, familiar with half a century of jazz and its all-pervasive influence, ragtime does not seem highly syncopated or 'hot' anymore... however, to a listener in the 1890s schooled in European rhythms or the bland popular arrangements of folk tunes, ragtime seemed massively syncopated, positively shocking in its broken rhythms and shifted accents" (Schaefer and Riedel 9). The result is to focus on the syncopation as the defining characteristic of ragtime music rather than other formal qualities.

⁷⁸ These interactions—between hands and feet, dancer and musician, ragtime and tap dance—also make manifest the concept of "high affect juxtaposition" that Gottschild outlines.

⁷⁹ The value of the piano can be seen in the literature of this period: one such example is James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* which tells the story of the protagonist's unique racial and class identity in relation to the piano. The ex-coloured man's ability to make money playing piano rags depended upon the fairness of his skin and his ability to pass as white, as well as his roots in African-American culture. He possessed the skills he did because of an inherent gift bestowed to him by his race and because of the white privilege his passing afforded him, granting him classical training and recognition amongst the upper class.

provided a simultaneously visible and aural manifestation of class and defined whether or not one (or a family) could afford America. Moreover, the piano allowed for musical and cultural growth on a very logistical level. The piano opened up the possibility for more rhythmic complexity: this instrument serves two hands, each of which can play a separate melody, harmony, and/or rhythm (14). It was precisely this rhythmic juxtaposition made possible by the piano that created elements like contrast and tension, rhythmic complexities that were unique to the sound and structure of ragtime at this time, and welcomed by American ears. In what follows, I look at the rhythmic phenomenon of syncopation, which the piano not only supports, but allows to flourish.

The type of syncopation used within the coon song genre is identical to that found in the piano rags of instrumental ragtime but its syncopation does not always appear on the printed page. That is, while ragtime songs did not appear in print until the late nineteenth century, vaudeville performers and minstrel men included them in live acts for many years prior to their publication. Furthermore, performers recall syncopating their performances, even if the words and music on the page gave no such direction (73-74). Consequently, syncopation was a necessary formality of coon songs, but it often elided, and continues to elide, the written (and visible) archive.

Ragtime music (in all forms) became particularly fashionable in New York⁸⁰ between 1895 and 1910. One New York-based music publisher, M. Witmark & Sons, recognized the capital gain in ragtime and quickly jumped on board. Isidore Witmark Sr., for example, supposedly discovered Ben Harney in the mid-90s. Harney was at this time popularizing the technique of

⁸⁰ New York was at this time both the center of music publishing houses and live entertainment and thus the locus of the ragtime craze. Hasse writes, "The success of ragtime and popular song writing was more dependent than instrumental writing on song plugging, vaudeville, and the entertainment complex based in New York City" (Hasse 23). Cohan is one such individual performing and composing in New York.

“ragging” at the piano and incorporated this new genre into his minstrel troupe repertoire.

Witmark Jr. writes, “...the hit made by the Johnson song in the minstrel show...dates the real interest of American publishers in ragtime” (Witmark 153). More importantly, the Witmarks published Cohan’s first coon song thus activating the artist’s career as an “American” composer. Publishers’ increased interest in ragtime music and the long-standing relationship between the Witmarks and Cohan provide my argument with some telling details.⁸¹

Talking Machines and Other Sonic Transmissions

The piano and the printed musical score brought music to the masses and bridged the divides between public/private and live/recorded. Both technologies preserved the sounds of the human voice and musical instrumentation and democratized American entertainment on the whole. Furthermore because sound and music now traveled faster than, and independently of, both the body and the written word, their transmission gave them a life of their own. Printed music eliminated the element of improvisation inherent to live ragtime performance; the phonograph and gramophones allowed for listening that was disjointed from the visible archive of sound and narrative. As a result, Americans were taught to read, see, and hear separately, yet make cognitive assumptions that these three sensory experiences were consistent with one another.

⁸¹ Thomas Edison invented the phonograph in 1877, Alexander Graham Bell introduced the graphophone in 1886, and Emile Berliner invented the gramophone in 1887 (Schwartzman 16, 22).

M. Witmark & Sons published Cohan’s first song in the year 1894—a ballad called *Why Did Nellie Come Home*. This is the only one of Cohan’s songs that the prestigious and popular M. Witmark & Sons accepted at the time. Although there is no proof that the other Cohan songs were trash—as the Witmarks claimed—personal letters show that the avant-garde publisher did not appreciate Cohan’s then comic style. Following this first acceptance with a major publisher, Cohan began publishing numerous “coon songs” that were set in the 2/4 time signature. *Hot Tamale Alley* was published in 1895 and *The Warmest Baby in the Bunch* in 1897. In other words, Cohan manipulated his compositions to reflect the style of the times. From the years 1895 to 1903, Cohan made a prolific contribution to the ragtime genre and to American entertainment. His popular syncopated tunes became household staples in both the printed form and on the increasingly popular phonograph record and gramophone cylinder.

Lisa Gitelman offers a theory of how media,⁸² such as the phonograph and gramophone, present valuable insight into representation, both as they work in culture and in nature.⁸³ Sound technologies, such as the phonograph and gramophone, circulate information while keeping their processes invisible. The phonograph and gramophone slipped into modernity as new objects, capable of transmission, reproduction, and disguise: “The success of all media depends at some level on inattention or ‘blindness’ to the media technologies themselves (and all of their supporting protocols) in favor of attention to the phenomena, ‘the content,’ that they represent for users’ edification or enjoyment” (Gitelman 6). That is to say, it was precisely these sound technologies’ ability to provide entertainment for the masses without necessitating a discussion of their particulars. Media as such detached the human voice from its body; technology allows words and melodies to transcend the flesh, in effect making it possible for the public to hear without seeing. Thus the circulation of media that inscribe, Gitelman argues, are simultaneously material and semiotic; they represent the ongoing negotiation of meaning within their particular social and historical contexts (6).⁸⁴

Gitelman’s analysis brings to the surface the various and complex ways that sound media, and specifically the phonographs and gramophones of Cohan’s era, took on a life and authority of

⁸² Lisa Gitelman defines media as, “socially realized structures of communication, where structures include both technological forms and their associated protocols, and where communication is a cultural practice, a ritualized collection of different people on the same mental map, sharing or engaged with popular ontologies of representation” (Gitelman 7).

⁸³ Media straddle the line between art historical objects, which represent culture and maintain their classification as art even in the modern era, and scientific objects, which represent nature. However, they lose their distinction as “science” as soon as new technologies have replaced them. While new media continuously replaces the old, as is the case with scientific objects, old media “remain meaningful” precisely because they are, “integral to a sense of what representation itself *is*, and what counts as adequate—and thereby commodifiable—representation...” (Gitelman 4). That is, media function as historical in a variety of ways and on multiple levels: media represent the past as well as the ways society has represented that past (5). Like new scientific paradigms that require both communal necessity and persuasive argumentation on the part of the scientist, new media require a need, a consensus, and ultimately, a self-evident practice which results from using such media over time.

⁸⁴ Between the Civil War and 1900, steam and electricity supplanted the human muscle and iron and steel replaced wood. This changes the face of farming and speeds up several sorts of business endeavors. These technological and scientific developments increased the demand for inventors—Thomas Edison and his phonograph being a perfect example—and workers sped up industrial processes. European and Chinese Immigrants come to America to fill these positions in the big cities. Thus between the years 1860 and 1914, New York’s population skyrocketed from 850,000 to four million (Zinn 253-254).

their own around the turn of the nineteenth century. By studying the circuits of power implicated in such sound technologies, I elucidate the various elements at play in Cohan's performance, including his ingenious—and potentially unconscious—use of media in order to write himself into American history (and write other social histories out of the nation). This exemplifies what Gitelman labels the “intersection of authority and amnesia” (Gitelman 6). Cohan's experiment in multi-media performance spawns a paradigm shift in American representation, not unlike that required for a scientific revolution, but also leaves behind the cultural artifacts of his art through printed sheet music, sound recordings, and libretti.

Because such transparency, “is always chimerical,” as Gitelman argues, (Gitelman 7), and this chimera relies on a unique combination of both displacements and obsolescences (8), over time, “media and their publics coevolve” (13). What remains important from this discussion is that in this coevolution of media and public, media holds the power to legitimate some voices and silence others. Recorded sound masked the face of the person's voice being projected and as a result, further distanced Africanist rhythms from the black bodies previously tied to such sounds. The phonograph and gramophone made sonic minstrelsy (i.e. minstrel performances that could be heard but not seen) possible. Furthermore, because recorded sound was repeatable, the element of improvisation that had been so definitive of early ragtime slowly began to diminish: now any song or note that was played once could be played over and over again, decreasing not only the act of spontaneity, but one's ability to hide certain notes and phrasing from the archive.

The “talking machine,” or “speaking phonograph” as the device was called, inscribed and mechanized the human voice for the public, while the public personified the machine by labeling the object with humanizing adjectives. Thomas Edison explains this in *The Phonograph and its*

Future, when he theorizes that the phonograph distinguishes itself from its media predecessors in its ability to gather up and retain sounds that previously exist only ephemerally (Gitelman 25). In the process of making the machine more human-like, Americans granted authority to new forms of inscription, thereby opening up the ways in which the individual could define him/herself in relation to the nation and in turn, the nation in relation to culture.⁸⁵ Rather than constructing national identity around the printed word, the American nation began defining “us” and “our” in relation to the recorded word. Media thereby tells the history of history by preserving the means through which the public preserves its history (i.e. printed word, spoken word, and/or recorded word) as well as *what* and *who* the nation preserves (i.e. the images, documents, and voices) and *why* (26).

At the same time that ragtime proliferated the (white) American mainstream market in the form of printed sheet music and the era’s new sound technologies, black artists included ragtime in their performances of black-on-black minstrelsy on smaller circuits and on less “popular” stages. Bert Williams’ career as a black-on-black minstrel performer fulfills the “unreconciled striving” in “one dark body” to which Du Bois gave a name. Many authors and performers felt it the American Negro’s responsibility to use this double consciousness to his advantage. While Du Bois held that members of the academy should use their talent to invoke social change, performers like Williams sought out opportunities to be recognized by the American public. Thus, in a manner similar to Du Bois, Williams played out the talented tenth mentality on the stage; both yearned to see a trained few rise up from behind the veil and produce racial uplift.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Here I am thinking specifically about Benedict Anderson’s notion of print capitalism. According to Anderson, print language invents nationalism and the “very idea of ‘nation’ is...nestled firmly in virtually all print languages; and nation-ness is virtually inseparable from political consciousness” (Anderson 134-135).

⁸⁶ Du Bois used his own success within the academy as a case in point: “I who speak here am bone of the bone and flesh of the flesh of them that live within the Veil” (*Souls* 4). Du Bois first empathized with what it felt like to be a problem and then used

However, black Americans were divided in their views of the two “real coons”. The question became a matter of whether Williams and Walker conserved or threatened the black race in their performance of black folk and self-proclaimed label, “coon”. Furthermore, black people often contemplated whether or not their brothers had a choice. At the turn of the century black writers began voicing their concern and conflicted sentiment towards black coon shouters and minstrels.

In 1903, black writers began publishing articles in black newspapers about the racial counterfeits appearing on stage. Sylvester Russell wrote: “The domestic classes of white people have been cultivating a tendency of late to assert that white people can sing coon songs better than colored people. This is not true. We must not accept this bluff from white people. We must disagree with them at once...” (Abbott and Seroff 20). On the one hand, the bluff works in the favor of America’s white citizens. That is, black-on-white performers could simultaneously uphold the political Imaginary *and* reap both the social and economic benefits of so doing. After all, who better to show America “authentic” blackness than the minds and bodies who had been authoring these fictions? But black people living in America, with a limited voice, finally objected to the dual success white Americans attained by taking advantage of the double consciousness that weighed heavy on their diasporic psyches: it was one thing to have the cake and a whole other to eat it. Consequently, the black bodies in touch with their voices began publicly rejecting the double standard against which they were held by way of black newspapers.

By the time a diatribe on the use of the word “coon” in song came out in the *Freeman* in January 1909, Americans—black and white—exercised more caution when publishing ragtime music. By 1910, the label “coon song” had become obsolete. Black men with a voice spoke out where and as they could. But, not all members of the African diaspora disparaged the work of

his toolbox of academic knowledge and European influence to show that “black folk” like him should strive as individuals for the empowerment of the whole black race.

Williams and Walker either: the same makeup that caused an uproar within certain circles of the black community gave other members of the African diaspora a moment in the spotlight, a name, and a reason to hope. This further complicated matters for members of the black community who sought unity in their struggle. So while the coon craze was strong and celebrated for more than a decade, there were mixed sentiments within America's black community. By 1909, however, the damage had already been done: white ideals devised to keep certain races and faces "in their place" tainted the images of both black people and, as I will show in the next section, tap dance. Equally divided was white American's relationship to blackface makeup during the first decade of the twentieth century.

The white stage became as controversial as the black stage of Williams and Walker. For years, Cohan visibly upheld the white political Imaginary by blacking up on the vaudeville stage. Yet his visibly "black" performances destabilized colonial authority over time. A fine line existed between a performance of race and race as a biological trait. As Eric Lott has noted, "Although minstrelsy was indeed in the business of staging or producing 'race,' that very enterprise also involved in it a carnivalizing of race...such that the minstrel show's ideological production became more contradictory, its consumption more indeterminate, its political effects more plural than many have assumed" (Bean 9). That is, as Cohan—like so many white performers of the era—became too good at "performing" blackness, he and his audience entered into an equivocal and dangerous process of racial reification. Cohan negotiated the space between American and African-American, between stereotype and national imagination, and between subjugation and Civil Rights. He staged American-ness by appealing to the racialized and gendered fictions built-in to American culture. By 1903, this practice started losing momentum and allowed black acts and solo performers, like Williams and Walker, to find a

simultaneously acceptable and disparaging place on the American stage. Cohan managed to elide published black criticism by changing the way he labeled his music, exchanging the lyrics he included in his songs, and abandoning the costumes and makeup he had previously required of his performers.⁸⁷

Labels and Lyrics

In flocking to the small vaudeville houses wherein performers donned blackface, white Americans not only sought to affirm their whiteness, but enjoyed the music on an aesthetic level. After all, the ragtime music craze could not have swept the nation had the nation not thoroughly enjoyed the spontaneity and polyrhythmic complexity behind the musical form itself. Cohan would have been a ‘dumb fool’ to dismiss ragtime music in favor of a more square, European, march. However, if Cohan had published a piece of ragtime, he would have run the risk of tainting his patriotism as something wrought with black aesthetics. I argue that this is precisely the reason that Cohan published “The Yankee Doodle Dandy” as a *tempo di marcia*, rather than a piece of ragtime. As I will show, the label “march” is misleading and marks one of the principle ways in which Cohan’s sonic minstrelsy slips under the radar for over a century.

⁸⁷ While performers of color gradually dominated coon song performances, a group of ‘Negro specialists’ known as ‘coon shouters’ sprang up between 1897 and 1898. These “untrained vocalist[s] of a certain ‘robust degree’” were white females who sang the music of black composers (Abbott and Seroff 15). A *New York Clipper* cites Artie Hall as one of the “boldest white coon shouters” in the New York City vaudeville scene: “‘Artie Hall became a favorite at once in her peculiar coon shouting and ragtime dancing...her specialty consists of an artistic and true-to-nature portrayal of the idiosyncrasies of the exuberant young Negro woman of the South. Every detail, from the facial makeup to the kinky coiffure and the attempt at style in dress, is accurately reproduced’” (17). While Hall did a few performances without the aid of burnt cork, the audience preferred her to perform with makeup on: her continuing success was indelibly linked to ‘realistic’ blackface makeup and her ‘coon shouting’. Through her performance, Hall endeavored to be almost, but not quite, indistinguishable from the subject she imitated (20). Hall became so indistinguishable from the caricatured-versions of black people she sought to portray that she eventually started removing her gloves and wig at the end of her performances in order to assure audience members that she was in fact white (20). As I will show in the next section, the famous dancer George Primrose does something very similar when he became so good at imitating the “Negro character” that he finally had to change his costume and do away with his blackface makeup so as not to be confused with the biological blackness represented by his black contemporary, Billy Kersands. Likewise, Artie Hall felt the need to expose her biological whiteness in order to uphold the belief that her blackness only ran as deep as her life on stage. Thus black-on-white minstrels embodied their own ambivalence. Cohan’s success as a vaudeville performer in blackface fits into this narrow window of triumph that white coon shouters experienced at the end of the nineteenth century.

The surviving sonic and written elements of the “The Yankee Doodle Boy” number offer the strongest evidence. In listening to Billy Murray’s 1905 cylinder recording of “The Yankee Doodle Boy”—the oldest surviving recorded version of the song—one hears it echo the pep and step of a high-school marching band.⁸⁸ The use of certain brass instruments, winds, and drums contribute to its parade sentiment. Yet something shifts in Murray’s voice as he sings, “*So’s Uncle Sam.*” These moments of syncopated inlay within the general march structure deviate from what is typical of a standard march. Recall that both a march and ragtime are forms written in the 2/4 time signature, so someone with an untrained ear might not be attuned to the song’s rhythmic idiosyncrasies. Murray then returns to the even tempo until the line, “*I love to listen to the Dixie Strain,*” where from this moment forward, he continues to slip in and out of syncopation, climaxing with the exceedingly syncopated phrase, “*Born on the Fourth of July.*” The types of instruments this song implements, along with the lack of derogatory coon lyrics, allows audience members to overlook the song’s ties to blackness. There would have been no reason for early twentieth-century listeners to become suspicious of Cohan’s use of syncopation or to find a similarity between what they heard on Broadway and the ragtime music that they were now accustomed to hearing only in parlors and vaudeville theatres. Furthermore, the absence of black bodies and the presence of flag-waving white Americans were likely proof enough for the audience: if no black bodies then no black music.

The sheet music further confirms that “The Yankee Doodle Boy” is a march in 2/4. While the first few bars are certainly march-like, the chorus offers a much more syncopated rhythm than is typical for a standard march. Just as Murray’s voice changes in the 1905 recording, so too does the written rhythm of the notes found next to phrases like, “Born on the Fourth of July” and “ain’t that a josh,” rhythms which actually replicate a cakewalk (Campbell 34-35). A cakewalk,

⁸⁸ See Edison Gold Moulded Record: 8910, courtesy of University of California Santa Barbara Digital Archives.

by nature, is syncopated against a backdrop of 2/4. While Cohan might have labeled “The Yankee Doodle Boy” a “March”, he in fact had composed a song in 2/4 with a syncopated chorus.⁸⁹

Inserting cakewalk breaks into the choruses of standard marches was not an uncommon gesture for composers at this time; this practice facilitated in the more general proliferation of syncopation into the mainstream. From the 1890s all the way through World War I, composers often took pre-composed cakewalks that had already become popular in the vernacular and added derogatory lyrics as an afterthought. That is, white composers often used the catchy nature of cakewalk tunes—songs to which Americans had already become accustomed—and added lines like, “*Come all yo’ black coons/Come all yo’ gals so shady...Dat cake is in view...*” (Dennison 350), thereby substituting nasty images of “coons” into the breaks of dance forms that were seen as “fun” and socially acceptable. Thus, while white people tended to fear the “real” black body, the image of that same black body in song signified the happy and the care-free. Cohan’s connection to America’s old ways would have been far too clear had he kept in coon lyrics during the moments in his music that reflected cakewalks or even labeled his composition a “Rag”.

Not all ragtime music is *consistently* syncopated. Recall the definition of ragtime music: “...a dance-based American vernacular music, featuring a syncopated melody against an even accompaniment, played in the 2/4 time signature.” Schafer and Riedel write, “[Syncopation]...is simply one characteristic among many which define the form” (Schafer and Riedel 10). According to these authors, a song can contain moments of syncopation and include other elements such as the break and/or stop-time and still be considered of the ragtime genre. As I

⁸⁹ See Appendix A for original sheet music.

will show in the next section, the surviving sonic recordings of Cohan's tap dancing point to his use of stop-time during his dance break. Therefore, is it possible that what Cohan chose to label a "March" would have been labeled "Ragtime" if he had published it just a year prior? As I mentioned earlier, Cohan published an astonishing number of coon songs in the years leading up to *Little Johnny Jones*. Does exchanging the label "March" for "Rag" change the way his audience *hears* "Yankee Doodle"? Do the lyrics "Uncle Sam" not fit side by side with a "wench" who been gettin' "crazy off niggah punch?"⁹⁰ Perhaps the national stage in Cohan's era made no space for anything but the white body.

"Yankee Doodle Boy" is just one of many songs within *Johnny* where Cohan writes a syncopated chorus in the style of ragtime, designs his breaks—musical and dance—for improvised cakewalks, yet omits lines that might have been found in earlier coon songs like, "*Oh lord bless you white folks/To drive away the blues,/There's nothing like the music,/That's in these darkey's shoes*" (Dennison 272).⁹¹ "I'm a Yankee Doodle Dandy" takes the place of generic black dandies, Zip Coons, and Jim's from Carolina.⁹²

⁹⁰ Words are adapted from Cohan's song "Ethiopian Diddy" in the 1897 show *The Warmest Baby in the Bunch*.

⁹¹ For full lyrics, see Sam Dennison's *Scandalize My Name* (pp. 272-273).

⁹² It is interesting to note that one of the earliest musical uses of the phrase "Yankee Doodle" dates back to 1767. Here the composer Andrew Barton writes a song for his ballad opera *The Disappointment* and gives these words to Raccoon, the first black character to appear in a "native-work" (Dennison 8). This comical but *free* black man possessed more rights than would have been realistic for a person of color during this period. Because of this, the show was censored and quickly removed from the American stage. The use of Yankee Doodle becomes even more complex in post-Revolutionary America, when Thomas Linley writes "Yankee Doodle; or The Negroes Farewell to America."

Now farewell my Massa, my Missey adieu
More blows or my stripes will me e'er take from you,
Or will me come hither or thither me go,
No help make you rich by de sweat of my brow.

Yankee doodle, Yankee doodle dandy I vow
Yankee dooodle, Yankee doodle bow wow wow... (25).

This song represents what would have been a common American sentiment towards black men and women during the Revolution. Sam Dennison explains that this song reflected the trend in African American deportation to England, "the promised land". Scholars have come up with varying interpretations of this song's meaning, but the most common understanding is that it was either meant to represent anti-slavery feelings or meant to serve as British propaganda in England's effort to acquire

As I explained earlier, the surge in music publishing that coincided with the invention of the phonograph record and gramophone cylinder allowed Cohan's music twice as many means of circulation and doubled his ability to slip in syncopation under the guise of the European march. Cohan's printed musical scores not only mask the Africanist elements of his work but profess his (and the nation's) whiteness by labeling the page something it is not quite. "The Yankee Doodle Boy" is almost, but not quite, a march. "The Yankee Doodle Boy" is almost, but not quite, ragtime. "The Yankee Doodle Boy" is all-American, but not quite all white. Both the music sung during the original performance as well as that sung by the faceless voices of new sound technologies allowed for listening that was disjointed from the visible archive of sound and narrative. With *Little Johnny Jones*, Cohan succeeds in "changing the joke"⁹³ and offering America some of the same aesthetic practices with which he engaged while in blackface makeup on the vaudeville circuit and in his published coon songs that filled the living rooms and parlors of white people from 1895-1903. Thus, with *Johnny*, he not only inverts the guilt of his audience, but reverses his own culpability; mis-labeling music absolves Cohan and the rest of white America from feeling "dirty" for appropriating certain Africanist aesthetics. Americans are taught to read, see, and hear separately, yet make cognitive assumptions that these three sensory experiences are in fact consistent with one another.

defectors (Dennison 24). Thus use of the phrase "Yankee Doodle Dandy" has always been fraught with black/white relations in America; to expel or to enslave? That is the question.

⁹³ This is a reference to Ralph Ellison's essay, "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke," wherein the author challenged Stanley Edgar Hyman's critique of African-American folklore and specifically, his understanding of the trickster figure. Ellison argued that Hyman set up a false binary; he assumes that certain "Negro" archetypes existed as necessarily separate from and opposed to other "American" archetypes. Furthermore, Ellison disagreed with Hyman's theory that the "darky" or minstrel man derived from the African (religious) trickster figure. He showed that the minstrel represented an act of, "self-humiliation of the 'sacrificial' figure, and that a psychological dissociation from this self-maiming is one of the powerful motives at work in the audience" (Ellison 49). In other words, the joke is necessarily bound up with the performer's racial identity and the comedic space allows white audiences a safe space to laugh. Ellison pointed out that Hyman's use of "trickster" models stemmed from literature, not traditional folklore, and such a conflation sidestepped the reality that not all African-American writers identify solely with an African folk (and especially a religious) tradition. Like the minstrel performer or darky, the African-American author may respond to the symbolic needs of his/her white audience. Minstrels signify a white perception of blackness rather than any essential characteristic; white audience members signify the sign that resides in the minstrel's mask rather than pointing to the man lurking behind it.

Although new sound technologies allowed for the separation between visible and aural forms of entertainment and made American culture accessible from the home at the turn of the century, ragtime still thrived in the public sphere and became synonymous with more visible and physical forms of entertainment. Theatres showcased vaudeville and variety acts that incorporated all forms of ragtime music and “ragged” dances into their acts. Dance halls, saloons, and other social spaces, housed more casual exchanges of ragtime music and ragged dances within a vernacular setting, allowing Americans from all class and racial backgrounds an opportunity to participate in a national culture and incorporate it into their daily life and identity. This proliferation of ragtime music into such social spaces allowed ragtime dancing to flourish.

Generally dance belongs to the realm of visible performance and perceptibility, the dances executed by George M. Cohan on the evening of November 7th occupy the space of both the visual and the sonic; tap dance, in general, has the privilege of being a phenomenon both heard *and* seen. I will therefore, in the next section, take up the ways that both the cakewalk and tap dance allow Cohan to mask vision with sound, and sound with vision. The musical genre, broadly defined as “ragtime”, not only marks an era on the page but marks black bodies and their identity on stage, and off.

Moving Notes: Cakewalk; Virginny Essence; Buck-and-Wing

Ragging and Dragging

Covert minstrelsy surfaces in the syncopated dances that Cohan improvised on the Broadway stage. In this section I examine the choreography that Cohan never wrote down and the bodies that he erased from Broadway's future. The manner in which white journalists have archived Cohan's engagement with ragtime dancing seals Cohan's name in entertainment history as the "Song and Dance Man" and affords him (at least) triple-threat status. Cohan wrote, directed, composed, and "choreographed" his own shows. I place "choreographed" in quotations here because my research has shown, as will this chapter, that Cohan improvised the vast majority (if not all) of his dancing in *Little Johnny Jones*. This is the first way in which covert minstrelsy functions in this section: because Cohan improvised his choreography, no written trace of his dancing exists in the archive. In order to support such a large claim, I will have to trace the genealogies of three dance steps that Cohan appears to have executed during *Johnny's* 1904 run. Equally important in my mapping of these steps' lineages will be to show the varied ways in which black and white bodies performed each of these steps and the disparity in literature surrounding the dancing of these two differently-typed bodies. This demonstrates the second way in which Cohan's dancing plays a part in the covert minstrelsy of *Johnny*: the only first-hand accounts of Cohan's dancing appear in newspapers written by white journalists.

At the turn of the century, black and white bodies began competing for a place on the public stage. The better the performance, the better the pay, but neither black nor white bodies were spared the social consequences: white performers risked being perceived as biologically black, and black performers only reinforced the fallacy in circulation at that time. Each group of

people—black and white—risked smearing its image and identity in the face of America. I have shown how the coon song holds the power to undermine the facticity of both “whiteness” and “otherness” and the colonizer’s desire soon becomes his biggest fear. In this section I show that the same slippage intrinsic to the economy of coon songs occurred in ragtime dances, yet the process was slightly reversed.

The ragtime waltz, though a minor genre, (Hasse 4) as well as the popular practice of “ragging” existing music, are ragtime musical forms frequently accompanied by a dance. The ragtime waltz usually showcases a piano and requires that the “right hand play against a recurring left-hand pattern” (4). What differentiates the ragtime waltzes from other ragtime compositions is their meter: waltzes are played in 3/4 rather than 2/4. More popular than ragging a waltz at the turn of the century was to rag a classical work. To “rag” something simply means, “to syncopate the melody of a non-syncopated work” (4). Ragging an existing work was common in the American South in the 1880s.⁹⁴ Banjoists who learned and played music by ear, rather than from sheet music, frequently referred to a ragged rhythm as “broken- time,” which etymologically morphed into “ragged time” and finally “ragtime”. The term “ragged” entered the vernacular around the same time as the phrase “broken-time” and was used to describe the dances of those danced by members of the black community. Their dances were “broken” or “ragged” rather than square (6). Because this is primarily a technique of improvisation, ragging was rarely, if ever, written down. While this was a common practice amongst American musicians at the turn of the century, the lack of written evidence makes it hard to trace this practice back to specific names. However, as I show in the coming pages, George M. Cohan was

⁹⁴ According to Barbara Cohen-Stratyner, “Dances with geographic references to port cities and, especially areas on the Mississippi River are faster, syncopated, and based on the cakewalk rhythm (1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &), its cousin the habanera (1 &-a 2 & 3-a 4 & 1-a &-a, etc.), or ragtime, a piano-based form with a cakewalk in the left hand and the more complex habanera on the right. These include charlestons, black bottoms, stomps, and todalos...References to the rural South tends to be minstrel-style nostalgia, such as ‘Swanee’ or ‘Mammy’” (Malnig 220).

not only a prolific publisher of coon songs, as I demonstrated in the third section, but built a name for himself through the practice of ragging. Because improvisation often elides the written document, I use Cohan's affinity for American patriotism, his upbringing on the vaudeville circuit, and his unique dance practice, to show his engagement with ragging. Three dances will be of primary importance to the following discussion: the Virginia essence, buck-and-wing, and the cakewalk. I trace these three dances as they exist in relation to ragtime music and as they served Cohan's early life and performance career.

According to biographer John McCabe, it was while the family was in Buffalo that George created, "the dance step which was to make him the most imitated vaudeville dancer at the turn of the century"(McCabe 39). McCabe writes: "In the four-act, George did an old dance called the 'essence' which was an undemanding little step done to the tune of 'Coming thru the Rye' played in six-eight time" (39). Unfortunately McCabe's description of the "essence" lacks specificity. One can deduce from literature and newspaper clippings of the era that the essence of old Virginia was an eccentric⁹⁵ dance with a series of flaps, spansks, and ball changes. Since the soft shoe is said to have evolved from this step, the essence of old Virginia likely followed the rhythmic structure of six and a break, or six bars of a dance with a two bar break (something that broke away from the melody of the first six bars) and then repeated several times. As is the case with any oral tradition, the tap dance lexicon lives on ambiguously at best. The advent of film and video helps to create some uniformity, but following a consistent narrative of tap dance terminology is always risky.⁹⁶ McCabe's version of the story goes on to explain how at rehearsal

⁹⁵ Eccentric dancing is a genre that includes everything from contortionist movement, legomania, and shake dancing. Marshall Stearns writes, "Although these styles frequently overlap with others, and a dancer can combine something of all of them. A few involve tap, for tappers are generally regarded as the dancing elite and imitated whenever possible" (Stearns 231). Stearns further explained that "eccentric dancing" was a term used to describe the type of movement of innovators, including names like George M. Cohan. However, he notes, "regular hoofers were not impressed" by eccentric dancing as such.

⁹⁶ The only "essence" shown in the 1942 production comes from the actor playing Jerry Cohan during a replication of his famous

George asked the orchestra leader to play something other than ‘Coming thru the Rye’ at that evening’s performance. The orchestra leader obeyed, playing not only a different tune, but also a tune in 2/4. This moment becomes relevant to my discussion of ragtime and Cohan’s early use of “ragging” his dances because of his engagement with the 2/4 time signature.

Cohan could not manage the essence step with the slower time signature—he would have had to fill the extra music with a series of acrobatic or eccentric moves and was thus forced into a buck dance. McCabe writes, “Desperately he went into a buck dance, and dragged out the steps in order to accommodate the slower tempo, leaping from one side of the stage to the other... Laughter stimulated him to exaggerate the steps, and he did a scissors-grinder movement with his arms and legs as he threw his head back in an extravagant gesture of comic strain” (39-40). Newspapers of this era cited Cohan’s style as one of “dragging” the steps in order to accommodate the tempo. Moreover, the term “ragging” was synonymous at this time with the word “dragging”.⁹⁷ Whether called ragging or dragging, this practice of syncopating an even tempo was wildly popular on the American stage. McCabe and others have argued that Cohan’s musical mishap revolutionized buck-and-wing dancing and earned Cohan the title, “Song and Dance Man” (40). However, it seems that McCabe omitted some key details from this re-telling.⁹⁸

I want to highlight the fact that minstrel or not, when it came to entertainment, accolades went to those white performers who imitated black performers well. This held in situations where a

“Dancing Master” routine. The young (supposed ten-year-old) Georgie Cohan dances the same routine—albeit much shorter and more simplified—one scene later. Although the essence escapes little Georgie’s rendition, the mirroring costumes, music, and sets, give the impression that this choreography will also become a part of George’s repertoire.

⁹⁷ This particular performance was so well received that the then-famous Lucy Daly labeled Cohan’s performance, “the most superb eccentric dance she had ever seen” (McCabe 40).

⁹⁸ In an article written for the *New York Age*, from 5 August 1915, Sam Lucas recalls Kersands and his famous Essence of old Virginia from 1874: “In that dance he would be flat on his head and then his toes against the stage to keep time. He would look at his feet to see how they were keeping time, and then looking out at the audience he would say, ‘Ain’t this nice?’”

white performer was thought to have looked like, sounded like, or spoken like, a “black” man. But if the resemblance became too precise, the white man would have to do something to “whiten his act”. For example, if a superb delineator of “blackness” did not remove his makeup at the end of a blackface performance, an audience member might have mistaken him for the “real” deal; in the nineteenth century, one who imitated too well ran the risk of “becoming black”. With dancing, however, the same rules did not apply. White dancing was always compared to that of black, as can be seen in Dan Bryant’s obituary. Taboo were certain aesthetic principles like improvisation, or steps that were weightier, closer to the ground, and thus more “primitive”. But in general, the dancing capabilities of black men were held in high esteem. A vast majority of coon songs of the era compare the white man’s dancing to that of the black man’s; the black man always took the cake. Popular songs and newspapers confirm that putting the black man’s dancing on a pedestal—even insulting the dancing of white men—was acceptable, even the norm, through the 1880s. Cohan is but one example of a white performer who imitated the dancing of black men well. The constant competition between black men and white kept the performances fresh and the art of tap dance in motion; much like ragtime music, stealing and sharing perpetuated the form. However, something changed in the 1890s: white men were no longer cited as imitating the steps of black men, but instead creating them: the relationship between Billy Kersands, George Primrose, and Cohan exemplifies this very shift.

The Essence of Old Virginia⁹⁹

My research has shown that the Virginia essence went through a number of rhythmic shifts before reaching Cohan’s stage. Black newspapers from the period cite Billy Kersands and other

⁹⁹ I use the terms “Essence of Old Virginny”, “Essence of Old Virginia”, and “Virginia Essence” interchangeably.

members of the black community as dancing the essence to a slower tempo in the late 1860s, early 1870s.¹⁰⁰ While a typical Virginia essence would have been danced vertically with both feet on the ground—*spank touch ball change, spank touch ball change*—in a wider-than-hip-width stance, Kersands inverted his version of the routine, dancing on a horizontal plane using the wall as a floor.¹⁰¹ His performance would have been read as eccentric and comical back in his day, but today remains hard to imagine without having seen one of his performances or pencil sketches that often accompanied his bylines.¹⁰² Even though Kersands in many ways subjected himself to the racial disparagement of white theatregoers, his performances necessarily challenged those of white performers like George Primrose and George Cohan.¹⁰³

Within a few years of black reporters' accounts of black dancers performing to this slower tempo on black vaudeville stages, white journalists witnessed the Irish George (Delaney) Primrose executing the "Juba" and Essence of old Virginia in the streets and eventually on the (white) Buffalo stage. Primrose likely witnessed Kersands' essence and modified the step for white vaudeville. That is, while in Buffalo, Primrose performed Kersands' essence, originally done in 6/8 time, to a more mild 4/4 rhythm without syncopation, perhaps with softer shoes, thereby giving it the label "soft shoe". Primrose's more "elegant" style replaced the frantic and

¹⁰⁰ Kersands began performing on the minstrel stage in the early 1860s.

¹⁰¹ Kersands' choreographic inversion—dancing on a different plane—likely inspired Cohan's use of the wall as a floor during the dance break in *Little Johnny Jones*.

¹⁰² Proof of Kersands' popularity throughout the duration of the nineteenth century can be seen in multiple newspaper headings. A *New York Clipper* from 1889, for example, reads: "Billy Kersands, the man who has many imitators but few equals..." (Editorial 1889, 268). This headline proves that even the white journalists recognized him as an inventor of a new style of dancing. Hence, while no living historian was privy to one of Kersands' original performances, newspapers and drawings from the past paint a vivid picture of his style and popularity on the American stage.

¹⁰³ Like the work of Bert Williams, Billy Kersands' dancing in many ways allowed for the triumph of black art while simultaneously furthering a history of racial insult. This whole genealogy of the essence hints at what Eric Lott has referred to as blackface performance's, "dialectical flickering of racial insult and racial envy, moments of domination and moments of envy" (Lott 18). While Lott's understanding of "dialectical flickering" applies to black-on-white minstrels, this flickering occurred for black-on-black minstrels and performers of color as well, in the form of double consciousness. On one level, Kersands performed the way he did (i.e. caricatured, overly exaggerated, and often syncopated even 2/4 or 4/4 melodies) because he *had* to appease his white audience, give them what they wanted to see. Yet on another level, dancing in this manner brought him—and potentially the community of black dancers—national attention.

eccentric nature of the Virginny essence making the white minstrel the recognized father of this new “soft-shoe” style. Primrose then danced his softened essence, or “picture dance,” (Stearns 51) to even 4/4 melodies like Stephen Foster’s “Suwanee River”.

As I will discuss more in Chapter Two, the minstrel stage popularized Foster’s music, making him the most popular composer of his era. Like the coon songs that were slowly picking up momentum, much of Foster’s folk music depicted the black man as lazy, stupid, overly sexual, musically inclined, and skilled in (wild) dancing. His music simultaneously glorified plantation life and paid tribute to Africanist rhythms by taking aesthetic cues from black spirituals. Although Foster’s lyrics were repetitive and the harmonies rather basic, the syncopation he included caught the ears of the American public. Foster’s syncopated folk songs became so popular on the minstrel stage that all minstrel performers—black and white—began adopting them in their acts. Thus, what began as Foster mimicking the music of the black slave community quickly became the syncopated tunes of choice for black dancers such as Kersands.

Kersands’ inclusion of syncopated tunes like “Oh! Lemuel” and “Suwanee River” in his dance acts not only helped to popularize Foster’s tunes, but further supported the idea that this was the music of “black folk”. What we do not know, however, is whether Kersands danced to this music because it was syncopated and lent itself well to his tap dancing, whether he danced to Foster’s tunes because they were popular and guaranteed him a full house, or whether his dancing to these syncopated tunes was his disguised way of taking back the music that was rightfully his, thus becoming his own mimic man. In any case, this was the path of minstrel music—black to white to black and back again—which is why after Kersands used this music, Primrose borrowed the tunes, but “softened” his dancing.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Buck-and-wing dancing was revolutionized long before Cohan. To understand the complicated history of this step, I turn to Cohan’s autobiography—which outlines the same essence miracle on slightly different terms—and Marshall Stearns’ history of

White minstrels could not perform the same skits that their black contemporaries simultaneously performed without consequence. Primrose performed the same steps as Kersands and other black minstrels, but did so in blackface on the white stage.¹⁰⁵ While Primrose's performance "looked" white (i.e. he was white enough to black up on the white minstrel stage), he garnered "authenticity" by performing his essence to tunes like Foster's Negro-spiritual-inspired "Suwanee River".¹⁰⁶ Primrose thus imitated those seemingly obvious black aesthetics

soft-shoe and buck-and-wing dancing. First of all, neither McCabe nor Cohan gives dates for this particular performance. Based on its location in Cohan's autobiography, it occurred some time between the years 1895 and 1896. Cohan described this essence in his autobiography as an "'essence of old Virginia' dance" (*Twenty Years on Broadway* 141). Although the essence of old Virginia bears a complicated genealogy, all scholars seem to agree that it was a staple step for all minstrel performers on all vaudeville circuits that made their way through New York, and its name probably the result of Southern nostalgia.

In his history of tap and vernacular dance, Marshall Stearns, outlines the history of the buck-and-wing, including its ties to the jig, clog, and soft-shoe. The jig originally came from Ireland, but developed other implications while on American soil and thus lost popularity. Stearns writes, "the word itself was soon used to describe almost any kind of early Negro dancing" (Stearns 49). Both jiggling and clogging were seen on the American stage as early as 1840 (49), but clogging outlived jiggling, perhaps due to the jig's ties to black culture. Clogging resembles the slightly later development of soft-shoe dancing. Historically what has made clogging different from the soft shoe is actually a matter of costume and one's racial make-up. That is, one difference between the two styles manifests in the shoe itself: clogging involves wooden clogs and soft-shoe dancing requires a soft-leather soled shoe. The other difference is a matter of color: in the late nineteenth century, dancers of color continued to call this revised form of clogging, soft-shoe dancing.

Stearns further explores the genealogy of the soft-shoe and finds proof of its stemming from the essence. Stearns and others have disagreed on precise origins of the soft-shoe, but researchers tend to agree that the essence of old Virginia came from the shuffle—as it was seen on slave plantations – and was based largely on West African traditions and styles. I am more concerned with this step's genealogy than I am its precise inventor; the different variations of essence steps that occurred on the minstrel stage in the middle of the nineteenth century provide a crucial piece in the Cohan puzzle. One famous white performer of the essence of old Virginny was Irish minstrel, Dan Bryant. Carl Wittke, in his book *Tambo and Bones*, writes of Bryant's famous dancing: "He had few rivals in 'shaking up a grotesque essence'" (Wittke 223). Dan Bryant, yet another Irishman, (his real name was Daniel Webster O'Brien) played with several minstrel companies and established his own company in New York in 1857. His obituary reads, "he became a clever delineator of the negro character" ("The Dead Minstrel"). Although Bryant made the essence of old "Virginny" famous, he was hardly the first minstrel to perform the dance

¹⁰⁵ Carl Wittke argues that William Newcomb, a black dancer, invented the essence of old Virginia in 1851, while dancing with Fellow's Minstrels in New York. Wittke writes, "He invented and produced the original 'breakdown,' called 'The Essence of Old Virginia...'" (Wittke 225). Wittke undermines this claim earlier in the book when he writes about a minstrel performance in 1843, where the Virginia Minstrels performed the staple minstrel dance known as the essence of old Virginia. The date alone weakens Newcomb's credibility as the inventor of the step. Wittke writes, "The announcement in the *New York Herald* characterized the show as 'an exclusively minstrel entertainment combining the banjo, violin, bone castanets and the tambourine, and entirely exempt from vulgarities and other objectionable features which have hitherto characterized Negro extravaganzas.' In the course of the evening's program, all four performers sang and danced, jiggled in solo and double numbers, played their respective instruments singly in various combinations, and did the 'Lucy Long Walk Around' and 'The Essence of Old Virginny,' a dance and 'break-down,' at the close of the show. The last feature became established quite early in the history of minstrelsy as the traditional ending of the show's 'first part'" (45). As I show, Billy Kersands was only born a year prior to this performance, so he could not have been the first. William Henry Lane, however, was born in 1825 and died in 1852, making his style a likely source for this type of dancing.

¹⁰⁶ Primrose danced his softened essence to even 4/4 melodies like "Suwanee River". This song is significant because although written by the white Stephen Foster, this tune—as Du Bois has discussed—was based on Negro spirituals. Kersands' performances during the late 1860s and early 1870s likely influenced Primrose's decision to perform the essence and soft-shoe to such tunes. Lott, in *Love and Theft*, mentions Du Bois' idea that many of the songs written by Foster were actually based on African-American themes and hence, "black music was the 'only real American music'" (16-17). Lott also explains Foster's

that Kersands integrated into his performances, but maintained his distance from black culture by stylistically and rhythmically “softening” his steps. Primrose thus adapted his performance in order that the audience might read his act as one of *imitating* Kersands rather than as an attempt to try and “be black”. However even Primrose’s performance risked a proximity to blackness that the nation was not willing to confront. As the popularity of blackface began to wane, white performers sought new modes of incorporating the Other into their work. Cohan was likely the first white performer to grasp and execute the Africanist presence that existed *beneath* the minstrel mask without using burnt cork as a blatant form of redirection.

Cohan¹⁰⁷ severed the Virginia essence from its black ties and made it his own thing: white, and, acceptably American. My research leads me to believe that Cohan performed black minstrel dances to Scottish waltzes in 6/8 time and did not syncopate his tap dancing until a famous Buffalo performance. Thus the famous story that cites Cohan as being the creator of the Virginia essence is false: Cohan did not “invent” syncopated tap dancing in 1896. This year instead marked the first time the white press noticed something different. Cohan was perhaps the first white man to perform the essence without blackface makeup and the first recognized white dancer to understand the music well enough to be able to improvise in response to the song in 2/4 that the musicians played that evening. Kersands had been doing exactly this for at least two decades but nobody noticed—or chose to comment on—this unique dance on his black body. When performed by Cohan’s white body, the Virginal essence took on a new life; it was no longer an imitation of black dancing, but rather the dance of “white folk”. Consequently, until Cohan’s Buffalo performance, minstrelsy was about explicit mockery and imitation, rather than

musical influence as the result of early exposure to black wharf workers in Pittsburgh, as well as his family servant who is a big name in local church choirs of color (52). Weldon Johnson makes the same argument with regards to American theatre (17).

¹⁰⁷ Note that George Cohan was not born until 1878, long after Kersands had been performing the Virginy essence.

covert. A confluence of factors—social, political, technological, and corporeal—contributed to this re-telling of history and set the stage for minstrelsy’s new face in 1904.

Passing the Buck

Since before the Civil War, white identity among European-American immigrants and workers has developed out of a mode of distinguishing self from slave, from black man, and most generally, from “other”. David Roediger explains in *The Wages of Whiteness*, the concept of race not only intertwines itself with analyses of class, gender, age, sexuality, and ethnicity, but in fact, with whiteness. Consequently no matter how derogatorily Kersands presented himself, or how distanced George Primrose’s performance was from an Africanist aesthetic, the various components—subject matter, music, and dance—of black minstrelsy have always retained a stigma of blackness, thus calling for a reform on any (white) stage where such forms have been present; such forms’ inclusion threatened “whiteness”. White minstrels could not perform the same skits that their black contemporaries simultaneously performed without consequence.¹⁰⁸

I have thus demonstrated how the jig and clog evolved into the essence, which Kersands developed into the slower Virginia essence done in 2/4, which Primrose adopted, reclothed, and danced alongside even 4/4 rhythms as a means of distinguishing his dance from those danced by visibly black dancers, like Kersands. Running parallel to this history is the story of the buck-and-wing, which developed as a blend of the jig, clog, and soft-shoe (song and dance).¹⁰⁹ The buck-and-wing is significant in that it was this style of dancing that predominated the minstrel stage in the few years leading up to Cohan’s *Little Johnny Jones*, and thus likely one of Cohan’s

¹⁰⁸ In 1876, one year after the nation signed the Declaration of Independence, citizens signed a “Negro Declaration of Independence” which deplored the Republican Party and “proposed independent political action by colored voters” (Zinn 244).

¹⁰⁹ The soft-shoe was often referred to as “song and dance” during Cohan’s era.

staple steps in his Broadway debut. Because of the lack of written and/or visual documentation that exists from his 1904 performance, I rely on what remains audible in the archive as well as this genealogy of steps to support my claims.

Like so many of the tap steps we have seen, musicality distinguishes the buck-and-wing from other dance forms and styles. Marshall Stearns argues that both the clog and the soft-shoe lack a syncopated rhythm. He writes, “They all lacked swing in the jazz sense” (Stearns 50). Swing enters the picture in tap dance with the buck-and-wing. Sketches and newspapers show William Henry Lane as the first to dance a buck-and-wing in the streets of New York. James McIntyre (b. 1857) claimed that he introduced a reformed buck-and-wing on the New York stage around the year 1880.

Regardless of its originator,¹¹⁰ the buck-and-wing (whether called by this name or not) dates back to the year 1840, involves a blending of styles, and demands a swung tempo.¹¹¹ Important to note, however, is that dancers did not always anticipate this swung tempo. More often than not, the Virginia essence and buck-and-wing steps were improvised, and the tap steps a dancer chose to use were an impromptu response to whatever it was the music suggested. My research points to the fact that buck-and-wing dancing evolved on Kersands’ stage in moments where, rather than dancing *with* the music, Kersands responded to it. That is, just as ragtime music evolved as part of an improvisatory practice within a call-and-response framework, so too did tap dance grow in complexity within this model of dancers responding to musicians and vice versa. What Cohan took from Kersands and the rest of the black community was, more than anything, an ability to improvise within this Africanist structure of call-and-response.

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The buck-and-wing gained popularity on the stage around the same time the young George M. Cohan took center stage. Recall that Cohan gave no exact dates for his miracle discovery, but that we can infer it happened between the years 1895 and 1896. By this time, men performed the Virginia essence to a 6/8 time, 4/4 time, as well as to a 2/4 time, and had danced the buck-and-wing for over 50 years. In Cohan's retelling of this Buffalo performance, he states that he, "went into a buck dance, and dragged out the steps in order to accommodate the slower tempo." As we have seen, the buck-and-wing is dragged out by definition; the rhythm is swung. It is hard to imagine what this buck dance looked like, especially without any clue as to just what kind of 2/4 song accompanied the dance. However, given the period, location, and circumstances, the music played was most likely a rag.

While Cohan performed the essence and buck-and-wing steps to ragtime music on the stage, Americans performed the cakewalk to ragtime music in social spaces and at private gatherings. Consequently tap dance, which began in the public streets of New York as a means of immigrant expression, migrated to the American stage, becoming a performance and spectacle increasingly represented by and for whiteness. The cakewalk, which began on private slave plantations as a disguised form of slave power, quickly became a leading expression of both white Americans and black.

Cohan Takes the Cake

The cakewalk's complicated history, both on the American stage and within the vernacular, speaks to the ways in which the slippery exchange and masking of power riddles American entertainment history.¹¹² In 1898, *Clorindy—The Origin of the Cakewalk*, starring Earnest

¹¹² The cakewalk is closely related to the ring shout, a hybrid form evoking elements of various African cultures, Protestantism, and the lived experience of the African diaspora. It finds its origins in the U.S. diaspora ring shout, a dance that one can trace

Hogan,¹¹³ appeared in an early form of Broadway at the Casino Roof Garden. According to Marshall Stearns, Hogan made himself a name by, “playing in various ‘Tom’ and minstrel shows in the South, where his fame as a comedian obscured his reputation as a dancer” (Stearns 119). I highlight this only to show a connection between Hogan and Cohan at the turn of the century. Hogan tried to become more Irish in an attempt to be accepted on stage. He reached the level of stardom in his performance of *Clorindy*, by performing a mockery of white men in the form of a cakewalk. He did so without burnt cork makeup and exaggerated mouth paint. According to James Weldon Johnson, Eubie Blake, and Flournoy Miller, “ ‘Hogan was the greatest of all colored showmen’ ” (119-120). Recall that Hogan was also the man to supposedly start the “coon-song craze” (120) with his hit “All Coons Look Alike to Me” in 1896. Cohan began performing and publishing coon songs around this same year, yet he sought to cover up his Irish heritage, and become whiter by blacking-up. That is, Cohan found the most success when he abandoned his strictly white comedic acts and imitated the syncopated music and tap dancing of black men by dancing buck-and-wings and Virginny Essences to coon songs. Consequently both Hogan and Cohan gained popularity on the American stage through various means of masking and disguise, rather than through self-representation and caricature-free comedy. While I have

back to the African Bakongo tradition of dancing over drawn cosmogram figures as a means of invoking spirits. Mark Knowles writes, “Most often the symbol consisted of a circle surrounding a cross. The horizontal bar of the cross represents the division between the living and the dead. The vertical bar of the cross represents the division between God and the underworld. By circumscribing the circle, the dancer symbolically moves through life to death and then into rebirth” (Knowles 225). In the U.S. this dance began as a ritual within Afro-Protestant services and gradually becomes a part of secular practices, first in the Gullah culture of South Carolina and Georgia, and then throughout the U.S. South. According to Yvonne Daniels, the U.S. ring shout exemplifies the African American value of the circle as the locus of social and spiritual life: “It traced the ongoing reality of and necessity for life as deeply improvisational ‘danced walking’ ” (154). Moreover it emphasizes the importance of the body to diasporic community by creating community out of body-inspired dance and music practices. She writes, “The body yields the utmost of aesthetic communication: the wondrous, the spiritual, or the sacred. This is the realm of African-derived dance where aesthetic stimulation mushrooms and lavishly overflows and where transcendent or transformational states of being surface and preside. Even in situations where there is minimal movement or musical sound, heightened states of consciousness can develop within performance. Altered consciousness is triggered, for example, with only flat-foot walking and rhythmic body-part jerking...During minimal movement practices, worshipping congregations reach for religious expression through prayer-filled texts and the interrelationship of dance and music. What they receive in their “reach” are the resultant rhythms of an aesthetic imperative; they become totally engaged, completely involved or “at one” within the dance and music experience” (Daniels 129).

¹¹³ Hogan was a black man who changed his name from Reuben Crowder to Earnest Hogan because of the Irishman’s popularity on the stage at this time (Stearns 119). Music by Will Marion Cook and lyrics by Paul Laurence Dunbar

already alluded to some of Cohan's racialized music and dance practices—all of which have held the potential to fly under the radar—his purposively visible blackface performances deceived no one.¹¹⁴ Moreover, although he succeeded on the vaudeville stage as a minstrel, the nation shunned such visible disparagement of its “Others”. This turning point in American theatre is where covert minstrelsy finds its niche.

The cakewalk represents the most popular black social dance of the ragtime era (Malnig 56). According to Nadine George-Graves, ragtime music evolved out of the cakewalk's syncopated rhythm. While the dance itself combines African, Seminole, and European dance practices,¹¹⁵ the unique African American experience on slave plantations birthed this celebratory form of mimicry and movement. The dance began as a contest amongst slaves on Southern plantations who, unbeknownst to their masters, mocked the European styles they witnessed in the house: “When the slaves performed for the whites, their masters often mistook the playful derision for quaint approximations of their dances” (George-Graves 56). Slaves would link arms, lean back, and perform a “high-stepping” prance, while “putting on airs”; masters usually provided the winners of these dance contests with a cake (56). Clad in costumes representative of a wealthy white class—top hat and tails for men, heels and parasols for women—slaves used the cakewalk

¹¹⁴ Not much evidence of Cohan's relationship to blackface has survived the test of time, but the beginning scenes of James Cagney's short vaudeville montage at the beginning of the 1942 film, *Yankee Doodle Dandy* offer some useful glimpses into Cohan's dark past. Although agreeing on details of the actual plotline was a challenge for everyone involved in the making of this movie, Cohan's contract stipulates that he had the final say in the song and dance numbers. McGilligan writes, “Cohan specifically requested a scene in which the Four Cohans could perform their “Goggles Doll House” routine” (McGilligan 38). Buckner agrees to include this in the final version of the screenplay because Cohan specially requests the routine, and Buckner believed, “it will be a very entertaining bit for the whole family” (38). The final film edits include this piece as nothing more than a title, written on an old poster in the vaudeville montage. Liberties with songs and dances are only taken to the extent that songs are removed altogether or numbers cut down in size. This of course gives viewers a misguided perception of these works' integrity, but the original choreography and song lyrics are kept as true to Cohan's original as possible. Having more replicas of this vaudeville style would be extremely helpful, but scene sixteen in the film is cut due to the director's political and artistic prerogatives. It is in Zipp's Casino in Brooklyn, New York that Jerry Cohan's “Goggles' Doll House” act proves to be a huge success. The seventeen-minute act performed by the four Cohans is such a hit during its debut, that it runs for 24 minutes and receives four curtain calls (McCabe 42).

¹¹⁵ George-Graves writes, “The [Cakewalk] style of dancing has many influences, including African competitive dancing, Seminole dancing in which couples paraded solemnly, and European dancing and promenading that the slaves witnessed in the big house” (Malnig 56).

as an opportunity to try on different social identities and as a means of exercising their power through disguised mimicry. The cakewalk picked up momentum and became a common feature of minstrel shows and within the black vaudeville circuit. As these shows toured the States, the cakewalk craze spread, appearing in Northern social dance halls and other public spaces. Consequently new bodies and spaces defined the cakewalk in American culture and this once private dance of slave power became a public dance of American popular culture: ragtime music and dance, no matter how mixed or messy, came to represent one (white) nation.¹¹⁶

Rather than white Americans appropriating the rhythms of ragtime as a backdrop for generating racial slurs through lyric, the cakewalk marks a moment in American history where African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans adopted a set of movements that belonged distinctively to and were carried by members of the white plantation-owning and upper class citizens of America in order to assert their power through covert means of masking. The cakewalk thus found meaning in irony. Constance Valis Hill writes, “By flattering the master’s vanity through imitation, these North American slaves were also enjoying a parody of their master’s customs within the safe confines of the song and dance” (*Tap Dancing America* 34). The cakewalk therefore became a way for slaves to try on the manners and customs of their white masters while safeguarding the ways in which they were perceived.

¹¹⁶ I find Michael Warner’s distinction between public and private a helpful tool for understanding the ways that a dance, like the cakewalk, comes to occupy both social milieus. Warner explains that historically Western thought has defined these two spheres as “distinct zones” where each is “spatially distinct” and defined by “physical boundaries”: That which divides the public and private has a clear boundary, according to Warner. Yet, as Warner argues, this represents an ideal and dismisses the fact that most boundaries cannot be known in such concrete or objective ways. First, most people and practices are capable of occupying both realms at different times. Second, the two spaces are fluid and constantly shaping one another. While the cakewalk carries one set of meanings in the privacy of the (plantation) home, its migration into public spaces shifts not only the meaning of the dance for consumers, but alters the identity of those who perform its steps, thereby forever changing the ways the dance is and can be performed in private settings. In other words, the bodies and spaces that define the cakewalk constantly shape and reshape the very bodies and spaces on and in which the cakewalk inhabits. I return to the reciprocity of public and private shortly where I show a correlation between what Warner and others have described as “counterpublics,” and the racialized music and dance forms this chapter queries.

Marvin McAllister's theory of whiteface minstrelsy provides a useful lens through which one can view the cakewalk phenomenon. McAllister's *Whiting Up* examines the African American practice of whiting up and its corresponding motivations and implications within American culture. He defines whiteface minstrelsy as the, "extra-theatrical, social performance in which people of African descent appropriate white-identified gestures, vocabulary dialects, dress, or social entitlements" (McAllister 1). A minstrel revisionist in his own right,¹¹⁷ McAllister dips into the theories of ambivalence, class, gender, and politics that Alexander Saxton and Eric Lott find muddled in the minstrel tradition. I am interested in the ways that McAllister sees whiteface minstrelsy as staging a symbolic inversion. Because whiteface minstrels base their craft on "authoritative representations of whiteness" (1), whiteface minstrelsy necessitates an inquiry into the stability and reliability of certain (imagined) hierarchies of race and class.¹¹⁸ Both blackface and whiteface minstrels find liberation behind the mask: this "freedom from behind the mask...allowed them to move without inhibition and celebrate disorder in public spaces" (12).¹¹⁹ Through the whiteface mask, black minstrel performers simultaneously identify with and against white mainstream culture and in the process create a new identity for themselves (both as individuals and collectively). Such performances "rehearse new African American identities and establish black style" (16). The destabilization that occurs in whiteface minstrelsy and other such racially transcendent practices opens up new possibilities for uniting an interracial nation. While black dancers do not "white-up" with white makeup, as McAllister stipulates, they do white-up with their costumes, gestures, and mannerisms. That is, the airs they perform and the

¹¹⁷ McAllister's study builds on the whiteness studies of Rogin and Roediger as he returns to the concept of performing whiteness. Such performance theory also takes major cues from authors Joseph Roach, Daphne Brooks, and Jose Muñoz. Furthermore, McAllister plays with ideas put forth by "minstrel revisionists" Alexander Saxton and Eric Lott (McAllister 11).

¹¹⁸ McAllister writes, "Attuned to class as much as race, whiteface minstrels often satirize, parody, or interrogate privileged or authoritative representations of whiteness" (1).

¹¹⁹ Unlike the black on white minstrels, McAllister believes that whiteface artists "respectfully" redeploy their whiteness (12).

values they mock serve as a form of masking wherein the participants of color can simultaneously identify with and against mainstream culture; the act of whiting up, in this case, produces a counterpublic.¹²⁰ This is the same phenomenon that takes place in the evolution of the essence of old Virginal and the buck-and-wing.

Kersands in many ways, “whites-up” when he decides to dance to Foster’s tunes. Although based on black spirituals, Foster’s music had already been “whitened” for the American public’s digestibility. “Whitening” his minstrel act gave Kersands a boost, and like Williams and Walker, served to elevate black dancing to a certain social status. Kersands’ whiting-up thus relied on dance *and* music. Primrose, though white, whited up more when he (and his public) decided that his song and dance had become too black. Primrose needed to be able to represent the dancing of the “Negro” without becoming him. Consequently, Primrose whitened his style—costume, hair, posture—as a means of retaining the black man’s dancing but distinguishing it from Kersands’ buffoonery and “primitivity”. These symbolic inversions granted Kersands and Primrose temporary fame, but still read too black for their public; their acts could represent a counterpublic, but not a nation. It would be Cohan’s job to take this art of the counterpublic, mask its connection to the black body, and re-present it as American mainstream, worthy of international attention.

Like the two popular tap dances I have been discussing, (and their leading performers) of the ragtime era, the cakewalk maintains a subordinate status at the same time it becomes a part of popular culture. In the nineteenth century, masters sponsored cakewalks as a means of confirming status, demonstrating social control, and containing their slaves. The cakewalk was

¹²⁰ Michael Warner defines a counterpublic as, “maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status...it enables a horizon of opinion and exchange; its exchanges remain distinct from authority and have a cultural relation to power; its extent is in principle indefinite, because it is not based on a precise demography but mediated by print, theatre, diffuse networks of talk, commerce, and the like...” (Warner 56-57).

allegedly a way for masters to profit from their slaves. However, rather than the cakewalk successfully procuring power and stability, it destabilized an image of whiteness. The alienation and disturbance of norms that ensued from black people mimicking white can be seen in the masters' reactions (or lack thereof) to certain slaves' apparent mockery of white forms. In other words, as McAllister explains, it was the responsibility of the master to detect insult and yet few masters ever conceded. He writes, "If they openly reprimanded a dancer, they would be effectively recognizing an autonomous African American identity and publicly acknowledging that a blow against white supremacy had actually landed" (39). Thus, the cakewalker represents the "almost white but not quite" idea on which Bhabha's theory depends; it continually produced a slippage and marks a difference. The fact that few masters ever reported the slaves' power within the performance demonstrates the degree to which such a performance produced an alienating transfiguration of the black subject, and the white.¹²¹

While the performer, observer, and historical context alter the meaning of the cakewalk over time, this particular dance always contains irony. If not in the form of mimicry, as in black people imitating the colonizer, then in the reverse, of black people mocking white, bringing awareness to the ridiculous possibility that black people could ever be like their masters; this idea was far-fetched and comical. Therefore, the cakewalk represents power for both sides: it allows black men and women more proximity to white privilege and demonstrates and reinforces white power by showing the irony of black bodies embodying a role that they could not ever inhabit outside the safe parameters of the dance. Both iterations allow for safe proximity to the culture of the taboo other. For example, an article in the *New York Courier* from 1899 clearly points to the nation's ambivalence towards the cakewalk: "Society has decreed that ragtime and

¹²¹ One thing that challenges this reading is the distinction between parody and mimicry that McAllister offers. Reflecting on the work of Margaret Rose, he first defines parody (that which remains sympathetic) as separate from satire which "takes no prisoners" (34) and then distinguishes parody from mimicry because of the former's "comic discrepancy" (McAllister 34).

cake-walking are the thing, and one reads with amazement and disgust of historical and aristocratic names joining in this sex dance, for the cakewalk is nothing but an African *danse du ventre*, a milder edition of African orgies” (qtd. in Stearns and Stearns 123). Yet the amount of resistance with which the cakewalk was met does not mean that all of America perceived the dance as something bad. After all, the dance took the nation by storm and brought public attention to black bodies. Marian Hannah Winter writes, the cakewalk “was ‘a great exhibition dance with such superb theatrical potentialities...that it served as a Negro re-entry permit to the stage’” (qtd. in Stearns and Stearns 124). Thus, through the cakewalk, Cohan was able to capture the attention of his audience (and nation) viz. a viz. an Africanist aesthetic, without visibly manifesting a black presence on his stage. Cohan’s perfected strut entertained¹²² his public at the same time it masked musical syncopations and distracted audiences from seeing the elements of black culture that were intrinsic to his patriotism.

This early tap dance vocabulary that I have been describing was never written down, but instead carried by ship, body, and struggle. Tap dance has survived through body and archive: the only trace of its process exists within performances which have been archived in some manner as well as in the bodies that have contributed to the form’s evolution. Whether its vessel is black or white, it is precisely the journey that marks and codifies the form: tap dance, which includes the buck-and-wing, Virginia essence, and to some extent, Cohan’s rendition of a

¹²² Comedy is also an alluring facet of the cakewalk. The irony of black bodies positioned upright, putting on airs, and clad in Sunday-best attire increases the comic value of the cakewalk. Such comic value gives rise to the form’s popularity: “Musical comedy was the path through which Negro talent found the best opportunity for expression” (Stearns and Stearns 118). I posit that this sort of contrariety allowed for the form’s popularity on the minstrel stage in a manner similar to that exhibited in the ironic nature of coon songs: coon songs denigrated the very black men and women who invented the ragtime form. Thus both the ragtime and cakewalk styles entered the vernacular by way of the minstrel stage and the success of each process has required an element of irony and contrariety that could have only been achieved through forms containing parody and hybridization. Moreover, despite the ways in which the mimicry present in both coon songs and cakewalks has challenged the Africanist aesthetic (i.e. at the root, hybridity constitutes each form), the contradictions residing in both practices only further illuminates elements like contrariety and of course, the aesthetic of the cool. Similar to the cakewalk’s dependency on hybridization, tap dance requires an additive and experimental process unique to the African diaspora.

cakewalk that I outlined earlier, developed on two circuits simultaneously. On one level, black bodies carried these forms through the middle passage keeping them alive and strong underground. On another level, white bodies—and specifically Irish bodies—stayed up on their toes, influencing these forms on the American main stage. Yet no matter how much hybridity manifests in these dance practices and musical forms, their long-standing ties to the black body interfere with their public statuses. Some of the aesthetics that have given these forms their edge transgress “safe” moral conduct and threaten the public who practice them.

While makeup, costume, skin color, music, and dance style often signified some relationship to race, call-and-response was not necessarily visible or audible to its audience. Part of the reason the Virginia essence, buck-and-wing, and cakewalk were as popular as they were was because of their musical malleability; the buck-and-wing and Virginia essence could be danced evenly or syncopated, and their doer, needed not decide this in advance. The cakewalk was generally performed as a contest where difference or cleverness of movement often marked the winner. Cohan’s proclivity for music allowed his dancing to succeed in a way that the dancing of other white performers could not flourish. In trying so hard to “represent” the “black” body, other dancers, like Primrose, lost sight of the Africanist aesthetics to which Americans were so drawn. That is, where Primrose tried to emulate the dancing of Kersands by way of song selections and dance steps, Cohan wrote his own music and improvised the syncopated dance steps in circulation at this time. Moreover, Cohan avoided the clichés of the vaudeville stage—of trying to be someone else—and instead used various Africanist qualities and structures to create something uniquely “American”. Because Cohan did not pretend to be black, no one could *see* the ways in which his aesthetic converged with a diasporic one.

These three dances,—the cakewalk, Virginia essence, and buck-and wing—though not written in the margins of Cohan’s sheet music undoubtedly appeared on the stage of the Liberty Theatre back in November 1904.¹²³ Even in the dance breaks of “The Yankee Doodle Boy,” where Cohan’s orchestration is as even as John Phillip Sousa’s “Stars and Stripes Forever,”¹²⁴ his tap dancing supplies the syncopated melody against which the orchestra’s even accompaniment provides the rhythmic structure and form necessary for this musical moment to fit the definition of ragtime. In a manner similar to the disparity ignited between Cohan’s sheet music, which has rapidly circulated the written and visible word (and note), and the phonograph recordings of Cohan’s compositions, which have rapidly circulated the spoken and audible notes (and words), the simultaneity of senses required for “viewing” Cohan’s dancing has muddled the public’s ability to compartmentalize sensory experience. In all of these scenarios, the simultaneity of multi-sensory expression has allowed the body to intervene with the music, the music to umpire the written word, the written word to arbitrate technology, and technology to re-map the body.

Covert minstrelsy conceals itself under all of these masks, which, when utilized simultaneously, distract their audience from seeing the depth of each individual part. In slipping one mode of masking over and through another, Cohan takes the focus off of the corporeal threat of blackness and utilizes the aesthetic gifts black bodies have carried. Rather than trying to imitate what America has identified as “visibly black”—that is the caricature of the “American

¹²³ Besides the non-existence of choreography notes—the one exception being the phrase “Roll and crash for bow—on the third bow catch kick on cymbal” located on the last page of “The Yankee Doodle Boy” musical score for percussion—within the entire *Little Johnny Jones* libretto (musical score included), the phrase “ad lib” comes up a lot, meaning that even if not a direction for movement, Cohan habitually improvised his lines. Other notes found within the margins of the musical score include “tap is good” or “dance break” (located in the first violin score), signaling the frequent use of non-notated tap dance within the production.

¹²⁴ Sousa’s “Stars and Stripes Forever” epitomizes the march typical of the American concert band at the turn of the century. This brisk tempo in duple meter relies on a clear marking of the beat throughout the duration of the song, with the exception of the breaks (Campbell 37).

Negro”—Cohan removed the visibly black body from the equation. In removing the “threat,” Cohan not only re-routes the bodies onto which certain aesthetics have been mapped, but rewrites the American narrative white. In other words, rather than including a blatant narrative about blackness on stage, Cohan covers up the existence of these bodies. Cohan therefore cultivates a national stage as aesthetically diverse as the nature of America’s parts, but free of the faces that supposedly “taint” the nation. This new theatrical space mitigates fear, harbors nationalism, and exhibits America’s great pride to the rest of the world.

Coda

Cohan's enthusiasm for a type of musical theatre that championed a patrotic tenor endured the First World War and helped to enliven the Second. He composed everything from minstrel shows—e.g. *Cohan & Harris Minstrels* in 1909—to patriotic anthems used during both World Wars—e.g. “Over There” in 1917—in order to motivate American men to enlist. Cohan broke new ground for Broadway until he took sick in 1941, yet his corpus continued to live on well past his death in 1942. *Little Johnny Jones* took on a life of its own, and its two featured songs, “Yankee Doodle Boy” and “Give My Regards to Broadway,” became two of the most popular songs to appear and re-appear on both the Broadway stage and Hollywood films in the first few decades of the century. During this prolific period, however, times changed, and so did the mediums through which Americans received their messages.

New technology allowed artists to experiment with image, sound, and the human body. The silent film—though not called that at the time—encompassed the entirety of the movie industry until roughly 1927. During this time Warner Bros. released a silent film version of *Little Johnny Jones* in 1923.¹²⁵ As sound technology improved over the next decade, movie studios experimented with the sonic interplay between visuals and narrative. First National explored the convergence of sound and image with a talkie version of *Johnny* in 1929/1930.¹²⁶ While this version was created as a musical, only two of Cohan's two most popular songs survived, “Yankee Doodle Boy” and “Give My Regards to Broadway.” In 1941, just after Cohan stopped producing new work, Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney performed a tribute to Cohan in the film

¹²⁵ All footage of this film was destroyed in a fire. Directed by Arthur Rosson and Johnny Hines. Starring Johnny Hines as Johnny Jones.

¹²⁶ A non-circulating version of this film exists in the SRLF Library at the University of California, Los Angeles. Directed by Mervyn LeRoy. Starring Eddie Buzzell as Johnny Jones.

Babes on Broadway as part of a ghost theatre sequence. In this same film, Garland is featured in a massive blackface spectacular in “Waiting for the Robert E. Lee,”¹²⁷ a peculiar, and yet unsurprising juxtaposition. In 1942, just days before Cohan died, Warner Bros. released his biographical musical, “Yankee Doodle Dandy,” starring James Cagney as George M. Cohan. The Irish American with a quirky physicality and musical sensibility was a fitting choice to play the part of Cohan. Cohan’s discontent with certain elements of the film, however, combined with stringent Production Code “Don’ts and Be Carefuls,” prompted some alterations to the story during the production process, including the removal of all but one very short blackface scene.¹²⁸ Still, this film stands as some of the best quality and most accurate footage of Cohan’s career, since Cohan oversaw the whole process and gave Cagney his blessing.

A handful of re-stagings of *Johnny* for Broadway took place amidst all of these modernized remakes of *Johnny* for the screen. Most notable were Cohan’s 1905 and 1907 productions. The former he revived twice at the New York Theatre and toured until he presented his newly casted and enlarged 1907 version at the Academy of Music. In the years following Cohan’s death, Michael Stewart and John and Francine Pascal wrote yet another take on the biography of Cohan for the Broadway stage: *George M!* opened in 1968¹²⁹ and was then was adapted for television in 1970.¹³⁰ Donny Osmond then took the role of Johnny to Connecticut’s Godspeed Opera House in 1980 and debuted the Broadway revival in 1982; the show was not a great success.¹³¹

¹²⁷ A song often sung by Al Jolson.

¹²⁸ Several versions of the script are made, trying to balance Cohan’s wishes with the desires of the studio and of Buckner. Cohan was determined to appear as white and prejudice-free as possible. He wanted to hold back on any talk of his association with vaudeville until the year 1893. Particular performances and routines done before this time would have revealed the very close ties that Cohan had to blackface minstrelsy. Omission of such routines and genealogies limit the amount of credibility this film has, but also makes it difficult in my work to prove anything beyond the surviving photographs and newspaper reviews.

¹²⁹ The show was revived yet again off-Broadway in 2006 under the title *George M. Cohan Tonight!*.

¹³⁰ Aired on NBC.

¹³¹ See *New York Times* Review in Appendix B.

Yet some of the most revealing aspects of Cohan's legacy can be found in the archive of printed sheet music that has continued to circulate a narrative of its own. Aside from the compositional changes that accrued from the original version Cohan created in 1904, to the version Warner Bros. used in their hit musical in 1942, various publishers created a counter-narrative for *Johnny* in virtue of the images they chose to depict on their covers and the advertisements they adopted for the scores' margins and interiors. One of the most telling re-prints was a musical score published by Vogel in 1930 depicting Cohan in his prime alongside a hand written note to his father, Jerry Cohan, all against the backdrop of the American flag. When the center insert (pp.2-4 of the score) is removed, a big box advertising a brand new dance manual is revealed. It reads: "Learn how to dance to this song with the nation's best dancers, Fred Astaire, Eleanor Powell, and Bill Robinson."¹³² The juxtaposition of Cohan paying homage to his father, a great vaudeville performer in his own right, alongside the American flag and a song full of national spirit bids farewell to past modes of representation as it introduces the new faces of 1930 (i.e. Fred Astaire, Eleanor Powell, and finally, Bill Robinson). It prepares America not only for an aesthetic shift, but primes its audience for a transferal of medium, as well as an amendment to the types of bodies allowed to perform for the nation. This single score traces a performative transference of tap dance amongst bodies and between spaces. *Welcome to the 1930s, where tap dance prevails, women are cast in a more favorable light, and space has been made for at least one black man to shine on the screen without makeup.*

¹³² See Appendix B for insert.

CHAPTER TWO

“Tributes” Overwriting Sound:

A New Face of Blackface in Hollywood Films of the 1930s

Mis-en-scène

February 4th, 1939. 7:10PM. Students from the University of California, Los Angeles and other Los Angeles locals gather outside the Westwood Village Theatre, hoping to snag one of a limited number of tickets to see the preview of MGM's newest film, *Honolulu*.¹³³ Several of the women in attendance can be seen in cutting-edge pant suits, perhaps showing their support for the film's star, Eleanor Powell, who, taking a cue from Katherine Hepburn and Marlene Dietrich, has made the wide-legged pant suit a signature part of her on-screen appearance. Most of the attendees have been anxiously awaiting the film's release for quite some time since *MGM Heralds* have been plugging the film for the last couple months and the recent success of Twentieth Century Fox's film by the same name starring the white Sidney Toler as Chinese detective Charlie Chan has the public eager for more.¹³⁴ A few ignorant passersby stop to acknowledge the theatre's marquis which features the names of Robert Young, George Burns, and Gracie Allen in addition to that of Ms. Powell's and make a last minute decision to attend tonight's festivities; the house will be full.

As 1,480 lucky Los Angelinos make their way through the Spanish Mission-style doors, the youthful excitement of the predominately collegiate audience creates a Saturday night buzz, leaving little room for Hitler's recent declaration for the annihilation of the Jews in Europe to preoccupy anyone.¹³⁵ While it would be another two and a half years before World War II

¹³³ *Honolulu* previewed at the Westwood Village Theatre in Los Angeles, California on February 4, 1939 before moving to New York City's Capitol Theatre on February 22nd that same year.

¹³⁴ In 1938, Twentieth Century Fox released the detective film *Honolulu*, starring Sidney Toler (Warner Olnad's recent white replacement for the fictional character Charlie Chan). Hollywood had to cast the benevolent Chinese caricature as white, since recent attempts to cast Chan as Japanese or Korean proved unsuccessful at the box office.

¹³⁵ On January 30, 1939, on Adolf Hitler's sixth anniversary of coming to power as Germany's leader, Hitler made a speech, "The Jewish Question," celebrating his rise to power and offering rationale for the "Jewish problem". See Appendix D for an excerpt of this speech.

pulled in the United States, it was still a fragile moment for politics and a scary time to be different.

Men and women alike have grown to love and respect Ms. Powell for her lightening-fast feet and acrobatic abilities which she has recently shown off in *Born to Dance*¹³⁶ and *Rosalie*¹³⁷. It has been several months since Powell has been featured on the screen since MGM abandoned her last project, *Gentleman Be Seated*, because of its outdated racialized content.¹³⁸ This, combined with MGM's promotional posters marketing Powell as going "Wicky Wacky-Woo in Honolulu," have the audience in a state of heightened suspense.

Female ushers wearing orange paper leis and brilliantly colored hula skirts greet Westwood's patrons at the door while lei-donned male ushers take turns guiding the wealthier theatergoers to their orchestra seats and the love-struck college students to the balcony level.¹³⁹ MGM hopes that by instructing theatres to sell "tempting" pineapple soda at their concession windows and asking that they decorate their foyers with miniature erupting volcanoes, audience members might forget they are still on the mainland.¹⁴⁰

As the house lights dim, the sound of ukuleles fills the auditorium. Finally the chatter is brought to a halt and all eyes make their way to the large screen in front. The words "Bon Voyage" appear on the screen. A man's voice soon dominates the room, his tone and cadence

¹³⁶ Perhaps one of Powell's most well known works was released on November 27, 1936.

¹³⁷ Her most recent film was released December 24, 1937.

¹³⁸ In 1938 MGM announced that Eleanor Powell would be performing alongside George Murphy in *Gentleman Be Seated*, a musical adapted from Daly Parkman and Sigmund Spaeth's minstrel stories. (Schultz 15) I was able to get a hold of this show's soundtrack and the lyrics reveal that the show was blatantly racist and would not have passed the censorship guidelines of the Hays Code that the MPAA began enforcing in 1934. Paramount published a famous list called the "Don'ts and Be Carefuls" which acted as a set of safe guidelines for major movie houses to follow. It stipulated that, "Willful offense to any nation, race or creed; And be it further resolved, That special care be exercised in the manner in which the following subjects are treated, to the end that vulgarity and suggestiveness may be eliminated and that good taste may be emphasized: (Lewis 301-302). See Appendix D for a more comprehensive list of these laws.

¹³⁹ See Appendix B MGM's distribution and marketing manuals.

¹⁴⁰ See Appendix B

resembling that of a hypnotized travel guide: *Come along, everybody, to loveable, tropical Honolulu, the isle of magic, where swaying palm trees bow to a moonlit sea, where native girls dance to the music of the night, on the golden sands at the beach of Waikiki, a heaven on earth, where life is a dream that has come true.* Couples grab hands and exchange a smile. *Ah, yes. This, is paradise. This, is romance. This, is Honolulu.* The overture begins and a montage of sunsets, palm trees, “native” dancers, and brown-skinned drummers provides the visual backdrop for the “authentic” music MGM has commissioned. The credits roll and before long, the boisterous crowd has been seduced. A receptive audience sits quietly: *Welcome to Paradise.*

George Smith (played by Robert Young) owns a pineapple plantation in Honolulu and is the spitting image of Hollywood movie star, Brooks Mason (also played by Robert Young). The audience seems engrossed in the doppelgänger narrative because although the Germans have exhausted this plot in expressionist films of the 1920s, *Honolulu* marks the beginning of such a tradition in American cinema.¹⁴¹ While visiting Hollywood, the obsessed and star-struck movie-going public mistakes George Smith for Brooks Mason and mauls the poor plantation owner. When the two lookalikes finally meet and not even Mason’s black butler of ten years can tell the two apart, Mason convinces Smith to take his place on his upcoming New York City publicity tour. Smith agrees to swap lives mainly because he believes some time in New York will “culture” him as his fiancé Cecelia (played by Rita Johnson) requests of him before tying the knot. The two men agree to keep this swap a complete secret.

Act Two opens on board the ship to Honolulu where Millicent de Grasse (played by Gracie Allen) has just spotted who she thinks is Brooks Mason and runs to tell her best friend Dorothy March (played by Eleanor Powell) the news. Miss March is unimpressed and leaves de Grasse to her childish fandom. Shortly after this interaction between the two women, the camera cuts to

¹⁴¹ For a more in-depth description of this history, see Jan-Christopher Horak’s essay, “German exile cinema, 1933-1950” (1996).

the main deck of the ship where men play a game resembling water polo and women giggle while jumping rope on the swimming pool's outskirts. March reads peacefully on a deck chair off to the side while de Grasse strums her ukulele and plays the meddlesome character for which she, Gracie Allen, is known. De Grasse's rhythms inspire March and within a few seconds Powell begins to taunt the audience with her syncopated rhythms. Powell's decision to tap dance from a seated position likely comes from the African American community; black dancers have performed a version of this in Harlem's Hoofer's Club¹⁴² for a few years now. Powell and Allen then rise and dance together for the first few bars—a unique combination of rhythm tap¹⁴³ and subtle hula gestures of the hips and arms. Powell then ditches her friend and begins to do more of her signature choreography: she starts traveling through space with more complex rhythms, and props. Powell executes a virtuosic bit with one of the jump ropes on set. She then finishes out of breath but camera-ready and seemingly unaffected.

Meanwhile George Smith's stint as Brooks Mason results in a comedy of errors with most of the comedy coming from Mason's agent Joe Duffy (George Burns) and much of the error a result of the doppelgänger effect. Whether or not the audience laughs at Burns' jokes is less important

142 The Hoofer's Club was the back room of one of Harlem's most popular gambling houses (*The Comedy Club* located on 131st Street and Seventh Avenue). The Hoofer's Club was where prominent African American tap dancers of the 20s, 30s, and 40s, would exchange steps and challenge one another (Ames 50). While the Copacetics choreographed the Copacetic Chair Dance around 1949, the idea stemmed from their years at the Hoofer's Club. Reggio McLaughlin has relayed the story to me as the following: young men without a home would often try and sleep at the club despite not being allowed to do so; they developed a series of tap dances that they could do while seated so if caught napping in the chairs, they could pretend it was part of the choreography. (Personal Interview 27 February 2015).

143 Rhythm Tap is a style of tap dancing developed by John W. Sublett (best known as John Bubbles) in 1922. Bubbles' unique style was a highly syncopated version of the day's popular tap dancing and required that he slow the tempo of his musical accompaniment by half, which allowed him to squeeze in more sounds per note. This style revolutionized tap dancing and was the basis for Powell's style (Ames 43).

than its response to Powell's dance sequences; the function of the American musical to provide narrative as an excuse for music and dance has stayed mostly intact since Cohan's¹⁴⁴ era.

The camera zooms in on a poster that reads: "Tonight, Costume Ball; Seaman's Fund, Come As Your Favorite Movie Star, Tonight" as Tony Martin serenades viewers with "This Night Will Be My Souvenir".¹⁴⁵ The camera cuts to a close up of Powell donning blackface in a backstage mirror. In front of her sits a black mannequin head, perhaps for inspiration. The camera then cuts to the ballroom where the ship's passengers delight in seeing each other's costumes: Gracie Allen, dressed in a garish Mae West-inspired evening gown, scolds seven passengers dressed as Snow White's Dwarfs; Charlie Chaplin picks up a bite to eat at the buffet while Gene Autry converses with some other passengers dressed as cowboys; the camera then pans to Douglas McPhail impersonating the up-and-coming Bing Crosby. The on-screen audience applauds for Crosby's performance and the Westwood audience probably also claps as a response to the on-screen reaction, a behavior typical of audiences watching film musicals in the public theatre. The camera pans the room and rests when it reaches Brooks Mason who is standing front and center, disguised as George Smith, but impersonating Beethoven, disheveled hair and all. The audience cannot help but laugh. Mason instructs the small orchestra to start a dramatic work and within the first few bars of Mason's conducting, Miss de Grasse plucks a couple off-key notes on the harp, further frustrating the already irritable Beethoven-impersonator; Mason exits the stage and de Grasse moves center.

The audience lets out a roar when they realize that the man sitting behind the piano is none other than a Harpo Marx impersonator (played by Budd Linn). The laughter continues as the

¹⁴⁴ A reference to George M. Cohan and his influence on the American musical as a means of presenting dance and musical numbers as part of an evening's length work, where music and dance come first, and the narrative serves to string these routines together in a cohesive manner.

¹⁴⁵ Written in 1938 by Harry Warren and Gus Kahn for the film *Honolulu*.

camera pans right to reveal Groucho Marx (played by Ken Darby) on cello, a second Groucho Marx (played by Rad Robinson) on piccolo, and finally Chico Marx (played by Jon Dodson) on Harp. The Four King's Men¹⁴⁶ disguised as the Marx Brothers join Allen in singing "The Leader Doesn't Like Music". The King's Men do a short *Duck Soup*¹⁴⁷ routine eventually leaving Allen on stage alone with their instruments. Clapping on the screen subsides slowly as de Grasse's performance continues with "Would You Like to Buy My Violins," until The King's Men join her once again for an even more slapstick routine than the one previously performed. As the five performers exit the stage, both the on-set as well as the live audience applaud so fast and energetically that one might think this crowd came to see the Marx Brothers rather than Eleanor Powell. The applause continues with such fervor that half the audience misses Brooks Mason's announcement: "And now Ladies and Gentleman, Miss Dorothy March, in her impersonation of Bill Robinson. The King of Harlem!" Most everyone knows of the famous Bojangles,¹⁴⁸ as the last four years have seen several box office hits including, *The Little Colonel* and *The Littlest Rebel*, starring Bill Robinson alongside Shirley Temple.¹⁴⁹

A slim, five foot six Powell, enters from a wing off house left dressed in Robinson's famous wardrobe consisting of a bowler hat, brown suit, and white gloves. It may be that for a moment the movie theatre becomes eerily silent, as a collective state of shock passes through the room.

¹⁴⁶ The King's Men was a musical quartet that formed in 1929 and held a successful career in Hollywood Films and Radio. One of The King's Men's more notable performances was as select Munchkins in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). Ken Darby went on to be a successful vocal arranger and supervisor, working in the Music Department for Walt Disney for the duration of the 1940s (*Bambi*, *Song of the South*, *So Dear to My Heart*, *Make Mine Music*, and *Pinocchio*) and winning three academy awards (*The King and I*, *Camelot*, and *Porgy and Bess*) in the 1950s and 60s.

¹⁴⁷ *Duck Soup* was a Marx Brothers comedy from 1933.

¹⁴⁸ "Bojangles" was the name by which most Americans knew Bill Robinson. While many stories exist for why Robinson acquired Bojangles, it is likely a derogatory nickname given to him both for his reputation as a gambler as well as for the color of his skin.

¹⁴⁹ While Bill Robinson had been dancing for years in minstrel shows, on the black vaudeville circuit, and in all black Broadway shows, it was his Hollywood career alongside Shirley Temple that brought him the most fame. *The Little Colonel* (1935) and *The Littlest Rebel* (1935) are two of his most notable on-screen works.

Some theatergoers sit puzzled...confused as to why Robinson has just appeared on screen. Others recognize that the person who has just entered is none other than Powell, dressed exactly like Mr. Bojangles. She has taken great precaution to make sure that no one mistakes her for someone other than Robinson; she has blackened her skin just in case. The resemblance is uncanny. Yet some UCLA students sit uncomfortably in their seats, almost afraid to take pleasure in such entertainment. But within a few minutes of watching Powell master Robinson's famed stair dance, the apprehensive spectators relax and begin to enjoy Powell for what she truly is: "Queen of the Taps".¹⁵⁰

The music alone appeals to the audience's more nostalgic side, as many of the older folks in the room remember a time when tunes like "Swanee River" dominated the vaudeville stage of their youth. Although vaudeville was now a thing of the past, the younger patrons have grown up listening to such tunes in animated shorts—Van Beuren and Warner Brothers tend to rely heavily on Stephen Foster's music in their cartoons.¹⁵¹ If anything, this number serves to validate Powell's skill as a female tap dancer, challenging the public to recognize her in a male-dominated art form. The second act closes after Powell proves her point. *Black Out*.

A Hawaiian beach fades in with the sound of a single ukulele. Brooks Mason (disguised as George Smith) has fallen in love with Dorothy March en route to Hawaii, which undoubtedly has complicated his (doppelgänger's) engagement with Cecelia. Furthermore, Cecelia's father accuses Smith of stealing \$50,000 thereby putting Mason in jail. When Mason tries to come clean about his real identity, Dorothy ends the relationship, as she (rightfully) believes that Mason is engaged to Cecelia. Once Dorothy has sworn off Mr. Mason (who she still believes is

¹⁵⁰ A title Ms. Powell received after her performance in *Broadway Melody of 1936* (Levin 49).

¹⁵¹ See for example Van Beuren's 1932 cartoon, *Down in Dixie*.

George Smith), the audience puts this part of the plot aside, making room for Powell to grace her audience with her third and final dance.

The camera cuts to the Fiesta Room where the neon marquis presents Miss Dorothy March. The sign cross fades to the interior of the Fiesta Room where relaxed couples dance to classical music. As the eclectic band finishes the number, the band leader turns around to present the featured performance: “Ladies and gentleman, for our first presentation, Miss Dorothy March, as a tribute to the islands, will do a native drum dance, a hula, and her version of a native dance done with taps.” The Westwood audience cheers with anticipation, once again mirroring the reaction of the audience captured on camera.

The audiences’ applause grows in volume as they witness that the Fiesta Room’s white orchestra is sitting on a revolving platform; the platform spins 180 degrees exposing an orchestra of dark-skinned “native” musicians sitting on the other side. These shirtless natives begin playing “traditional” instruments: ukuleles, drums, and a bass. The audience sits engrossed in this sight. They resume their applause as they witness dozens of scantily clad female dancers putting a Hollywood touch on Hawaiian performance. The camera cuts to Powell, who gracefully makes her way to center stage. The heads of the Westwood audience move collectively from right to left as Powell positions herself in the spotlight. The chorus dancers slowly form a circle around Powell, executing a series of moves that acknowledge a 1930s syncretism: Ruth St. Denis’¹⁵² influence on modern dance, Busby Berkeley’s¹⁵³ innovations in

¹⁵² Ruth St. Denis (b. 1879) was a modern dancer known for creating works largely based on Hindu and Egyptian mythology, as well as broader themes inspired by the “Orient”. Ruth St. Denis co-founded the American Denishawn School of Dance in 1915 with fellow modern dancer and husband, Ted Shawn. This school relied heavily on Delsarte gymnastics, Dalcroze eurhythmics, and “ethnic” dancing. The school also trained a large number of notable modern dancers including Martha Graham, Charles Weidman, and Doris Humphrey.

¹⁵³ Busby Berkeley (b. 1895) was a director and choreographer best known for his “parade of faces” filming technique (capturing extreme close ups of an individual chorus dancer’s face and other body parts) and his top shot, which he invented in order to capture his complex kaleidoscope structures from above. While Busby Berkeley choreographed many memorable geometric patterns for shows on the Broadway stage in the 1920s, his career peaked in the 1930s when he started working in Hollywood

Hollywood, and a classic Patty Cake.¹⁵⁴ Meanwhile Powell's strength, precision, and pleasant face captivate her audience, her white body distracting spectators from seeing the ways in which her style includes elements of Horton,¹⁵⁵ early Dunham,¹⁵⁶ and West African body percussion.

The tone in the room shifts rather drastically as the high-energy dance suddenly morphs into a seductive solo by Powell. Not only does it capture the attention of Brooks Mason on the screen, but the close-ups of Powell's face and gliding hips draw Westwood's men in as well. The camera then zooms out revealing the rest of the chorus dancers on set. The audience applauds recognizing the now famous Berkeley-esque kaleidoscope effect and top shot, "native" dancers fanning Powell from all angles as she continues to perform an "authentic" hula.

The music picks up. Drummers interrupt the soothing music and flow of Powell's hula. As the time signature shifts and the filming technique changes, several audience members shift to the tips of their seats completely engulfed by the extreme close ups of Powell's ethereal white hands which stand in stark contrast to the extreme close ups of the dark-skinned drummers' strong and powerful hands, beating out the rhythms of this Hawaiian drum chant. The camera and music cut immediately to the metallic toe taps of Powell's glistening feet; the camera zooms in and then proceeds to accentuate each muscle in Powell's powerful legs. The camera comes to a halt when it reaches the small opening in the dancer's revealing ti leaf skirt and quickly zooms out in time with the music. This bare-midriff dance is quite risqué.

and was able to use the camera as an added means of choreography, capturing both the female body and movement in a new light. He entertained America for the duration of the Great Depression and continued to choreograph until 1971.

¹⁵⁴ English nursery rhyme dating back to the 18th century.

¹⁵⁵ A reference to Lester Horton (b.1906), an American modern dancer and choreographer best known for incorporating Native American dance and modern jazz into his technique. He is also recognized as being the teacher of Alvin Ailey and Arthur Mitchell.

¹⁵⁶ A reference to Katherine Dunham (b. 1909) who was an American dancer, choreographer, and anthropologist known for her writings on dances of the African diaspora, innovations in African American modern dance, and contributions to American modern dance.

Ms. Powell embarks on something America has NEVER seen: a Hawaiian tap dance. She spins effortlessly on the glossy floor alternating between Maxie Ford and flap heel turns. She travels through space with a distinctive elasticity—left, right, up, down—stretching like a rubber band from one level to the next and punctuating the dominant ukulele beats with her hips. She executes flawless rhythm tap with her feet while maintaining a smooth, calm, cool of her upper body. The ensemble suddenly appears and the shot wavers between showing Powell in the center of a circle of hyper masculine dark-skinned drummers and that of hyper-feminine fair-skinned hula dancers. The piece ends with all of the female tap dancers lined up vertically in the center of the dance floor with Powell *chaine* turning straight down center. She picks up speed with each turn until landing in a seated cross legged position right in front of the camera, hands framing her face, smiling.

The audience goes wild. Some patrons rise and give her a standing ovation, while others whistle and shout from their seats. Not only is Eleanor Powell the queen of the taps, she is by far the best hula dancer this audience has ever seen. Once again, the applause and accolades last for so long that the audience misses the next few minutes of dialogue. Not that they care, but the film's ending is crucial to the messy plot's resolution. Once Brooks Mason and George Smith iron out the truth, all lovers are reunited: George Smith marries Cecelia, and Mason and March live happily ever after. Gracie Allen and George Burns fill the last few minutes of screen time with their much-adored comic relief that has the audience in stitches. The End.

As couples make their way to the exit, noisy chatter clutters the foyer. A few men buy their dates one of the ukuleles on sale in the lobby while other couples stop to buy some of the pineapple soda they missed on their way in. Everyone is talking—some people planning trips to Hawaii, others planning a second visit to see *Honolulu*. This preview proved to be a success and

in two weeks will make its way to the East coast to play at New York City's Capitol Theatre.

The true verdict, however, will not be released until tomorrow's morning paper.

An Introduction

In the decade spanning the period between The Great Depression and the start of World War II, the United States experienced the biggest social and economic changes it had seen since the Civil War. The infamous stock market crash known as “Black Tuesday” set off a period of darkness for the American workforce, leaving one quarter of previously employed workers without a job by 1933 and a staggering number of families homeless. President Hoover’s attempts to remedy the situation proved fruitless and not until Theodore Roosevelt was elected president in 1932 did the United States see any glimmer of hope. Yet despite the nation’s state of fiscal darkness and waning hope, artistic and technological breakthroughs helped the film industry see the dawning of a Golden Age.

The film industry implemented their own “New Deal”¹⁵⁷ of relief, recovery, and reform on the screen: idyllic images (e.g. the Hawaiian Islands) and cute children (e.g. Shirley Temple) provided immediate relief from the stress of unemployment and increasing poverty; many Americans, finances permitting, flocked to movie houses hoping to find distractions from everyday problems. From the late twenties to the early thirties, smaller production houses with fewer overhead expenses capitalized on new sound technology and hired personnel that could help them appeal to more “vernacular tastes” and lower class populations. (May 135); these smaller houses not only recovered financially but surpassed production of some of the larger studios. As filmmakers gained an increased awareness of the moral implications held by their pictures—for which the Hays Code¹⁵⁸ was partly responsible—Hollywood narratives went through a major reform. This category of reform becomes pivotal in defining covert minstrelsy

¹⁵⁷ Franklin Roosevelt’s response to the Great Depression: domestic programs aimed at recovery, relief, and reform.

¹⁵⁸ This code greatly impacted what could be seen and heard on the screen. See also “Don’ts and Be Carefuls” in Appendix D.

of the Depression era: I argue that the “reform” of this New Deal era changed the manner in which class, gender, and racial stereotyping unfolded on the screen, but still conveyed potent messages about what it meant to be a person of color, woman, or member of the wealthy class.

One major shift could be seen in the move from minstrelsy onstage to minstrelsy on screen, which according to Michael Rogin, not only “rooted the present in the past; It also made the entertainment business the vehicle for national integration” (Rogin “New Deal” 176). During the teens and 20s, it is likely that many white Americans were drawn to the image of the blackface mask on screen as it conjured up a certain nineteenth century nostalgia, recalling a time when a good laugh trumped a guilty conscience, and putting down the Other shaped collective identity without fear of consequence. A large number of films with Civil War plots gave production houses an excuse to project the clear racial divide they believed existed between black people and white while also hinting at the “source of division in American life” (175). The blackface mask in this context represented slave life rather than the lives of archetypal figures such as Zip Coon or Jim Crow. Subject matter unrelated to Southern plantation life also permeated celluloid expression: shows that were about theatre, for example, would often use the blackface mask to signify the passing down of a tradition. *The Jazz Singer* (1927) marked the beginning of a new era in film as it succeeded in becoming the first feature-length motion picture to include synchronized dialogue. At the same time that this film waved goodbye to the silent film era, it glorified the blackface mask by making it the redeeming element in Al Jolson’s American assimilation story about the son of a cantor who dreams of nothing more than becoming a jazz singer. While the purpose of the blackface mask in this film was not to caricature the black body in the same manner, as did nineteenth century minstrel¹⁵⁹ shows, Jolson’s performance

¹⁵⁹ Lott has attributed much of the success of nineteenth century blackface minstrelsy to its ability to bring people from disparate classes together; the blackface mask on the screen did not differ much in function. Blackface played a big part in the shaping of

represented the blackface mask as the key to “national integration”. This cinematic trend of white actors blacking up in pursuit of cultural assimilation was one mode of accomplishing this visibly, and advertising one’s patriotism to the masses. After all, to afford the privilege of becoming someone else and starting fresh was the basis of the American dream.

The cinema also helped shape the black image; representation on the white screen was an opportunity to be seen by the rest of the nation. Like Bert Williams of the last few decades, these new black performers saw the screen as an opportunity to shine, only without the use of burnt cork. While they would still be seen as members of the black race and relegated to certain roles (e.g. servant, maid, or butler), these few minutes of fame they received offered a glimpse into the soul that the mask had, for almost a century, obscured. The screen made the black body visible in a way the minstrel stage could not. If not in film’s capacity to convey “reality” to the masses, then in its ability to narrativize the nation in a manner that ostensibly offered all bodies, all gifts, all talents, while protecting its viewers from coming into physical contact with those bodies that looked different. In other words, film could impart the same sorts of messages that stage productions communicated but in a more agreeable fashion: the mask symbolized self-creation and the screen maintained distance between the cross-dresser and the original.

This chapter opens with a brief discussion of the move from stage to screen and the apparent shift from the caricatured “Negro-type” to the caricatured black character-role on screen. This “refined” scapegoat often took the form of the servant, ranging from the highly dramatized Stepin Fetchit¹⁶⁰ to the more eloquent and articulate Bill Robinson. I zoom in on the work of Robinson, best known for his tap dancing on screen with Shirley Temple, to draw parallels

American entertainment, specifically musical theatre; reenacting this mask was an opportunity for spectators to reminisce together, as a nation, on the basis of history. However, this history was deeply rooted in strict subjugation of the black body.

¹⁶⁰ Donald Bogle describes Fetchit’s character as being the, “lanky, slow-witted, simple-minded, obtuse, synthetic, confused humbug” (Bogle 39). See *Toms Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks* pp. 38-44.

between Bert Williams and the notion of double consciousness I explored in my first chapter and to show the ways in which Robinson pioneered an era on screen for the black body in his own right. I am specifically interested in the shift in blackface that occurred in the twenty years between Williams' prime and that of Robinson's. I locate black-*and*-white minstrelsy as the link that takes us from the visible black-on-white and black-on-black minstrelsies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to the more covert minstrel performances of the 1930s.

One facet of covert minstrelsy I discussed in Chapter One was how Cohan redirected his twentieth-century audience's focus away from common uses of the minstrel mask by summoning yellow bodies in place of black. At the turn of the century, incriminating the Chinese body made sense to the extent that the Chinese, at this time, posed one of the largest economic threats for the nation's white citizens. By the 1930s, however, the Chinese body became more of an obsession than a threat, and the shape and specificity of that body became more diffuse. The brown body, or poriferous "Asian" body replaced that of the yellow for the decade between 1930 and 1940.

Hawaii's idyllic landscape made the Islands a popular site for films that sought to provide a "safe" getaway for their audiences and the "ethnic" brown body acted as the perfect mediator between black and white. Furthermore, because the "brownface" effect could be achieved without a literal mask, performers could signify the brown body without necessarily making themselves up to look like one. That is, Hollywood found ways to invoke the brown body without relying on masks or makeup: setting, costume, instrumentation, and movement could refer to the Other without all of the stigmas attached to blacking up and/or caustic imitation. For this reason brownface not only helped to shift the focus away from the black body, but facilitated what I am calling "tribute minstrelsy". As I will show, a fine line exists between imitation, appropriation, and paying tribute to other people and their cultural practices.

By creating plots centered around an imagined Hawaiian community, Hollywood could simultaneously “annex” the parts of Hawaiian culture towards which it was drawn—and for which it saw economic benefit, fabricate some sort of cultural intimacy between the mainland and its surrounding islands, and do all of this while still keeping the Other at a distance. That is, mainland culture could participate in the commerce of love and theft while maintaining control at all times, reaping the economic benefits of so doing, and producing a national narrative that privileged whiteness. This thematic provides the perfect backdrop for what I will be referring to as “brownface minstrelsy”. Juliet McMains uses the term “brownface” to describe a performance practice wherein performers artificially darken their white skin in order to seem more “ethnic”.¹⁶¹ McMains’ theory offers this chapter the idea that the person who “browns up” signifies, through visible demarcation, an imagined community of “ethnic” bodies. In the section “Brown Attributes and Black Tributes,” I explore the role of brownface in narratives of national representation, comparing and contrasting this corporeal layer of covert minstrelsy to/from the function of yellowface in *Little Johnny Jones*.

As the popularity of the “quasi-Asian” body appeared more frequently on the screen, the black body was seen less and less. This is not to say that black vernacular dancing disappeared from the screen, but rather to say that lighter, more “exotic”, “passive”, and “safe” bodies were performing these dances in disparate lands. By placing various Africanisms in the hands of “brown folk”, the U.S. had found a way to make the black look more American in virtue of the fact that America was, in effect, offering up its culture to “native Islanders”.

¹⁶¹ While McMains uses this neologism to better understand the DanceSport phenomena, I will use the concept as it benefits my critique of the “Hawaiian” body on the Hollywood screen of the 1930s. See Chapter 3, “Brownface: Representations of Latinness in Latin Dance” in *Glamour Addiction*.

After tracing the role of brownface within the imagined island model, I offer a brief overview of the backstage musical, or “show-within-the film formula,”¹⁶² which allowed the film industry to provide a pretext for a large number of justifiable musical numbers,¹⁶³ thereby fulfilling audience demand for musical theatre as an end in itself. The popularity of the backstage musical declined in the mid-thirties in favor of the “integrated musical” wherein “production numbers seemed to emerge from the narrative and dialogue” (Grant 15). Integrated musicals remained popular through World War II and constituted the perfect platform for what I am pinpointing as the dominant constituent of covert minstrelsy in the 1930s. The practice of tribute minstrelsy offers the thirties a method of representation that distinguishes it from covert minstrelsy of the early twentieth century (Chapter One) and the 1940s (Chapter Three). While covert minstrelsy relies on the simultaneity of multiple modes of masking, each decade, with its unique politico-social environment and technologies manifests a prevailing mechanism; sonic minstrelsy played this role in Chapter One and tribute minstrelsy overshadows sound in the Second.

The 1936 film *Swing Time* appears to be the first instance and beginning of a trend in “tribute minstrelsy” as I am defining it in relation to blackface performance. This is the practice of paying tribute to someone or something that the performer deems intrinsically raced and thus incapable of signifying without his/her use of makeup (e.g. blackface, yellowface, brownface, redface) as its primary signifier. In this film, Fred Astaire dances “Bojangles of Harlem” as a tribute to Bill Robinson and his contributions to tap dance. This is the only time in Astaire’s career that he blacked-up, and the first time a box office hit musical included burnt cork since roughly 1931. In 1939, Eleanor Powell blacks up and dances a “Tribute to Bill Robinson” in *Honolulu*; I continue to return to this tribute throughout Chapter Two, defining what tribute

¹⁶² See Grant pp. 14-15.

¹⁶³ Examples of such musicals include *Broadway Melody of 1929*, *Gold Diggers of 1933*, *42nd Street* (1933), and *Dames* (1934).

minstrelsy means within a larger covert context. Within just a couple years of Powell's blackface tribute and the release of *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), Judy Garland paid tribute (in blackface) to the all-black Broadway musical, *Shuffle Along* by singing Noble and Blake's "I'm Just Wild About Harry" in the film *Babes in Arms*.¹⁶⁴ In 1941, Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland paid tribute to Al Jolson's blackface rendition (1927) of "Waiting for the Robert E. Lee," in "Babes on Broadway". In 1942 Bing Crosby blacked-up in *Holiday Inn*, to pay tribute to President Lincoln (and by extension, emancipation) in the song, "Abraham". All of these tributes to black America (i.e. dancers, composers, products, moments as in emancipation) performed by white people via tap dance and blackface makeup, share several attributes. I spend the last portion of this chapter's first section discussing the role that tribute minstrelsy plays in *Honolulu*, including the ways in which it helps lay the groundwork for the other modes of masking to come.

In the second section of this chapter I explore the role of sound in *Honolulu*'s two tribute performances. I begin with a brief history of sound in the movies to show some of the technological leaps that were made between 1904 and 1939, and to demonstrate the ways this broadened both the margin of possibility and complexified the science of representation. While the phonograph was responsible for one of the first instances of freeing sight from sound, the movie soundtrack takes this separation to a whole new level and furthermore, making sonic techniques such as montage, diegesis, and dubbing possible.

The history of music in film dates as far back as 1895 when live instrumentation would accompany silent films. Music as such helped to convey various moods for the production team and for the audience. Live music would be played on set, during the filming process: it helped to

¹⁶⁴ In 1948 Harry S. Truman selected "I'm Just Wild About Harry" as his campaign song for the 1948 presidential election. A lot could be said about the relationship between the disappearance of Africanisms from the United States socio-political narrative despite their lasting impact on the nation's identity.

drown out superfluous noise and helped to create a mood for its actors.¹⁶⁵ In the theatre, music served to drown out the noise of the projector, alleviate the anxiety some audience members experienced in a dark and silent theatre, and set the mood of the film for its viewers. (Reay 6) But aside from the practical uses for music, a lot of its use stemmed from tradition; the opera, theatre, and music halls of the nineteenth century all influenced what would become the predominant form of entertainment in the 1930s.

A rising competition between Warner Bros. and Fox influenced the former's decision to move to a full-length synchronized-sound feature film, as opposed to using the Vitaphone shorts (sound-on-disc) audiences had come to expect. With the synchronization of film came the need for digetic¹⁶⁶ sound, a detail that required more than the solo piano could provide in the theatre. New sound technologies played a big part in this transition and the outcome was a symbiotic relationship between all entertainment mediums: radio, film, cinema, and theatre began working together to meet the requirements of changing technologies and an ever-expanding world.¹⁶⁷

As in Chapter One, technology plays an essential role in covert minstrelsy. However, mechanical leaps in the twenties and thirties became faster and more far-reaching than the comparatively slow evolution of the phonograph and gramophone at the *fin de siècle*. For this reason, I have chosen to focus less on individual technologies and instead analyze the part that sound technology as a whole played in distracting its viewers from recognizing the similarities

¹⁶⁵ Two films were often shot simultaneously and the music helped to mitigate distraction for its actors.

¹⁶⁶ "Diagetie" refers to music that stems directly from an on-screen action, as in a woman who listens to the phonograph on screen or dances the jitterbug to music at a party. The opposite of this is "nondiagetie" or music that is played in the background for effect or ambience; nondiagetie music is not intrinsic to the plot. See Pauline Reay's first chapter in *Music in Film* (2004) or Claudia Gorbman's *Unheard Melodies* (1987) for a more detailed explanation of these two terms.

¹⁶⁷ In the 1930s and 1940s, five major (and three little) production houses ruled Hollywood: Paramount, Fox, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), Warner Brothers, and RKO controlled all aspects of the movie market including, production, distribution, and exhibition. (Reay 13) This gave birth to the Hollywood studio system and required an efficient labor system. Music departments were one component of a new system where production companies contracted their own music directors, composers, orchestrators, and recording engineers. (13) Yet despite hiring these music specialists, creative control remained in the hands of the producers and studios; composers had little say over their own music.

between covert minstrelsy and classic blackface. Thus, after offering a succinct outline of the history of music's relationship to film, I focus on the role that sound plays in image perception and the effect that hearing and seeing simultaneously has on the ability to process and make meaning. I explain this by analyzing the function of the soundtrack in *Honolulu*. "Sound Effects" begins to describe the soundtrack's role in covert minstrelsy.

I briefly examined the work of Stephen Foster in my first chapter, but his role in covert minstrelsy becomes particularly evident in a number like Powell's tribute to Robinson. While Robinson often danced to Foster's "My Old Kentucky Home," the decision to pay tribute to him with the songs "Swanee River"¹⁶⁸ and "Old Black Joe" begs the question of whether or not the film's creative team was responding in some way (consciously or not) to Foster's complicated ties to both Negro Spirituals and minstrel tunes and whether, despite the number being labeled a "tribute", they intended to convey some subliminal message about Robinson's race.¹⁶⁹

Coincidentally, one can draw several parallels between Foster, the father of American folk music, and George M. Cohan, the father of the American musical.¹⁷⁰ Each got his start on the blackface minstrel stage and gained popularity as soon as he discontinued his visible donning of

¹⁶⁸ I use two spellings of "Swanee"/"Swanee" interchangeably as there seems to be some inconsistency in how this song's title has been catalogued over the years.

¹⁶⁹ Nelson Kneass was a distinguished impresario of minstrel entertainment, particularly those found in the saloons in the mid-1850s. Kneass would often hold contests for "best comic song," "best sentimental song," or "best Negro song" with various prizes awarded at each level (Milligan 43). Around 1846/1847, Stephen Foster sent Kneass the song "Way Down South, Where de Cane Grows." While Kneass did not award Foster's work, this moment marks the beginning of Foster's career in song-writing (43). Milligan writes that Foster's brother took this song to the United States Court to copyright the lyrics and was met by Mr. Kneass himself who was trying to copyright Foster's lyrics as his own. While Kneass was caught, W.C. Peters (the man who had arranged and published the song "Jump Jim Crow" fifteen years prior) was awarded copyright in 1848, after Foster had shared his early manuscripts with the then-established music publisher. Three of Foster's songs made Peters \$10000 in profit. (Milligan 43-44). That same year, Foster copyrighted three of his own songs: "O Susanna," "Uncle Ned," and "Away Down South" (44). With the exception of "Uncle Ned," these songs as well as the rest of the lot published under Peters' name in 1848 are, "essentially minstrel songs, and require burnt cork and banjo to reveal their true character" (Milligan 46).

¹⁷⁰ Interestingly, both men claim to have been born on the fourth of July. Unlike the Cohans who likely fabricated the July Fourth birth date, strong evidence exists that the Fourth was Foster's actual date of birth. According to record, Stephen Foster was born on July 4th, 1826, the semi-centennial of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. (Milligan 1) Such similarities between Cohan and Foster make me wonder whether individuals who are born on the fourth of July feel some sort of obligation and/or special calling to/from their nation.

burnt cork. This does not preclude an ongoing process of composing derogatory tunes to be used on the minstrel stage; Cohan and Foster engaged blackface minstrelsy covertly through their sonic masquerades. Like Cohan who was dismissed early on in his music-composing career, many dismissed Foster's early works for being "miserable" (Milligan 49); few people knew of his music's commercial value (49).¹⁷¹ In this next section I draw some parallels between the ways in which Cohan and Foster both engage with sonic minstrelsy and then discuss how this sonic element comprises a fundamental aspect of the tribute narrative and an important part of the covert equation.

Like Cohan, Foster gradually began changing, or "refining" his choice of words. Such substitutions allowed him a glorified position on the minstrel stage. From this point forward, Foster's name appeared on his "Ethiopian songs" and would be included in published compilations with titles such as "Foster's Ethiopian Melodies" or "Foster's Plantation Melodies" (Howard 181). While I would not go so far as to say that Foster engaged with the same level of sonic minstrelsy as did Cohan, the lyric and label substitutions he provided did, over time, do their part to distance his music from the more "vulgar" aesthetic of the minstrel stage. While Foster's name would still be learned alongside the practice of blacking up, with enough legerdemain, he could maintain distance from the black body so as to be remembered as the father of American folk music, rather than the father of Ethiopian tunes.

Lyric substitution and labels played as important roles for Foster as they did for Cohan in *Little Johnny Jones*. I proceed by exploring the late 1920s and 1930s phenomenon of labeling

¹⁷¹ By 1849, Foster had piqued the interest of Firth, Pond & Co., one of the largest and most well-respected publishing houses of the time. Firth agreed to pay Foster two cents for every copy of his music sold after all publishing costs were paid. They also recommended that he advertise his own music by having minstrels sing them. Letter from Firth, Pond, & Co. to Stephen Foster: From your acquaintance with the proprietors or managers of different bands of 'Minstrels,' and from your known reputation, you can undoubtedly arrange with them to sing them and thus introduce them in that way, but in order to secure the copyright exclusively for our house, it is safe to hand such persons printed copies only, of the pieces, for if manuscript copies are issued, particularly by the author, the market will be flooded with spurious issues in a short time (qtd. in Milligan 50).

any song that, language aside, sounded like a Negro Spiritual, a “tribute”, and showing how such a practice allowed an Africanist aesthetic to be used without criticism at the same time that it created a false representation of what it is black people make, do, and are. Much of this process is directly tied to the inaudibility the soundtrack achieves when coupled with image and embedded within a complex narrative structure. That is, the very juxtaposition of sound, image, narrative (including its “tribute” label) and technology all work together to produce meaning that may or may not be based in any sort of reality. The result: tribute minstrelsy allowed performers to pay tribute to a part of American culture that may or may not have been black, Hawaiian, or even American.

To get at the root of film’s ability to signify something entirely different from what might exist out in the world, I expand on a Structuralist notion of sign, signifier, and signified and explain the Other in terms of metonym. I conclude that the “tribute” label, combined with a series of sonic displacements in the context of Powell’s “Tribute to Bill Robinson,” exemplifies a shift from dancing subject to metonymic disarticulation. That is, in performing her tribute to Bill Robinson as an act of covert minstrelsy, the audience is asked to see blackness as substitutable and Robinson’s talent as distinct (from his race) and thus re-attributable (to Powell; to the nation). I conclude this section by doing a similar analysis with the music that accompanies Powell’s tribute to the Hawaiian Islands. Once again, the tribute label qualifies the Other as metonymic and re-attributable.

In the chapter’s final section, “A Lighter Aesthetic: Robinson, Powell, and Hula-Tap,” I focus on the dancing and more ocular aspects of covert minstrelsy. I begin with a history of Bill Robinson’s career, tracing everything from the decline in popularity of the black image to his

rise to stardom. Like so many black performers of his time, Bill Robinson¹⁷² faced a double standard. In order to be “seen” or recognized by white society, Robinson had to subscribe to the racist rules of Hollywood on set.¹⁷³ However, in order to maintain his role and recognition as a great performer on the screen, he had to monitor his behavior off set. Because of the color of his skin, Robinson became highly visible to the American public. He was the last to gain acceptance through the camera lens and the first to be dismissed by the public eye for “bad” behavior.¹⁷⁴ Like his predecessor Bert Williams, Robinson sacrificed the little freedom he had as an individual in hopes of opening up more opportunities for black performers across America.

I draw out the evolution of both Robinson’s famous Stair dance and “Doin’ the New Lowdown” because these two pieces of choreography comprise the majority of Robinson’s life on screen. While the context in which Robinson danced was contingent upon the plot of these films, he generally played the role of a butler/servant and utilized excerpts from these two routines. For example, film footage exists (1932) of Robinson dancing his stair dance to Foster’s “Swanee River” and “My Old Kentucky Home”. Another example can be seen in the Vitaphone short, *King for a Day* (1934) which featured Robinson dancing a combination of “Doin’ the New

¹⁷² Bill Robinson was born Luther Robinson on May 25, 1878 in Richmond, Virginia. His parents died while he was still an infant, and so his grandmother Bedilia Robinson, an ex-slave, raised him. Around the age of five, Robinson ran away to Washington D.C. and supported himself by dancing in the street. Lemmeul Eggleston or “Eggie” and Bill Robinson were best friends as young boys. The two started boot-blackening and dancing together as means of making money. Eggie often blacked up but Robinson refused. In an interview, Eggie recalls some of the slack he received for dancing in blackface, ““I was criticized so much about that play ‘cause I used “Old Black Joe.” I was twenty years old when I played that”” (qtd. in Haskins 33).

¹⁷³ According to Jim Haskins, Powell was deeply troubled by the racism she witnessed Robinson experiencing in Hollywood. However, she was taught from an early age that she had no business discussing such matters. He writes, “Like every other good studio performer, she was taught not to discuss Hollywood’s family problems in the press” (“Bojangles” 227). Off set, Powell recalls treating Robinson with the utmost respect, and doing things that were not socially acceptable in order to make a point of treating Robinson like an equal. Powell tells one story about how after a performance she and Robinson were offered a drink. Powell asked the butler for a glass of water but only if Robinson could have one as well. Both Robinson and Powell were served and after Robinson finished, he broke his glass and then offered to pay for it. When questioned as to why he would do such a thing, he simply responded by saying that he knew nobody would sip from the glass once a black man had taken his lips to the crystal. (Galligan 1981) I highlight this anecdote not only to show the prevalence of racism during this period, but to show the ways in which Robinson truly lived the two different lives about which Du Bois speaks in *Souls*. His career in (Hollywood) film constantly required that he live as both African American (in itself) and as black man for the white man. For every bit of recognition he received for his talent on stage, society reminded him of “his place” in an industry of/for white America.

¹⁷⁴ Jim Haskins writes, “He was living under the pressure of knowing that if Bojangles ever tarnished his image as America’s favorite colored performer, the consequences could trickle down to every other black person from Harlem to Hollywood” (228).

Lowdown” and his famous Stair dance to the Foster classics, “Old Black Joe” and “Swanee River”. A version of Robinson’s Stair dance danced to “My Old Kentucky Home” also appears in the Shirley Temple film *The Little Colonel* (1935). While Robinson typically performed his stair dance to “My Old Kentucky Home” and “Doin’ the New Lowdown” to a tune by the same name on the stage, the life of these dances on the screen saw new musical pairings. “Swanee River” or “Old Folks at Home” became the most popular accompaniment for anything meant to signify blackness in Hollywood. As the years passed, “Old Black Joe” could often be heard in place of “My Old Kentucky Home”.

Even though Robinson held “exceptional” status on the screen as the most gifted black dancer of his era, America recognized Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, and Eleanor Powell as equally talented, and white. While Astaire and Powell had received extensive training from members of the black dance community, many Americans preferred to see these more Africanist styles executed by white bodies. One way of accomplishing this was through the tribute narrative. The tribute in *Swing Time* was named “Bojangles of Harlem,” but Astaire in fact honored his primary tap mentor, John Bubbles. Astaire worked hard to establish himself on the Hollywood screen as a tap dancer and his identity as a white man put him in an ideal position to be accepted by society. Some of Hollywood’s women, however, had to work a little bit harder in order to be recognized.

Though women were never explicitly banned from performing tap, it was rare to see a female tap soloist. Yet by the 1930s white female tap soloists became more popular, especially on the big screen, due in part to Hollywood’s declining interest in the black body, the popularity of tap dance in America, and a Deco-inspired obsession with the female body. The production and popularity of black art waned around 1929 as The Great Depression set in, the Harlem Renaissance slowed, and crime became more prevalent within many of the nation’s black

neighborhoods. This led to an increased fear of the black body and thus a move away from its central place in the entertainment sphere. The ability to synch sound to image made it feasible to include tap dance in movie musicals. Dubbing allowed for higher quality performance in tap dance; cameramen would film the dance sequences and the dancers would then come in to the sound studio to record just their taps. Finally, by the mid-1930s, Art Deco infiltrated all aspects of American culture, its influence seen most vividly in the era's architecture, fashion, and film.

The Deco movement greatly impacted the artistic choices of 1930s Hollywood, including a strong Africanist presence as well as a piqued interest in the image of the more androgynous female. Almost all of Los Angeles' premiere movie theatres were designed in the Deco-style, including the Pantages (1930), Saban (1930), Wilton (1931), El Rey (1936), and Fox Bruin (1937) theatres. The logos of several top-grossing studios were fashioned in the Deco aesthetic as well as lobby cards, movie posters, and advertisements, which designers also rendered in this modernist graphic. (Fischer 301) The screen itself became its own sort of "display window" for art deco products (301). Hollywood sets owe everything from their popular Bakelite floors¹⁷⁵ to their stark chrome accents to Art Deco's influence. The Africanist presence could be seen in the influence that jazz music and its symbolism played on film culture. The interest in androgynous femininity could be seen in countless iterations of the geometrically-adorned female body.

While I circumvent the direct impact that the Deco-inspired aesthetic had on *Honolulu* in the body of this chapter, I make reference to several sculptures of the Deco-period that I see Powell recreate in her choreography. However, even more generally speaking, Powell's use of the suit in

¹⁷⁵ Also known as polyoxybenzylmethylenglycolanhydride, was an early form of plastic used in everything from kitchen appliances to flooring. Van Nest Polglase is credited with changing the modern movie aesthetic: High-gloss surfaces perfectly complemented the grace of Astaire and Rogers' dancing and influenced RKO set design for the next decade. As a result, almost all tap dances filmed in the mid-1930s and early 1940s were performed on the shiny black Bakelite floors which would have to be polished after nearly every take in order to keep their shine. See "Van Nest Polglase And The Modern Movie Set: A Pioneer Who Changed The Cinematic Landscape" in *Architectural Digest*, July 2009.

her tribute to Robinson (and black culture), alongside her highly Orientalized and exoticified costume in the hula tap number epitomizes Deco's simultaneous obsession with African American culture, the "exotic Oriental", and the more geometric and athleticized female body.¹⁷⁶

While Art Deco certainly impacts many of the ways in which *Honolulu* signifies gender and race, I focus more on the ways that *Honolulu* transmits these ideals and how the tribute narrative both justifies and produces social values. Even though Powell attempted to recreate Robinson's famous stair dance, she managed to choreograph a dance significantly more caricatured than Robinson's. Could Powell not have performed Robinson's signature stair dance without the use of burnt cork? Without drag? I ask these questions in order to accent the factors I believe motivated the "tribute" label: calling Powell's performance a "tribute" makes space for appropriation, justifies imitation, and passes, all under the guise of "replication".

Like the covert minstrel on Cohan's Broadway stage, who, through performance, captured Eric Lott's notion of "love and theft" by way of corporeal reenactment viz. a viz. choreography, Powell pulls her audience into a highly strategized usurpation of "native" culture. In "Natives and Nationals," I expand on Jane Desmond's notion of Physical Foundationalism as it applies to song and dance tourism. I read Powell's body on the Hawaiian Islands as, "binding notions of 'facticity,'" and authenticity so that Powell's brownface comes to represent "real" Nateness in a manner similar to the way in which the blackface mask was thought to signify something intrinsically black. In the case of both Cohan's stage and Powell's, the dance, music, body, and technology (here the technology is the camera) work together to mask a hidden agenda: Powell's body appears to capture Hawaiian "nativeness" but in fact uses brownface, (which is really only

¹⁷⁶ It comes as no surprise that Cedric Gibbons, art director on *Honolulu* was also the man who designed the academy award statuette. The statue perfectly embodies the Deco period: it was designed after Mexican actor, Emilio Fernandez, a dear friend of Gibbons' wife, Dolores del Rio. The statue simultaneously captures that "exotic" flavor with the streamlined, column-like high tech modern material gold nude body, a trademark of the Deco style.

a fabricated version of nativeness) which inadvertently covers up the mainland's appropriation of both Hawaii itself and of black culture more generally. Powell, as sign, carries a distinctive pleasure that satiates her audience's need for escape from the mainland through a safe encounter with the exotic. When Powell dances the "native drum dance" and hula, she becomes a sign of the Hawaiian "natives" despite the fact that she has no ancestral connection to the island. I conclude this chapter with a close reading of Powell's tribute to the Hawaiian Islands and the similarities this routine carries to her tribute to Robinson onboard the ship. With this chapter I offer a glimpse into one instance of covert minstrelsy that occurred on the Hollywood screen in the 1930s. In offering this deconstruction of *Honolulu*, I hope to arouse some skepticism around the blackface performances that Hollywood justifies as being narratively necessary or appropriate. Whether called "blackface", "brownface", or "tribute", representation of the "Other" has permeated the American screen for decades. *And now, fade in on the bodies and stories the American screen has written off under the mask.*

Screening the “Other” History: Black-on-White; Black-and-White; Brown

The Demise of Blackface Disguise

Whether donning the mask oneself or taking part in such theatre as spectator, many who participated in blackface minstrelsy defined their own self worth at the same time they constructed and crystalized the American narrative. As Rogin articulates so poignantly, “Synecdochic for Hollywood, blackface gives America its meaning—self-making through role-playing...” (176). Such “self-making through role playing” would be the basis upon which the 1930s musical burgeoned. Yet by the 1930s, the use of the blackface mask on the Hollywood screen was declining. The 1930s saw a new trend in black representation: the servant.

While white performers could construct a self through performing the Other, black performers were subjected to Hollywood’s changing but still stringent parameters. The “Negro Servant” replaced the toms, bucks, and coons of the past. (Bogle 35) While the figure of the black butler did not project the same level of grotesquery or clownishness as did a minstrel pastime, this characterization allowed for muted buffoonery, laughable dialects, and subservience; these traits were welcomed by a depression-stricken America in need of a “refined” scapegoat. Despite the insulting nature of such “typecasting”, this was, according to Bogle, a Golden Age for black performers.¹⁷⁷

With or without the mask, the white performer as black or the black performer as servant, conveys a message of self-making in the interest of nation building. The fact that black performers and white could share the same theatrical space hinted at a nation that was moving in

¹⁷⁷ Bogle writes, “Admittedly, the black servants were repeatedly exploited and mistreated...But through their black characters, the actors accomplished the almost impossible: they proved single-handedly that the mythic types could be individualized and made, if not into things of beauty, then at least into things of joy. Almost every black actor of the period approached his role with a *joie de vivre* the movies were never to see again” (Bogle 37).

the direction of equality but one that was still very clear and intentional about the differences that existed between the black body and the white: “underneath the ‘magnanimous caress’ was the ‘malevolent blow’” (qtd. in Rogin “New Deal” 177). Although the delivery became increasingly more covert, the nation’s message surrounding racial difference was worked into the narrative. “Black-*and*-white minstrelsy” brought these bodies closer together (physically and visibly) *and* further apart (socially and psychologically).

Black-*and*-White Minstrelsy¹⁷⁸

*I went to the market
for to get some meat.
And the meat so tough
and I couldn’t get none.
I paid five dollars
for a great big hog.
And the hog so fat
and I couldn’t get back.*¹⁷⁹

Walker (Bill Robinson) recites these words while performing an upright buck dance for Lloyd Sherman (Shirley Temple) in *The Little Colonel’s* (1935) famous stair dance sequence. The young Temple watches attentively while her servant, played by Robinson, shuffles up and down the main flight of stairs in her grandfather’s Civil-War-era plantation home. His rhythms and steps increase in complexity as the dance progresses until he reaches a climactic sand dance finish at the top of the staircase and then leaps down (tapping all the while) to offer Lloyd (nicknamed the honorary “Little Colonel”) his hand. She grins, giggles, and then utters the words, “I want to do that too!” As the two grab hands, Hollywood makes history. For not only have a black man and a white girl made physical contact, but Temple’s facial expressions and

¹⁷⁸ Excerpts from this section appeared in my unpublished master’s thesis, *Five Point Riff* (2009)

¹⁷⁹ Powell, Azizi. “Bill ‘Bojangles’ Robinson-His Nickname &His Stair dance.” [Pancocojams](#). 10 January 2013.

body language tell the audience, “This black man is safe.”

Shortly after black actors made their presence known as servants in Hollywood cinema, several black actors were made into confidants (e.g. the mammy figure in a handful of Mae West features) and/or playmates (e.g. the role of Bojangles in nearly every Shirley Temple film made in the mid-30s).¹⁸⁰ I highlight the relationship shared by Bill Robinson and Shirley Temple, for it captures what I believe to be a pivotal shift in the way Hollywood represented the black body by the mid-1930s. It marks the transition between a figurative “separate but equal” relationship to that of a “together but unequal” one.¹⁸¹

The visibility of racial difference marked by these two dancing bodies on the same filmed stage reveals a space between black and white, man and child, master and servant, teacher and novice. Audible dances such as those found in *The Little Colonel* (1935) locate an otherwise concealed aesthetic matrix. By placing Robinson alongside Temple, the film simultaneously heralds a new way of seeing how black and white bodies *can* relate—that is, Temple and Robinson demonstrate that physical contact is not only possible, but potentially desirable—and creates a divide between these two bodies. Hollywood thus pairs physical proximity to the Other with imagined difference.

The two dancers hold hands as they make their way back up the staircase. One sound; two dances. The dance represents two worlds coming together under the guise of a unified whole. Robinson simplifies his choreography so that the small dancer, 50 years his junior, stands a chance at mastery. While these strikingly dissimilar bodies appear to execute the same sounds,

¹⁸⁰ See Bogle pp. 45

¹⁸¹ Patricia Turner writes, “Both white filmmakers and theatrical troupes continued to script all or parts of the story. There can be little doubt that the popular depression-era films starring Shirley Temple and Bill “Bojangles” Washington owed their success to the public’s love affair with the Little Eva/Uncle Tom team. Describing Robinson as a ‘cool-eyed Tom,’ film critic Donald Bogle declares the relationship between America’s sweetheart and the tap dancer ‘the perfect interracial love match.’ With laws against miscegenation on the books in many states, the match between Shirley Temple and Bill Robinson was the only one that would be tolerated” (Turner 83).

upon close examination, their seemingly synchronous bodies diverge visually. That is, for every two sounds uttered by Temple's body, Robinson works to produce four.¹⁸²

The dissonance created by the juxtaposition of servant qua teacher and master qua student complexifies the visual spectacle upheld by Hollywood's placement of Robinson's adult male black body alongside Temple's youthful white female body. In these examples, whiteness exists only to the extent that blackness subsists and vice versa. Furthermore, a white discourse not only mediates blackness, but is also mediated by the positing of a black aesthetic. This film marks a notable transition from the segregated performance spaces of black-on-white and black-on-black minstrelsy to the united space of black-*and*-white minstrelsy.

In filming a version of Robinson's famous stair dance with Temple in the picture, American cinema begins to assert the American-ness of tap dance. Tap dance belongs neither to black nor to white, but rather to the nation. The art moves from its "primitive" ties—both as it regards its "African-ness" and as it regards the now-uncouth minstrel show—to a more "refined" projection of the nation. Hollywood includes in this presentation, however, a fixed relation between the white body and the black. As I discussed earlier, the "Negro servant" replaced the toms, bucks, and coons of the past; Robinson took on this role for the duration of his film career. In casting black men as the servants for white plantation-owning families, the process of stereotyping the black body was incumbent upon its relationship to the white. Here *The Little Colonel* defines Bojangles' blackness through Temple's whiteness. By juxtaposing the two, the screen's stage provides the material conditions for an aesthetic dialogue mediated by gender, race, and class.

¹⁸² Directors of *The Little Colonel* wrote Robinson's famed stair dance into the script; it was Robinson's responsibility to figure out how to get Temple involved. He realized that to teach her how to tap well in just a few short days would be impossible, so he taught her how to make the "necessary extra-tapper-step sound" by teaching her how to kick the staircase. Temple had to keep her tap steps small and precise and "must always tap the riser instead of trying to get the same effect on the step itself" (Haskins 225-226). The resulting sound was that of two tappers working together to create a complex rhythm. Temple believed that she was mastering everything Robinson gave her. In her autobiography she writes, "We made an unusual couple. A raggedy urchin with tousled curls paired with a regal black man...every sound matched, every gesture, the scuffle, the staccato tap...the smile on my face was not acting" (Black 92). She saw herself in stark physical contrast to Bill Robinson, but also as his dancing equal.

Cinema of the 1930s did away with the mask of Cohan's era and instead relied on the juxtaposition of the thing and its opposite in order to define and disqualify the Other. The stage, until now, had become an overt display of America's social hierarchy. The *almost-but-not-quite* white man—e.g. the Irish immigrant—could become more white by donning the black mask and the black man could make a living by subscribing to certain roles assigned to him by the country in charge of the entertainment industry. Hollywood replaced this highly visible form of blackface minstrelsy by placing the black man on the same stage as the white. On this shared stage, the white man/woman could become whiter in virtue of his/her not being black and the black man could make a living by playing the roles assigned to him alongside white actors cast in more favorable roles. By placing the black body in closer proximity to the white, Hollywood defines the space between white and black, between the nation and its others.¹⁸³ Thus more telling than Robinson's role as a servant in this film, is that Temple, his less skilled junior, is his master.

Nonetheless, the stair dance shared by Robinson and Temple temporarily challenges the master/slave dialectic. Here the servant becomes the master's teacher and the film, for at least the duration of the routine, exposes the interdependence of master and slave. Moreover, the epistemological foundation for (aesthetic) taste consequently resides in the concealment of the two dancers' interdependence; taste here inhabits a secret location.¹⁸⁴ The tap dancing that one hears—the syncopated beats against a wooden staircase—will, moving forward, no longer

¹⁸³ When Hollywood cast Robinson, it was well aware of what was at stake: Winfield Sheehan of Fox said, "There is nothing, absolutely nothing, calculated to raise the gooseflesh on the back of an audience more than that of a white girl in relation to Negroes" (Black 90); this was known as the "gooseflesh" theory. Hollywood in effect, grafts the "sub" onto Robinson.

¹⁸⁴ What might be interesting to note here are the racial distinctions made by Temple in her autobiography. Even though she claims that she and Robinson were the best of friends, there is something notable about the way she described her first meeting with the famed tapper: "The first thing I noted was the way his arms and legs moved with a silky muscular grace. He was square-jawed and shiny cheeked, his great round eyes showing whites all around. I was instantly attracted" (Frank 90). Though ultimately describing an attraction, Temple chronicles it in terms of the ways she notices their physical differences, somehow proving that opposites attract—or at least provide something attractive for their audience.

signify the black or blackfaced body. Instead, the tap dancing that one hears on the Hollywood screen will signify an American aesthetic that includes audible Africanisms disguised by the white bodies who perform them. Moreover, the film buries the assigned social roles of black bodies and white under this invisible mask.

This covert form of masking that starts to evolve in tap dance performances of 1930s Hollywood cinema represents a new moment where the aural and the visual “stand before one another”. Fred Moten writes, “...then the aural emerges as that which is given in its fullest possibility by the visual: you hear...most clearly in seeing...the visual emerges as that which is given in its fullest possibility by the aural: you see...most clearly in hearing the space and silence” (Moten “In the Break” 172-173). That is, in placing the sonic in line with the visual, Hollywood allows its American audience to hear unity at the same time it sees difference. Through their synchronicity Temple and Robinson cover up tap’s historical connotations (e.g. black, minstrel, uncouth) and transition it into the present moment.

This new method of presenting tap dance on the Hollywood stage breaks the *ocular-sonic* relation¹⁸⁵ between sign, signifier, and signified. The new sound one hears resists reification; it survives independently of its object. For example, we get a clear sense of Bojangles’ capabilities during his solo for Lloyd Sherman (Shirley Temple). Comprised primarily of buck time step variations, he consistently executes complex rhythms while continually changing his weight as he leaps from one step to the next. His facings change at the same time he plays with tempo and stylization of the steps. When he grabs hands with Temple, the flow of the dance becomes stagnant: no more syncopated buck and wing steps; no more effortless flights through space. The whole routine from this point forward becomes a series of cramp rolls, flaps, and toe knocks

¹⁸⁵ I introduce this word as a succinct way of describing a perceived relationship between what can be seen and what can be heard.

with their backs to the camera. The camera zooms in on Temple's feet executing standard cramp rolls, a step that, in its most basic form, makes only four sounds. Viewing Temple's feet in isolation does not account for the sonic discrepancy the viewer hears when six beats are uttered. For a brief moment the camera zooms out and one can see that Robinson's basic cramp roll includes two extra (syncopated) heel drops.¹⁸⁶ Something similar happens when Temple's single flap is accented by her partner's *hop flap*, the effect of which is a seamless sonic *pick-up*. Neither the complex tapping of Bill Robinson nor the simple steps of Shirley Temple are signified by the sound one hears in these films. While such black/white relations did not last long in Hollywood, they helped pave the way for new forms of minstrelsy. As I will show, relationships such as Robinson and Temple's justified the disappearance of the black body as well as the reemergence of burnt cork.¹⁸⁷ By taking tap dance out of its historical context and placing it on neutral ground, America could divest of the black, re-imagine its Other, and re-write its national narrative.

Brown Attributes and Black Tributes

In addition to dance films featuring unlikely couples, as was the case in a handful of Robinson and Temple films, the United States in the 1930s saw two major plot trends evolve on the Hollywood screen: Americans became obsessed with exotic Island themes (and their ambiguous corporeal correlatives) as well as the "backstage musical". This is not to say that these three film genres encompassed all Hollywood film during the Depression era, but these three genres, I argue, reflect most clearly what it is the nation needed from entertainment at this time. Just as Cohan's stage evolved, in part, as a reaction to the great influx of immigrant bodies and need for

¹⁸⁶ This is actually the precise move he uses in his original solo stair dance for which he became so famous.

¹⁸⁷ It should be noted that by "disappearance", I literally mean just that. In all of these films, only one or two black actors were present in the film, and his/her role was one of servant.

a unifying culture at the turn of the century, most Hollywood narratives in the thirties developed as a response to the great economic despair faced by the nation. Island-themed films and backstage musicals fed the imagination and satiated the nostalgic pallet.

While an infatuation with Hawaiian culture must have existed in order for America to draw so heavily on it as a source of American entertainment as well as tourist destination, its more tangible elements (e.g. geography, bodies, dances, music) were often taken as porous objects to be handled with wild imagination. Consequently, in addition to the fact that most stories that seemingly took place in Hawaii were filmed on one of Hollywood's back lots, the actors they cast could be from anywhere. White actors from the States or parts of Western Europe were often cast as "Native Hawaiians", their skin browned to make them look more authentic but not made up. Through brownface, Hollywood's "native" "glamorized" the Islands at the same time it rewrote a colonial narrative into their native history. In marking such categories of difference, brownface, and the bodies who wore it, created the Other at the same time they "ate it".¹⁸⁸ At other times, Hollywood cast the "generic Asian" body as a stand-in for the "authentic native", as if all Asian features resembled one another and represented an equivalent exoticism.¹⁸⁹

The island theme grew to encompass the whole Pacific region such that the types of islands projected were as eclectic as the bodies who supposedly inhabited them.¹⁹⁰ Though labeling these Island performances was not a common practice, the *Honolulu* (1939) I examine, does

¹⁸⁸ A reference to bell hooks' essay, "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance" (1992).

¹⁸⁹ McMains writes, "Brownface hides the history of actual racial discrimination out of which these dances were born and substitutes for that real-world inequality the illusion that racial and ethnic differences can be slipped on and off like a fashion accessory, its impact only as long-lasting as the season hairstyle... it contributes to the fantasies invoked... by projecting differences of class and gender onto the performance of ethnic otherness" (111-112).

¹⁹⁰ Examples of the broad range of bodies and islands depicted between 1930 and the attack on Pearl Harbor can be seen in films such as *Paradise Island* (1930), *Tabu* (1931), *Flame of the Pacific* (1934), *Honolulu* (1938), *Honolulu* (1939), *Typhoon* (1940), *Honolulu Lu* (1941), *Moonlight in Hawaii* (1941), and *Hawaii* (1941). In most of these films about Polynesian Islands, regardless of the narrative, filmmakers could write off their inclusion of the "brown" or "brown-faced" body as a tribute to this colonized land and "native" culture.

label dances such as a hula tap number, a “tribute”. This I argue stems from the “integrated musical” trend in Hollywood that was occurring alongside the obsession with Island culture.

Often times, the tribute narrative was implied in these island-themed films. Subtle ukulele-laced musical tags or quick cutaways to the sun setting behind a group of hula dancers’ swaying silhouettes gestured at the many gifts native culture had to offer. Other times, text and narrative would accompany such sounds and images, making it very clear that these scenes or moments were “tributes”. While the predominant message was to portray this “other” culture in a positive light, such framing allowed more subtle commentary to slip in under the guise of such tributes.¹⁹¹ Films featuring brownface tributes often used spectacle—as in Eleanor Powell’s climactic “Tribute to the Hawaiian Islands”—to distract viewers from consciously registering anything but the show’s more superficial layers. These brownface tributes offered some distance from both the minstrel stage and the black body, and were thus effective means of covertly establishing social codes on the stage. It was not long before the focus returned to the black body, only this time, blackface performance would take a cue from the screen’s lighter bodies.

Several things distinguish the “tribute” from typical performances of black-on-white minstrelsy, black-on-black minstrelsy, black-*and*-white minstrelsy, and all other iterations of these forms. The narrative within which these tributes exist is primary: all of the above mentioned tributes exist within an *integrated* backstage musical. That is, these shows are all either about producing a final show/showcase, and/or about the life of someone in showbiz. These shows are *integrated* insofar as their blackface routines are auxiliary to the plot’s overarching narrative. The mask is neither necessary nor ancillary; it just is. Because the mask

¹⁹¹ Take for example notes to an early version of the *Honolulu* script which read, “*At the same time, Mason, as well as many other passengers, is tossing pennies into the water, for which the native children dive into the depths with astounding agility.*” Images such as these, couched under the tribute narrative pretext, offer viewers a strong message regarding race and class. See Fields, Herbert, Frank Partos and Harry Ruskin. Screenplay for *Honolulu*, September 23, 1938. Core collection scripts, Box 13: 10.13.38-11.14.1938 p. 37, line 67. Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

ostensibly pays homage to black culture, its use is “appropriate”. Such framing allows the blackface mask to be used to *integrate* black culture at the same time it appropriates its contributions to American entertainment. In doing so, it justifies the disappearance of the “actual” black body in favor of a *representation* of blackness.

The success of such masquerade depends not only upon a tribute label and corroborative narrative, but upon a certain level of transparency. Michael Rogin has noted a common thread in almost all blackface musicals wherein the camera or stage exposes the performer blacking up. Transparency thus helps define the act of “becoming” black.¹⁹² By showing the donning of the costume, by exposing the fiction behind the mask, the makeup becomes nothing more than fetish. The blackface performance, when stripped down and presented as costume, makes it clear that the person donning this mask is still in control. To “become black” in the context of black-on-white minstrelsy delineates the body that must black up in order to find work from the person who chooses to black up for fun. To show the process of blacking up is to deny the existence of the black man and affirm the black body as substitutable. Thus, when a tribute begins with the performance of blacking up, the performance that follows necessarily disavows the realness of that which it seeks to honor.

Brownface and Tribute Minstrelsy in *Honolulu*

The scene opens with an image of a moonlit ocean and then cuts away to a poster advertising the ship’s costume ball: “Come As Your Favorite Movie Star,” it reads. The camera then cross fades to Powell’s dressing room where she is looking at her mirror image while applying the burnt cork makeup to be worn in her tribute performance to Bill Robinson.

¹⁹² Rogin writes, “There is a primal scene in every blackface musical: it shows the performer Blacking up. The scene lets viewers in on the secret of the fetish: I know I’m not, but all the same. The fetish condenses the unanalyzed magical significance assigned to blacks, functioning like the... commodity in Marx’s [theory]. Signifying transvestite masquerade and the expropriation of black labor, burnt cork fetishized not only blackness but sexual difference and the commodity form as well”(New Deal 176).

The audience only sees her apply the first stroke of blackness to her cheeks, but this image sufficiently establishes the level of transparency about which Rogin speaks: seeing Powell apply the burnt cork affirms her whiteness and her use of blackness as nothing more than a costume, or fetish.¹⁹³ The image of Powell blacking up in the beginning of the scene seeks to delineate real blackness from that which can be applied as fetish, and the dialogue at the end of the scene reminds viewers that Powell is in fact white, and, furthermore, subtly comments on the impurity of both blackness and the mask; Powell must wash in order to be socially acceptable.

Honolulu is unique in that it presents its audience with both a brownface *and* a blackface tribute, and moreover, Powell's white body performs both of these within a matter of minutes. It is precisely this fact that leads me to believe that by 1939, the role of the body as a sign changes dramatically from its function in nineteenth century, or even early twentieth century, blackface minstrelsy. In early blackface performances, the body became a vehicle for the blackface mask that would signify "Negro". Everything from a performer's dialect to their movement style would elicit the "Negro", which although merely a stereotype, was taken at face value. By the time Cohan presents *Little Johnny Jones*, the body as something distinct from the blackface mask becomes an important part of this process of signification. Here sonic minstrelsy becomes the dominant sign comprised of the "march" label, patriotic lyrics, and coon song model (to name a few components) which work together to signify "America: a unified nation" and to disguise the subtext which reads: "forget the Other". By the time *Honolulu* reaches theatres, tribute minstrelsy functions as the dominant sign and uses costume, narrative, instrumentation, and movement style to signify an, "homage to America's diverse make-up" and disguise the ways in which the (white) nation sees the Other as substitutable. In other words, the Other becomes

¹⁹³ In an earlier version of the script, Mason (Young) insists that Dorothy (Powell) remove her makeup before he will escort her to the deck.

metonym rather than an individualized body. The success of minstrel performances which are covert in nature depends on the use of multiple signs—of which the body is one—that work together, in synch, to convey both a superficial and a veiled meaning. The signified's subtext is as pervasive as the performance's overt meaning, but because the one is merely parenthetical, its often derogatory implications slip under the perceptive audience's radar. Because 1930s technology (e.g. the camera) opens up the possibilities for signification, Powell's body becomes but one facet of the meaning-making process. Within the tribute context, Powell's body *in-itself* becomes less important than what her body can *do*. Powell's white body can do what brown dancers do as well as what black dancers do; Powell's white body is American.

Sound Effects: Background Music, Soundtracks, and Subversive Medleys

Sound/Image: A Brief History

Initially (1895-1904) entire vaudeville and variety shows would accompany the projected entertainment. By 1905, films moved into theatres of their own and the need for film music as a separate genre (and thus profession) arose. The piano and other mechanized forms of music (e.g. the phonograph and gramophone) would accompany silent films. As the popularity of film increased, so too did the theatres' budgets and their competition. From the late 1910s up through the 1920s, musical accompaniment grew into full symphonic and variety show performances with each acting as a film's prologue. Movie houses would often send cue sheets to movie theatres outlining what music was permissible accompaniment for the specific film being shown. (Reay 9)¹⁹⁴ Also in the mid-to-late 1920s came the introduction of synchronized sound, a process which involved using technology to couple or "synch" sound to image (Reay 7).¹⁹⁵ While the first documented instance of such a practice took place in Paris in 1900, two more decades passed before the benefits outweighed the costs of this new science.

¹⁹⁴ According to Pauline Reay, the 1920s marked the beginning of Hollywood's personal investment in the music industry. She writes, "...Hollywood invested in songwriters, composers and music publishing houses; with Paramount and Lowe's being the first to buy their own publishing houses followed by the Warner Bros. purchase of the original Tin Pan Alley house, and M. Witmark & Sons in 1929" (Reay 6-7). Recall that M. Witmark & Sons was the first publisher to print George M. Cohan's famous ragtime/coon tunes in the late nineteenth century.

¹⁹⁵ As I showed in the last chapter, Edison invented the phonograph in 1877. In 1895, Edison introduced the kinetophone, which added the idea of a moving image (from his kinetoscope) to his phonograph, thereby creating a machine that could play tunes at the same time it projected images. Concurrently, the demand for synchronized films was low, making the cost of Edison's machine too high for popular consumption. In 1904, Sigmund Lubin created a cinephone that claimed to do all that Edison's device could do, but the quality was poor and failed rather quickly Britain's Chronophone (1904) followed these inventions, followed by Cecil Hepworth's Vivaphone (1907)—which although successful, could not keep up with the ever-growing run time of films; the vivaphone could only provide accompaniment for short films. Inventors did not really try anything new until the end of World War I, at which point Lee de Forest invented the Phonofilm system (1923). This system allowed sound to be recorded on film. In 1925, Fox bought the patent for this system, followed by the patent for the German system Tri-Ergon, and finally merged the two systems into Movietone in 1927. (Reay 7-8) Meanwhile Vitaphone, Warner Bros. and Western Electric developed their own sound-on-disc system in 1925, creating steep competition for Fox and the rest of the movie-making industry.

All films from 1930 onward can be described as having a distinct soundtrack.¹⁹⁶ Reay defines this soundtrack as having three basic components: dialogue, sound effects, and music. The particular place of each of these within the film determines the effectiveness of the soundtrack. (Reay 31)¹⁹⁷ While a soundtrack inevitably contributes to a film's overall effect, films need not have sound in order to convey a series of sentiments and/or to elicit meaning; subception, or subliminal auditive perception, refers to the effect that visual simulations of sound can have on their viewer.¹⁹⁸ (Cooke 2) Everything from the image of a crying baby to the action of a knock at the door can simulate a sound effect for its viewers. Hence, whether absent or present, music can have a profound effect on that which is being viewed, either because it agrees with that which is projected on the screen, or because it disturbs one's sonic expectations. Within the academy, scholars write frequently on the impact that the presence and/or absence of color has on its viewers ability to ascribe meaning to an object and/or subject, yet we are less accustomed to this analysis in the vein of aural perception. What one hears is as important as what one does not hear, and what one hears in two pivotal medleys, or "tributes" in *Honolulu*, is a testament to the ways in which covert minstrelsy functions at both the perceptible *and subceptional* levels.

Sound Effects and Affects

Historically, filmmakers have used music as a means of conditioning their viewers' responses to visual stimuli on the screen. Kathryn Kalinak has theorized that music allowed the silent

¹⁹⁶ The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences added "Best Original Film Score" as an Oscar category in 1934. (Reay 15)

¹⁹⁷ Annahid Kassabian writes about an "Attention Continuum" (qtd. in Reay 31) in which theme songs draw the strongest audience attention, and musical scores played as background to dialogue command the least. That is to say, the music projected with the least amount of distraction has the strongest pull on its audience.

¹⁹⁸ Annabel Cohen demonstrates that the part of the brain that is associated with music and rhythm is associated with the cerebellum which is a more primitive part of the brain that is also the part of the brain that is involved in dance and motor responses to music.

image of early films a three dimensionality that was otherwise impossible. This process of projecting image from front to back and sound from back to front created, “a kind of transference or slippage between sound and image, the depth created by the sound is transferred to the flat surface of the image” (Kalinak 44). Consequently whether or not the sound and image were in synch, the audience was forced to reconcile this “quasi-magical” process.¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, as Paul Romain argues, music speaks to one’s subconscious. He writes, “all that is required of the orchestra in the cinema is to play harmonious background music with the idea not of being heard but of creating an atmosphere to sink us into our subconscious and make us forget...” (qtd. In Cooke 6). That is to say, what one hears largely affects what one sees as well as one’s interpretation of the image, action, and film as a whole. As I demonstrated in my first chapter, sonic minstrelsy relies heavily on the effect that listening has on seeing and vice versa; hearing certain lyrics on Cohan’s stage not only quieted the (perceived) Africanist presence in syncopated rags, but allowed listeners to *see* coon songs (and the bodies who performed them) as less crude and more “American”. The sonic elements of *Honolulu* certainly play a role in the efficacy of the show’s covertness, but because sound technology looked so different in 1939 than it did in 1904, I must tease out the particulars: while the phonograph/gramophone affected the way audiences heard Cohan’s music *outside* the theatre, film’s ability to layer sound complexified what could be heard—and therefore seen—*inside* the theatre. I turn now to *Honolulu*’s (canned) soundtrack that audience members experienced live.

Foregrounding Background Music

While MGM commissioned composers Harry Warren and Gus Kahn to write most of the film’s score, exceptions were made for the two “tributes” I take up in this chapter. The first

¹⁹⁹ See Mervyn Cooke’s take on Adorno and Eisler’s writing on the subject (Cook 6).

“tribute medley”²⁰⁰ accompanies Eleanor Powell’s impersonation of, and tribute to, the famed black tap dancer, Bill Robinson. The score for this piece is comprised of four different works: Stephen Foster’s “The Old Folks at Home”, or “Swanee River” (1851), followed by Richard Milburn’s “Listen to the Mockingbird” (1855), Foster’s “Old Black Joe” (1861), and finally, “The Darktown Strutters’ Ball”, written by Shelton Brooks (1917). To see the significance of this hodgepodge, we must examine each of these songs’ lyrics, music, and composers in depth.

Stephen Foster’s earliest songs became the most popular on minstrel circuits of the mid-nineteenth century.²⁰¹ Foster saw the minstrel stage as a locus for American culture: “He found the songs of the current minstrel shows crude, vulgar, ditties that struck the popular fancy, but which were nevertheless lyrics and songs that in spite of their vulgarity actually represented something definitively American” (Howard 119-120). Foster’s prerogative was to compose music that was “truly” American—glorifying the South and recapitulating “Negro” stereotypes demonstrative of the nation’s sentiments during this period—while abstaining from an association with the men who performed in blackface and spoke in a “Negro dialect”. Consequently he removed his name from most of his scores and gave local minstrel troupes full bragging rights.

²⁰⁰ A term I will be using throughout this section to denote a mix of songs written by composers other than Harry Warren and Gus Kahn that also happen to offer the music for “tribute dances”.

²⁰¹ The German-born Gus Kahn did not experience much success in his early years as a composer, but began finding fame in 1917 when he teamed up with Al Jolson and Buddy DeSylva to write a long list of songs for the stage. While he had established a name for himself in Tin Pan Alley (c. 1922), his true fame came a year later and for the next twenty years. He is perhaps best known for his work on Hollywood musicals in the twenties and thirties.

The self-taught Brooklyn-born musician Harry Warren was perhaps the more famous of the pair. He had a wider musical scope and his music reached a wider audience than that of Kahn. He reached his prime in the 1930s and is best known for his work on major box office hits such as *42nd Street* and timeless favorites such as “Jeepers Creepers”, “That’s Amore,” and “Chattanooga Choo Choo.”

It was on the minstrel stage that Americans began identifying with Foster's music as a form of folk entertainment that they could call their own.²⁰² The year 1850 marked one of Foster's most prolific years: he published fifteen pieces, six of which were "Negro" songs, "obviously put forth to capture the favor of the 'minstrel' public" (Milligan 55). Such songs attracted the public for their strong rhythmic pulses (e.g. "Camptown Races") and their inclusion of a Jim Crow type narrative (e.g. Oh! Lemuel! Go Down to de Cotton Field) (55). All the big minstrel troupes (e.g. Christy's Minstrels, Campbell's Minstrels, and The New Orleans Serenaders) of the day incorporated these songs into their shows.

Foster's music expressed the spirit of the white majority in America. It captured a uniquely (white) American sentiment towards the South, towards black bodies, and towards social hierarchies. However, Foster believed that his music spoke to white and black people alike. His intention, as he states in numerous correspondence letters, was to capture universally American sentiments, articulating messages that addressed both slaves and plantation owners. Part of his gift was in his ability to craft songs that spoke quite generally to humans. Themes such as "longing", "home", and/or "nostalgia" he believed applied to all mankind. Thus it was possible for the general public to absorb and make meaning out of his music.

Part of what won Foster the appeal of the American public was the musical simplicity of his tunes. Milligan writes of Foster, "He could neither develop a melody nor vary his harmony. His melodies repeat themselves monotonously, and he was content with a few simple chords and modulations" (109).²⁰³ These simple chords made his music easy to follow and therefore accessible to the masses and allowed the folk to unite around the messages these songs carried.

²⁰² The way in which Foster's "Oh! Susanna" (See Appendix A) proliferated the mainstream exemplifies just how removed the artist was from his own success and how quickly one of his songs shared on the minstrel stage would sweep the rest of the globe.

²⁰³ Harold Milligan goes on to write of Foster's music, "...no amount of erudition and sophistication could have equaled in sincerity and potency...it is because they are the honest expression of real emotion that they found their way directly and at once to the world's heart" (109).

Such simplicity meant that his audience received his messages more directly; these tunes were simple, accessible, and above all, easily understood by every man, no matter what the color of his skin. “The Old Folks at Home” or “Swanee River” (1853) is considered to be one of the most well-known songs ever written.²⁰⁴ While Foster wrote without the use of many of the “uncouth” lyrics²⁰⁵ that were hallmarks of mid-nineteenth century music, he would see nothing uncivilized about the term “darkey” or the use of the “Negro dialect” that was so typical of this period’s literature and music. Thus began a trend in Foster’s compositions of looking to “black sources” for inspiration. While “The Old Folks at Home” marked a transformation in Foster’s compositions, it achieved a more complicated rhythm than his earlier work, with syncopations more in line with early ragtime.²⁰⁶ In addition to Foster being influenced by ragtime, many of his songs show a resemblance to popular Negro Spirituals of the era.²⁰⁷

Projecting Sound

While the manner in which blackface performers and Foster approached the subject of race differed, both modes had a lasting impact on the ways in which America perceived people of color. Visible blackface teased out what white men thought made black men different than white as a means of performers creating an artificial distance between self and other. Foster, on the other hand, sought to collapse this binary of human experience into something universal; he

²⁰⁴ After some backlash from his own brother and a few of his professional critics, Foster chose to change “Pedee” River to “Swanee,” (Milligan 61).

²⁰⁵ See Appendix A for the full lyrics.

²⁰⁶ Recall the similarities between early ragtime and coon songs. Their rhythm is what made them similar, their lyrics marked their most fundamental difference.

²⁰⁷ William Austin writes, “Foster’s ‘Old Folks at Home’ and ‘Old Black Joe’ took on a kind of prestige, beyond affection or respect, by their association with anonymous songs of the black slaves, like ‘Go Down, Moses’ and Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,’ which Foster himself may have never heard or even heard about” (Austin i). For example, “Camptown Races” finds melodic similarity to the Negro Spiritual “Roll Jordan Roll” (Howard 179). See Appendix B for a short history of how Foster was influenced by Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

worked to find similarities between white folk and black in order to unite the nation. Upon first glance, the long lasting effects of Foster's mode seem less egregious than the physical and visible act of blacking up, however, in trying to universalize human experience and conflate slave mentality with that of the master, Foster inadvertently justified plantation life and reified various linguistic and behavioral traits of black people.²⁰⁸

After reading Foster's work in this way, we see that covert minstrelsy dates back to the mid-nineteenth century; George M. Cohan was not the first white man to engage with minstrelsy in such a subliminal manner. The nation's cooption of Foster's folk music and that of the country's usurpation of Cohan's new musical theatre is very similar. In chapter one I argued that black-on-black minstrelsy occurred on a sonic level when white composers created coon songs that were simultaneously (and ironically) based on the Africanist form of ragtime but transfigured to include lyrics that carried a derogatory meaning for the nation's people of color. Lack of social mobility and power meant that in order to be recognized by the public, black performers had to black up and sing coon songs—the most prime example being that of George Walker and Bert Williams singing (in blackface) the tune “All Coons Look Alike to Me”. In this process, white composers' music as well as a general social ideology gained credibility. This way of thinking presupposes that if the black Williams called himself a “coon”, then what the songs stated must have been “true”. I venture to say that in adopting Foster's musical scores—many of which were based on Negro Spirituals—and lyrics, that were a symptom of the charged racial environment in which the composer lived, white performers engaged in a form of (covert) black-on-white minstrelsy while black performers engaged in a form of (covert) black-on-black minstrelsy.

²⁰⁸ Again, I cannot infer whether this was Foster's intent, especially since the most convincing evidence of his music's social impacts can be seen in the history of American theatre which transpires apart from and outside of Foster's control. The Tom show, for example, began as something positive, as did Foster's desire to convey the message of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. By granting permission for his songs to be used in the theatrical space, Foster signed off on the possibility that his music would be used for ulterior motives. Consequently the life of the Tom show became the life of Foster's music.

The similarity between Foster's music and many Negro Spirituals gave Foster's music extra credibility; its similitude presumed "authenticity" with regards to the "black experience". This worked to lend authority to minstrel shows, as the public was more apt to see these as representing the "truth" of blackness thereby supporting the validity of his tunes in Tom shows even when the angle had changed. Accordingly, these songs were believed to represent *all* "folk". Many members of the black community then began incorporating Foster's music into their repertoire. Fisk Jubilee singers, for example, integrated a number of Foster's tunes. But perhaps even more far reaching than Fisk's performances were the words of W.E. B. Du Bois.

Both Du Bois and Alain Locke condoned the work of Foster, claiming that he made African American music more accessible to the general public. In *Souls* Du Bois writes on several types of music that existed in the United States.²⁰⁹ According to Du Bois, Foster's music was neither an imitation nor a debasement of the black man. It spread the message of the slaves to the world. (Austin 300) Locke, author of *The New Negro*, also praised Foster, claiming that he was, "the Joel Chandler Harris of Negro music, breaking its dialect bonds and smoothing it out palatably for the general American ear" (Austin 302). By equating Foster to Harris, Locke not only spoke to the composer's wide-spread success and patriarchal role for America's folk, but alluded to the impact that black oral traditions had on these two men and thus the nation.

The attitudes of Du Bois and Locke towards composers like Stephen Foster seem to bear a resemblance to their thoughts on black-on-black minstrel performers like Bert Williams. It would seem that on the one hand, Du Bois approved of Foster's "folk" music precisely because it

²⁰⁹ Du Bois writes, "The first is African music, the second Afro- American, while the third is a blending of Negro music with the music heard in the foster land. The result is still distinctively Negro and the method of blending original, but the elements are both Negro and Caucasian. One might go further and find a fourth step in this development, where the songs of white America have been distinctively influenced by the slave songs or have incorporated whole phrases of Negro melody, as "Swanee River" and "Old Black Joe." Side by side, too, with the growth has gone the debasements and imitations—the Negro "minstrel" songs, many of the "gospel" hymns, and some of the contemporary "coon" songs,—a mass of music in which the novice may easily lose himself and never find the real Negro melodies" (qtd. in Austin 300).

resembled the slave songs of his people. As he makes clear in *Souls*, the Spirituals exemplify black essence in both an aesthetic and spiritual regard. Thus it would make sense that Du Bois would praise the work of Foster, as the composer captured a small essence of Negro Spirituals by replicating their rhythmic form and attempting to capture their spiritual intensity. Although Foster's language came from his own (white) background, he sought to universalize the "black soul" in a manner that was congruent with Du Bois' hopes for the African American race.

In Du Bois' mind, it behooved black men to make sacrifices, such as blacking up, if it meant recognition for the race. Recall that in Chapter One I demonstrated how Du Bois saw the work of Bert Williams as exemplary of his own talented tenth theory. Given Du Bois' mention of Foster's "Swanee River" and "Old Black Joe" as departures from the "real Negro melodies" but worthy of respect nonetheless, it appears that he must have acknowledged such work as demonstrative of national recognition and identification. The fact that Foster's work had gained such notoriety (nationally and abroad) was a testament to the fact that black art—and culture—had laid the foundation for what was considered "American" and thus representative of national folk culture. I wonder then, to what extent we may read Du Bois' early writings as forgiving of black-on-white sonic minstrelsy if such a practice had the potential to grant recognition and/or some level of social uplift to African Americans as it did in the case of Williams.

My reading of Locke is similar in that I view his praise of Foster's work as suggestive of a tolerance for black-on-white sonic minstrelsy. Like Du Bois, he saw the Spirituals as sublime instantiations of religious exaltation and emotional expression. What Foster got right, according to Locke was the simultaneously primitive structure and subliminal effect. While slightly more "commercialized" than the Spirituals in their purest form, Foster's tunes captured the secular and simplistic while still holding onto transcendent sorrow and ecstasy. Therefore, as much as Locke

could not stand to see the concert stage rob this music of its original modesty, the race could not afford for its songs to be forgotten. Thus Locke observes dilution or “whitening” a small price to pay for the legacy of black art to be recognized and remembered.

Subversive Medleys

Foster’s music satisfied the following types of needs: America needed a voice that spoke to all of its citizens and Foster’s music spoke to common Christian values, grasped a spiritual intensity characteristic of diasporic people, but distinguished itself as separate from the tunes uttered by black slaves.²¹⁰ In 1904, Louis Charles Elson named Foster the, ‘folksong genius of America as Weber or Silcher have been of Germany’ mainly because he felt that Foster’s music conveyed ‘the same tender melancholy’ experienced by slaves. (qtd. in Austin 306). Eleven years later, the same author used Foster to renounce ragtime music. This marks one instance in which white authors used Foster’s “folk music” to supplant ragtime’s popularity; this happened frequently in the late nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries. Which is to say, Foster’s recognition of and adaptation of the Negro Spirituals was “safer” for the American ear, than the syncopated rhythms of ragtime. Over time, the music became more and more dissociated from its diasporic roots. Like the coon songs published by Cohan that bore his insignia and experienced countless substitutions, Foster’s “slave songs” morphed over time to become less black and more “American”. By the 1920s and ‘30s the songs were so removed from their ties to the black experience, that several white folklorists and anthropologists had an easy time dissociating the

²¹⁰ Not everyone enjoyed Foster’s music. Many still saw the songs as too black to represent the nation. George Curtis writes in 1853, “It is remarkable that we, who are the most practical, are also the most sentimental people in the world. There is a kind of literature and art grown up among us, which is weak and unhealthy, and yet the most popular of all...It is a favorite device of ordinary song-writers to harp much upon sickness and death; and the composer follows in the same strain by the most commonplace minor chords. The Negro melodies are a ludicrous example of this peculiarity, to which the Negro dialect only contributes” (qtd. in Austin 255).

Negro Spirituals from their black roots; they could convincingly argue that this music had stemmed from a nineteenth century British oral tradition. (Austin 303)

Many scholars, filmmakers, and journalists in the 1920s and 1930s labeled, any song that, language aside, sounded like a Negro Spiritual, a “tribute”. The benefit of labeling something a “tribute” rather than a caricature, or even omitting a qualifier altogether is that it allows an Africanist aesthetic to be used without criticism. In many cases, it absolves its performer of the guilt associated with minstrelsy, creates physical and corporeal distance between the one paying tribute and the one being “honored”, puts the performer in the position of the “good guy”, and creates an illusion of social progress (i.e. we have accepted black bodies into this white nation and to prove it, we acknowledge their contributions). However, in paying such tributes, the performers, directors, and backstage crews can actually alter the art to which they credit black bodies thereby creating a false representation of what it is black people make, do, and are.

I contend that a film’s soundtrack makes such false representation possible because of the inaudibility it achieves when coupled with image and embedded within a complex narrative structure. Jeff Smith explains this in terms of film music’s “inaudibility and abstraction”:

“Though film music serves important narrational and structural functions, it performs these functions ‘unheard’ by the spectator, who is too immersed in the film’s fiction to attend to the interplay of image and sound, music and narrative” (Smith 230). Pairing images of the black body with sound “binds” the spectator to this fictional world. Just as blackface minstrelsy allowed white performers to imitate black people regardless of these renditions’ basis in reality, tribute minstrelsy allowed performers to pay tribute to a part of American culture that may or may not have been black. Furthermore, tribute minstrelsy assists in reducing the Other to

metonym.²¹¹ According to Lacan, “What this structure of the signifying chain discloses is the possibility I have . . . to use it in order to signify *something quite other* than what it says” (Lacan 155). Such metonymic reduction expands the boundaries of what is and is not black and in so doing justifies various representations of the black body and its culture.²¹² The role of the “tribute” label combined with a series of sonic displacements in the context of Powell’s “Tribute to Bill Robinson,” exemplifies this shift from dancing subject to metonymic disarticulation.

In the three years that lapsed between the time Foster wrote “Old Folks at Home” and “Old Black Joe,”²¹³ he modified his language to make it less offensive. He, for example, supplanted the word “nigger” with “darkey.” This change took place gradually, and for a time he used both words, but by the time he wrote “Old Black Joe,” he had sworn off the word “nigger” for good (Milligan 69). Over the years, Foster made other changes including changing “Massa” to “Grandpa” or some other substitute.²¹⁴ This of course did not change the meaning of the songs, but lessened the public backlash the songwriter received in future years.²¹⁵ Changing certain lyrics in many ways disguised some of the songs’ original meaning, or at least made it “legal” to publish Foster’s tunes in the twentieth century. However, by the time he changed these lyrics, the tunes themselves had already begun to carry meaning. Consequently Foster’s famous tunes did not even need lyrics to convey certain messages.

²¹¹ See Toni Wein’s “Fixing Ireland/fixing the Jew in Melmoth the Wanderer.” *Patterns of Prejudice*. 40.1 (2006): 1-24.

²¹² Furthermore, white writers have been using the black voice as justification for the use of certain words: if Bert Williams calls himself a “coon” it makes a case that we can call ALL black men “coons”; if the black poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar uses the term “darkey,” it makes it okay for America to call men and women of color, “darkeys”.

²¹³ William Austin identifies three types of Foster songs: comic, poetic, and pathetic; “Old Folks at Home”, “Massa’s in de Cold Ground,” and “Old Black Joe” he considers to be of the “pathetic” type (Austin ix-xi). Here “pathetic” simply means that these songs invoke pathos.

²¹⁴ A perfect example can be seen in this excerpt of one of Foster’s tunes (written c. 1852) that he wrote in his sketchbook alongside the lyrics to “Old Folks at Home”: *Nigga drunk/Draw your knife/Nebber drunk/In all my life...* (Emerson 186).

²¹⁵ While Foster did not write “Old Black Joe” in a Negro dialect, Joe was the docile “house nigger,” prized for his loyalty and submissive qualities. See Appendix A.

Americans had already tied meaning to these tunes regardless of their lyrics such that a minstrel message was implicit in the tune. Recall that even though Cohan had severed his blatant and visible ties to the black body on the minstrel stage, (white) American consumers read Cohan's sonic corpus as primitive and taboo for years following because of the unconscious fear that had evolved out of a paired association with the black or black-faced body and certain types of music. Even though lyric substitution helped the composers' music sell, the aural, once again, gave way to a concealed aesthetic matrix, part based in diaspora, part based in racial fantasy. In the fashion of covert minstrelsy, the aural as such helped to displace certain ways of seeing so that in hearing Cohan's coon songs and/or Foster's folk music, one need not have seen a history of racial division but instead a nostalgic and patriotic nation in search of unity. In other words, the tunes themselves could imply without directly referring and listeners could infer without explicitly knowing. The lyrics' apparent meaning possessed much less power than the tunes' covert implications. The underlying meaning of Foster's songs' becomes important in my analysis of Powell's tribute precisely because MGM commissioned a score devoid of lyrics.

A lack of lyrics makes possible many things: First, choosing to omit the lyrics allows the musical team more flexibility in arrangement. If one wants to string together a series of songs, it is much easier to do this when one is not required to take narrative into consideration. Second, a lack of lyrics allows both the dancing and rhythm to remain in central focus. Third, and possibly most important to my argument, is that omitting lyrics can lessen the overt symbolic references to a minstrel pastime. If no lyrics exist, the margin of association to a plantation-owning South (e.g. to that which a lyric like "house nigger," suggests) shrinks. Furthermore, this is a tribute, and no tribute would be paying homage to a "darky". Yet, despite the removal of certain lyrics, the tunes themselves would, on some level, make reference to American folk life as well as black

slave life. Therefore, Hollywood could comment on the “souls of black folk” even in the lyrics’ absence. That is to say, when, through repetition, the meanings of the songs are engrained into the minds of the public, and the lyrics are removed, the subliminal message/stereotype takes center stage, without the interference of words or moral judgment.

To take this analysis one step further, I venture to say that not only did these tunes’ historical ties to black life make them a likely musical source for Hollywood, but the image of Powell in blackface affects the audience’s perception of the music itself. I briefly described the phenomenon of subception, or subliminal auditive perception in my introduction to this section. The soundtrack chosen for Powell’s “tribute” works on a subliminal level to further substantiate Powell’s performance. Here the music “encourages narrative comprehension” (Smith 237). I will discuss this in more depth in the next section, but for the time being I want to point out the way in which Powell’s black makeup simulates a negro dialect and other audible elements of the minstrel show. Foster’s melodies stimulate nostalgia for a slave-owning past while simultaneously uniting its viewers as Americans. The audience is thus forced to reconcile the sound and the image regardless of whether they are in synch: “...film music does not so much displace the importance of narrative in engaging the process of suture, but rather makes narrative a more efficient means of implementing the identification upon which the text’s positioning of the subject depends” (Smith 234). Robinson’s famous stair dance and his artistry get lost in this “quasi-magical” process whereby Powell, a white female performer, suddenly becomes the new face of tap dance. His choreography becomes America’s choreography in the same way that the Negro Spirituals become America’s folk music and the white man or woman, becomes the arbiter of such national identifiers. The music therefore signifies at both the perceptible and subceptual levels simultaneously.

According to Claudia Gorbman, film music signifies according to pure musical codes, cultural codes, and cinematic codes. (Gorbman 2-3). I have already analyzed some of the ways in which Foster's music signifies according to musical codes, for example, his obvious references to the Negro Spirituals, with or without lyrics. I have also touched upon how Foster's music signifies according to cultural codes: whether or not Foster's tunes contain lyrics, the music's long ties to the minstrel stage result in a permanent signification of the black body and/or a glorified plantation-owning South. The music itself further signifies American folk culture because of the ways in which musical codes have intersected with cultural codes over time. What I have yet to explore is the cinematic significance of Foster's music, specifically "Old Black Joe" and "Old Folks at Home" as presented in Powell's dance solo.

In the case of cinematic codes, the filmic context itself helps to codify the music. (Gorbman 3). The very placement of the music within the film is crucial to its signification. In the case of Powell's solo, the music is presented as a medley, with Foster's songs "Old Black Joe" and "My Old Kentucky Home," sandwiched between the (African American street composer) Richard Milburn's "Listen to the Mockingbird"²¹⁶ and (Canadian jazz composer of color) Shelton Brooks' "The Darktown Strutter's Ball". In positioning Foster's music, amidst that of two African American composers, MGM is in some way qualifying Foster's music as "authentically" black. Because the musical arrangement blurs the beginnings and endings of each of these four songs, there is no clear understanding of which songs belong to whom and no immediately perceptible moment marking the end of Foster's interpretation and that which he seeks to interpret; all four songs are supposed to signify blackness in some way.

Generally, according to Wagner's theory of motifs, and leitmotifs, musical themes become associated with people, places, and/or situations. (Gorbman 3) In the case of Powell's tribute to

²¹⁶ See Appendix A for full lyrics.

Robinson, Hollywood relies on Powell's costume and the four songs of this routine's medley to signify blackness. Never mind the fact that when Robinson danced his famous stair routine (which is seemingly what Powell is imitating), he danced to Foster's "My Old Kentucky Home". This is important for several reasons: First, the fact that Robinson was himself dancing to Foster's tunes shows how much a part of the vernacular Foster's music had become. It also hints at a level of double consciousness that Robinson may have experienced as a black man on the white stage. Second, given the nature of "My Old Kentucky Home" and the meaning behind the tune, it demonstrates the double consciousness intrinsic to Robinson's dancing. Did Robinson need to dance to a tune that narrated the life of gay "darkies" who forever rolled on the cabin floor "All merry, all happy and bright" in order to be accepted on the stage? Then there arises the disparity in song choice between those songs to which Robinson danced and those to which Powell danced when imitating Robinson. Does choosing a different Foster song, or collection of songs, somehow reference the similitude of all black music? That is to say, whether or not Powell is paying tribute to Robinson is not nearly as important as the fact that she seeks to signify blackness as a general concept through costume, song, and dance. Accordingly, I would like to read Foster's music as a temporally fluid leitmotif of blackness. In other words, one Foster tune becomes metonymic for blackness. Here "Old Black Joe" represents all black people (both as objects and as particular ways of being in the world) across all space and time.

Over the course of a century, American entertainment turned Foster's black-inspired folk music, which sought to represent ALL bodies, into a catch-all musical phrase that ostensibly signified ANYTHING or ANYONE related to blackness. With or without lyrics, Foster's tunes could instantly conjure up an image of blackness for its American audiences, whether that meant blackness as a biological trait or blackness as a social construct. One musical phrase could

instantly evoke everything ever signified by a particular dialect, makeup, costume, class, or aesthetic without trying anything on or even coming into contact with the “real” black body. Thus when blackface makeup became outdated, and Hollywood did not want to employ real black bodies in their films, they could achieve all of these things, and more, with a simple score—a score not even written by a black man. Therefore, it is possible, that one reason that Powell’s tribute exists is to include black culture without ever having to come into contact with it. After all, if it were not for the narrative aspects of the film, would we even know that Powell was paying tribute to someone?

Like the sonic component of Cohan’s engagement with covert minstrelsy, the music in *Honolulu* contributes to a general re-mapping of the Africanist aesthetic onto white bodies under the guise of national unity. Where Cohan swaps out coon lyrics for patriotic ones, Hollywood strips Foster’s music of lyrics altogether. Where Cohan labels his rag a “March”, Hollywood labels the canned medley a “Tribute”. In both cases the show’s musical director rearranges one audible element while keeping the rhythmic composition intact and then gives the score a label that further buries the aesthetic complexity of the work. On Cohan’s stage this masks the score’s use of syncopation, improvisation, and call-and-response. On the Hollywood screen this covers up the soundtrack’s wide-ranging song choice and amalgamates the white voice and the black. This musical medley puts Foster’s voice in dialogue with two African-American voices so that the black and white voice become fused. On a perceptible level this song marks “blackness” as something codifiable. On a subceptual level, this song simultaneously “whitens” Brooks and Milburn’s voices and offers credibility to Foster’s, thereby blurring the line between what constitutes the black experience and what makes up its white narration. The medley’s lack of lyrics opens up a space onto which its audience can project meaning, while the song’s aural

depth collapses into a two dimensional image of Powell in blackface. That is, what one hears as one sees the burnt cork emerge is no longer a fluid notion of aesthetics or race, but instead a flat object. While the music masks what lies beneath, the mask stands in for real (black) flesh.

The placement of this musical medley within the film's overall structure also sets up a distinction between the mainland and the Hawaiian Islands. Immediately following the completion of Powell's solo, the sound of ukuleles fades in. The final note of "Old Black Joe" is the last time we hear anything related to the identity of the mainland. Thus the music itself creates a clear distinction between us and them. The "exotic" Hawaiian melody is a mix of slow and tranquilizing strums of the ukulele and powerful slaps on the drum; these sounds stand in stark contrast to the melancholic and nostalgic songs of the mainland. The Island is where people go for escape. One looks to the past, while the other looks to the future. The music makes it clear that even though Hawaii is a U.S. Territory, it does not belong to the nation. Powell's "Tribute to the Hawaiian Islands" further substantiates this power dynamic.

While I will explore the role of Powell's Hula Dance and Hawaiian Tribute in the next section, I want to note how the musical medley on board the ship actually helps to qualify the medley used in Powell's hula tap dance. Powell demonstrates her ability to capture the essence not only of Robinson, but of blackness as something both quantifiable and predictable. Who, therefore would be more qualified than she to become the brown other? The musical medley in the scene leading up to the star's arrival on the island establishes that tributes make use of a panoply of exotic things. In the case of Powell's tribute to Robinson, it was a medley of black music. In the dance sequences that take place on the Island, the music invokes a medley of all things that Hollywood perceives as "native", "exotic", "relaxing", "powerful", and "American".

The music chosen, “Holo E Pae”, written by Johnny Noble and played by Andy Iona’s Orchestra as well as the “Hawaiian Medley” played by Andy Iona’s Orchestra, and sung by The King’s Men, disagrees with that which is being projected on the screen mainly because tap dance is not Hawaiian; tap dance is American. Yet, if the audience can reconcile sound and image through a “quasi-magical” process as Katherine Kalinak suggests, then tap dance suddenly becomes Hawaiian...*and* Hawaii becomes American. Once again, Powell’s tribute is less about honoring the art and integrity of the “Other” and more about taking ownership of another culture and calling it American.

A Lighter Aesthetic: Robinson, Powell, and Hula-Tap

Applause fills the room as the band starts playing a version of Suwanee River. The camera reveals a slight Eleanor Powell disguised as Bill Robinson; she is dressed in “Bojangles”²¹⁷ standard white shirt, plaid vest, suit jacket, bow tie, white gloves, pleated pants, bowler hat, and suede oxford shoes. (S)he tips her bowler hat, acknowledging the audience, before entering a glossy stage. When she reaches the center of the performance space, a small cubed-shaped podium rises from a trapdoor, providing Powell with a second surface for making sound. As she nods her head, the camera catches a glimpse of the stark contrast created between her white sclera and the thick burnt cork of her face paint. The profuse coat of blackface makeup simultaneously alludes to the color of Robinson’s skin and acts as a gentle reminder that whiteness pervades Hollywood despite the ever-decreasing use of the blackface mask. To have the ability to pay tribute to a black body assumes one’s status as white, not black.

She clicks her toes on the cube, then shuffles left, *click*, shuffles right, *click*. Gradually more cubes of varying height emerge from the floor, forming a five-step staircase that resembles that of Robinson’s. The camera zooms in on Powell’s face: she blinks, revealing long eyelashes and delicate cheekbones. She smiles almost as if flirting with the camera. But in fact, there is more to her gaze than pure flirtation. Buried beneath Powell’s mask sit several layers of meaning, each one contributing to a long theatrical history and disguise of the Other.

While the soundtrack to Eleanor Powell’s “Tribute to Bill Robinson” characterizes a major sonic element demonstrative of the type of covert minstrelsy present in 1930s American cinema, Powell’s dance exemplifies a simultaneously visible and audible account of covert minstrelsy’s corporeal component. In order to understand the full implications of Powell’s dance, I situate

²¹⁷ Robinson never wore white gloves while performing the stair dance.

this number within the context of both a broader theatrical history of tap dance in America as well as within the film's narrative. That is, I focus on how this dance frames and is framed by the film's other dance numbers. This piece is particularly significant because Powell not only re-introduces the use of burnt cork, but crosses Hollywood's line of pre-conceived gender normativity by performing her routine in drag. As she performs this dance on a ship bound for the utopic Hawaiian Islands, Powell waves goodbye to both the American mainland and strict racial and gender binaries. In what follows, I examine the choreography in both Powell's "Tribute to Bill Robinson" as well as her "Tribute to the Hawaiian Islands" in order to illuminate how Hollywood uses movement, costume, and the "tribute" narrative to cover up old ways of seeing the black body, femininity, and geography in exchange for a lighter look, lighter sound, and more idyllic postcard. In choreographing a "Tribute to Bill Robinson" alongside a "Tribute to the Hawaiian Islands," Hollywood writes the codes and behaviors through which national identity can exist on the big screen.

Bill Robinson and the Black Body in Motion

While Robinson did not himself don burnt cork, he and Eggie, his boyhood friend and dance partner, imitated George Primrose whenever Primrose and West came to town. Recall from Chapter One that Primrose and West was one of the most popular duos on the minstrel circuit at this time. Also note the irony involved when two black men start imitating the dancing of Primrose, a white man imitating the (caricatured) dancing of a black man. Eggie mastered the soft-shoe and Robinson, the buck-and-wing.²¹⁸

²¹⁸ Around 1890, Bill Robinson formed a street partnership with some white boy named Al Jolson. Around 1892, Robinson became a pick, or pickaninnie for Mayme Remington, a famous French burlesque dancer who employed as many as fifteen picks per show including Eddie Rector and Toots Davis, to name a few. (Haskins 44).

Between 1909 and 1915 Bill Robinson and friend George Cooper played the Keith and Orpheum circuits (headlined as “Cooper and Robinson”).²¹⁹ By 1912, the two had become very well established in theatre, mainly because of the color of their skin. The public liked the fact that they were “real Ethiopians” (Haskins 83-87).²²⁰ Ultimately one of Robinson’s mishaps with the law (this was a frequent occurrence) led to the demise of “Cooper and Robinson”. Cooper often excused Robinson’s conduct but alas, around 1914, he could no longer tolerate Robinson’s behavior. Without Robinson, Cooper would have to either find another partner or quit.²²¹

The end of Cooper’s career marked the beginning of Bill Robinson’s stint as a solo performer.²²² While Robinson still refused to black up, his sheer entertainment value was enough to keep him performing on the white stage. Along with the split up of “Cooper and Robinson” came Robinson’s second major contribution to representation of the black body on stage.²²³

²¹⁹ Vaudeville was a leading form of American entertainment from the 1880s through the 1920s. The Keith and Orpheum circuits played the leading theatres highlighting white performers in blackface makeup and in special cases, “real” black acts (Williams and Walker and Cooper and Robinson being two of the most famous couples). In 1914, Sherman Dudley established T.O.B.A. (Theatre Owner’s Booking Association or “Tough on Black Asses”) as an all black vaudeville union. (Frank 37) While white vaudeville primarily toured the northern states and the west coast, T.O.B.A performers played the racist southern states and were paid on a much lower pay scale than performers who found work within the white circuits (Frank 38). Additionally artists who toured with T.O.B.A. would have to conform to the racist rules of their patrons, which included entering through the service doors of the venues that booked them. While the establishment of a black vaudeville circuit meant that more people of color could perform on the American stage, it also placed a serious divide between black talent and white. Black performers who graced the white stage were the exception and even those exceptions had stringent rules. At this time the country had a “two-colored” rule, which stated that black people were only allowed to perform on the vaudeville stage in pairs (Haskins 91).

²²⁰ See Appendix B for excerpt from the Denver Tribune regarding this label.

²²¹ Several rumors started after the two performers split up: one story states that the reason Robinson left was because Cooper married a white woman and he was afraid that nobody would book them any longer while the newspapers announced that Cooper had died of cancer (Haskins 93). Whatever the case, that was the last the two men danced together.

²²² Cooper performed in blackface while Robinson refused.

²²³ With the help of theatrical manager Marty Forkins, Robinson became the first black man to perform solo (and without blackface) on the white circuit. In an effort to build up his client’s visibility on the stage, he arranged to have him teach dance to one the choristers of one of Chicago’s top theatres. Thus, in addition to winning the audience over with his solo acts on smaller stages, Robinson made a name for himself with the Marigold Gardens choristers (two of whom were Ruth Etting and Joan Crawford) (Haskins 96) as dance instructor. He worked with these chorus girls for a year and continued performing on small Chicago stages and later other small stages across the Midwest.

Within three years of this split, Robinson had worked his way up to the Keith Circuit becoming the first solo black performer in big time white vaudeville. (Haskins 97)²²⁴

In 1918, Bill Robinson introduced his signature stair dance routine at the Palace Theatre²²⁵ in New York. Robinson was one amongst three total black acts that performed at the Palace: During the First World War Bert Williams, Greenlee and Drayton, and Bill Robinson were the only performers of color to grace its stage. (Haskins 99) According to one story, Robinson caught sight of some friends in the house and so he danced down the four steps that lined the outskirts of stage right and left. He unexpectedly received a round of applause for his moves and so he decided to work the stairs into his solo act. (Stearns and Stearns 179) Finding theatres equipped with stairs was difficult and consequently the stairs did not become a consistent part of Robinson's act until roughly 1924.²²⁶ While many performers might have included stairs in their acts prior to 1918, Bill Robinson's stair routine became so popular that he even tried to secure a U.S. patent on the routine around 1921. His request was denied but soon his name was so tied to the stairs that nobody dared to copy his act.²²⁷

While Robinson did not have a large tap vocabulary, his light-on-you-feet style, happy disposition, and role as "authentic Ethiopian" gave him premiere status on the national stage.

²²⁴ Robinson gained more exposure when he started performing for the troops in 1917 when the States' entered World War I. Over the next year, Robinson continued to entertain both black and white troops regardless of how he was treated. He accepted the poor treatment he received in return in the name of patriotism and in exchange for stage time and public recognition.

²²⁵ The Palace Theatre was one of the Keith Circuit's major venues. Haskins writes of it as the, "undisputed crown jewel of vaudeville theatres (one at which few black performers appeared, and certainly not as singles)" (99).

²²⁶ Some contention exists among tap historians and the origins of this stair dance. King Rastus Brown claims that he was utilizing stairs long before Robinson. Haskins notes that some vaudeville historians credit Al Leach and his Rosebuds as being the first to use stairs, while others cite the Whitney Brothers as the originators at Hyde Behman's theatre in 1899. He also notes that Mack and Williams had three versions of a stair dance in 1915 and that Paul Morton and his wife Naomi Glass did a stair routine around the same year. (Haskins 100)

²²⁷ According to Haskins' account of this routine, a dancer by the name of Fred Stone borrowed the stair routine idea and sent Robinson a check for \$1500 along with an apology for impinging on his territory. (Haskins 101)

In addition to his famous stair routine, Robinson had a collection of signature steps he could execute better than any of his contemporaries.²²⁸ Stearns and Stearns write, “Robinson might use ...a cross-over tap which looked like a jig; hands on hip, one arm extended, with eyes blinking, head shaking, and derby cocked; or a tap to the melody of a tune such as ‘Parade of the Wooden Soldiers’; or a broken-legged or old man’s dance, one leg short and wobbling with the beat; or an exit step, tapping with a Chaplainesque waddle (Stearns and Stearns 187). As was the case with Bert Williams, white American audiences were drawn to Robinson’s unique black dancing body for several reasons: Robinson managed to fulfill the white ideal of black body as entertainer, black dancer as safe, black soul as happy, and black presence as pliable. In other words, Robinson performed *as* a black body *for* the white nation. Yet the inherent irony in all of this is that in order to be accepted by the white nation, Robinson could not be too “primitive”. A fine line existed for those black performers wishing to be different and interesting, but not so different that they scared their audiences. At the same time, however, those wishing to portray the black body had to signify primitivism and a slew of other derogatory stereotypes just in order to be seen as truly imitating the black body. In the next section I will show how Powell’s tribute to Robinson played up certain “Negro” caricatures to a greater degree than Robinson would have ever been willing to embody. While his physical body appeared to be black, he was known to dance as lightly as an Irishman. He made no “primitive” Africanisms visible to the naked eye yet he was “real” enough to avoid having to use the blackface mask. His lack of makeup and perpetual smile assured his audiences that he was both of African origins *and* happy. Robinson’s performing body found the perfect balance. Robinson’s gaze gestured at subservience while

²²⁸ His bag of tricks included a signature skating step to stop-time, a scoot step, a jig-like crossover step, and a special Bojangles’ Time Step.

hinting at forgiveness; his black face alluded to the fact that America still owned the black body, while reminding its spectators that slavery was a thing of the past.²²⁹

While Bert Williams was the first black actor to really succeed on the vaudeville stage as a result of both his talent and willingness to subscribe to a certain white notion of what it meant to be black at a particular moment in America, Robinson was the first black man to “make it” on Broadway for many of the same reasons.²³⁰ In May 1928, Robinson joined the (all black) cast of *Blackbirds*. This show is significant for several reasons: it marked the first time that Robinson would work alongside his ex-vaudeville partner, George Cooper, since their split-up. While the show still included a large number of gross caricatures (e.g. children eating watermelon) referencing the black body, this show “discovered” Robinson and Earl “Snakehips” Tucker on a main stage.²³¹ I highlight this show because one can attribute the show’s success largely to Robinson’s dancing in the second act, which according to reviews, “electrified” the production. (Haskins 187) Robinson introduced his famous routine, “Doin’ the New Lowdown”, where he tapped up and down five steps. While programs and advertisements for the show continued to represent the black body as a series of stereotypes, this was the first show where white journalists began talking about Robinson’s dancing without the highly critical minstrel narrative.²³² While

²²⁹ See Appendix B for Newspaper excerpts making such implications.

²³⁰ After Bert Williams died in 1922, several newspapers wrote articles claiming that Bill Robinson was Bert Williams’ successor. See pp. 134-136 in Haskins’ “Below the Headlines” for excerpts from the *Omaha* and *Los Angeles Daily Times*.

²³¹ One notable artistic choice was when Lew Leslie staged a tribute to DuBose Heyward in the first act finale. Taking a cue from his 1925 novel, *Porgy*, *Blackbirds* featured “a huge black screen on which were reflected the magnified shadows of the performers” (Haskins 187). A similar stage effect can be seen in the Gershwin Opera *Porgy and Bess* several years later. This effect continues to be used in Hollywood films of the 1930s, including Fred Astaire’s “Bojangles of Harlem” routine in the 1936 film *Swing Time*. In this “tribute to Bill Robinson”, Hermes Pan and Fred Astaire re-create the effect of black shadows on a large screen behind Astaire’s dancing. It is also important to note that although this film titles Astaire’s routine “Bojangles of Harlem”, it is really a tribute to Astaire’s mentor and friend, John Bubbles, who also happened to play the role of Sportin’ Life in *Porgy and Bess*, further evidencing the genealogy of this stage direction/effect.

²³² Richard Watts for the *Herald Tribune* remarked, “This veteran tap dancer is one of the great artists of the modern stage and is worth in his unostentatious way several dozen of the Mary Wigmans, Charles Weidmans, Martha Grahams...who are more pompous in their determination to be Artists” (qtd. In Stearns and Stearns 183).

not all of his shows were a success, Robinson was widely known and performed frequently on stage and screen.²³³

While Robinson never donned burnt cork himself, most of the films in which he danced included instances of black-on-white minstrelsy.²³⁴ In 1938, Twentieth Century Fox revoked his contract due to the decline in popularity and thus need for black performers.²³⁵ With the exception of the 1943 film, *Stormy Weather*²³⁶ and the 1945 Broadway show *Memphis Bound*,²³⁷ Robinson spent the rest of his career (and life) performing on smaller stages and invisible platforms such as radio.²³⁸

²³³ Marshall and Jean Stearns attribute the success of ballet-heavy musicals like *On Your Toes* and *Oklahoma* to the decline of black revues; Balanchine had a major pull on the Broadway stage. As Haskins notes, by 1933, “‘colored revues on Broadway’ were a thing of the past” (Haskins 199).

²³⁴ Robinson made his first film debut in 1930 with RKO’s *Dixiana* where he did a “specialty number” within an all white film (Haskins 205). In 1933 Robinson starred in the first-ever all black film, *Harlem is Heaven*. Neither of these films did anything significant for his career but at least he was working during the Great Depression. Robinson’s name was too big for vaudeville circuit and Broadway had outgrown black revues. Revues became his primary performance platform and until 1934 he played all the big theatres on the RKO-Orpheum circuit. He called his travelling show *Hot from Harlem* for the first year of the run and then changed the name to *Goin’ to Town*. This was due to the rising violence and poverty that had become Harlem during the Depression. The name change separated Robinson’s work from what had turned into a slum or sorts. (Haskins 210)

²³⁵ Bill Robinson consequently signed with a new Cotton Club Parade, followed by a new Broadway take on Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Mikado*, called *The Hot Mikado* in 1939. This performance was part of the 1939 World’s Fair in New York City and was one of his greatest successes on the national stage. *The Hot Mikado*, which was inspired by the recent *Swing Mikado* produced by the Federal Theatre Project, marked a major transition in Bill Robinson’s career and the life of tap dance on the Hollywood screen. (Manning 116). With the close of *The Hot Mikado* came the demise of the Cotton Club, along with public interest in the black image. As the fear of communists increased towards the end of the decade, America offered even less tolerance for artists, intellectuals, people of color, and others whom they perceived to be of a communist mindset. The WPA Federal Theatre Project died, and along with it, so much of the entertainment that had defined the 1930s. All black productions ceased to exist and the roles for black performers became few and far between; only a handful of roles existed for black people and those were subservient roles in otherwise white productions. Bill Robinson was among the few black entertainers to receive roles throughout the 1940s, yet, the changing aesthetic also meant changing the means by which Robinson could deliver his sonic gift to the nation. While radio was as difficult to break into for black performers as early vaudeville, it was an artistic medium that could be communicated without image. That is, the invisibility of the form made it a “safe” space for black bodies to share music, whether pedal, vocal, or instrumental. Radio broadcast became Robinson’s new vaudeville stage. Though most of the nation would never see his face after the 1939 World’s Fair, they could still hear the sounds of his taps and receive the humor of his one-liners and short stories. For a list of some of these one-liners, see Haskins chapter “The Hot Mikado,” pp. 268-269.

²³⁶ Although the show had a phenomenal all black cast (Lena Horne, The Nicholas Brothers, Bill Robinson, Cab Calloway and his Orchestra, and many others), the reviews were poor since the public loved the only other major all-black production to hit theatres, *Cabin in the Sky*, and consequently compared the two shows.

²³⁷ This show was a takeoff on Gilbert and Sullivan’s *H.M. S. Pinafore*. Robinson received excellent reviews but the show was ultimately a bust. (Haskins 293)

²³⁸ Paul Young remarks on the similarities between radio and cinema: “Broadcasting itself emulated classical cinema’s appeal to undivided attention by constructing a theatrical discourse of intimacy, and implementing it in an eminently cinematic way, by constructing stars and cultivating fan culture” (Young 79).

Radio's invisible audibility provided new opportunities for consumption. When Robinson performed on Hollywood's stage, his visibility as a black body was inescapable for audiences. To *see* Robinson perform was also to see his blackness; to hear Robinson perform, though, was to ignore the color of his skin. The radio disrupted film's social signifiers: "With its impartial distribution of authority to any and every voice, 'radio's ability to escape visual over-determination had the potential to set off a virtual riot of social signifiers'" (qtd. in Young 81). Thus radio gave bodies whose voice had previously been compromised through the film medium an opportunity to re-figure the American imagination. Much like the sound technology that pervaded Cohan's era, the radio's ability to cut off sound from image, allowed for racially untarnished *viewing*. In this way, technology made the invisible body a race-less one and in so doing helped transition American audiences into seeing old sounds in a new light.²³⁹

Although Hollywood films demonstrated a decline in interest with the black image, Shirley Temple films in the mid-1930s occurred with a period of piqued interest in films that included tap dance numbers performed by white bodies. Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, and Eleanor Powell, became, to name a few, the new faces (and bodies) of tap dance. After doing a picture for Paramount and one for Twentieth Century Fox, MGM persuaded Powell to sign with them; Powell became one of MGM's leading ladies from the mid 1930s until about 1943. What these three leading white tap dancers—and several others not mentioned here—had in common besides the color of their skin and Hollywood stardom were their capacity to heal those affected by America's Depression-stricken economy and an ability to distract the nation from the

²³⁹ Robinson was a charitable man; his dancing made him four million dollars and yet he died penniless (Haskins 23). Part of this was engrained in his copacetic attitude—that everything would be okay if he danced when he could and gave all he had, everything would work out in the end.

frightening reality of failing banks, labor strikes,²⁴⁰ and the draught-spawned Dust Bowl.²⁴¹

While Astaire and Powell had received extensive training from members of the black dance community, most Americans preferred to see the same styles executed by white bodies. While these dancers would occasionally reference the talents of their mentors (e.g. John Bubbles in Astaire's "Bojangles of Harlem" (*Swing Time*) and Robinson in Powell's Tribute in *Honolulu*), the image of the black body did not placate economic anxiety in the same way these white bodies *projected* some American "ideal" on(to) the screen. I turn now to a description and analysis of what exactly comprised this utopic image and how sound lent itself to tap's changing aesthetic in the 1930s.

Although Powell held a remarkable reputation as a tap dancer, having her pay "tribute" to Bill Robinson as the second major dance sequence in *Honolulu* helped Hollywood shift a presumed association between tap dance and the black male body to that of an "American" dance form and the slim, white, female body. Furthermore, such a narrative conveyed a broader message of national identity as it concerned public image and power. Though women were never explicitly banned from performing tap, it was rare to see a female tap soloist. Of the handful of female tap soloists, most were African American, and many performed in drag. By the 1930s white female tap soloists became more popular, especially on the big screen, due in part to the popularity of tap dance in America, a Deco-inspired²⁴² obsession with the female body, and Hollywood's declining interest in the black body.²⁴³

²⁴⁰ For more on these labor strikes see Howard Zinn's chapter "Self-Help in Hard Times" in *A People's History*.

²⁴¹ The Dust Bowl, or Dirty Thirties, was a period of extreme dust storms in the 1930s that spread across the prairies of the United States and Canada as a result of farmers' insufficient knowledge of the Plains' ecology. Some "black blizzards" (as these dust storms were called) travelled as far East as New York City. See Bonnfield's *Dust Bowl: Men, Dirt and Depression* (1979).

²⁴² The Art Deco period celebrated the slim and slightly androgynous female figure. According to Katharine McClinton, we can examine Art Deco from two angles: "On the one hand, there was the 'masculine' geometric pole in which 'curves gave way to angularity and motifs of design tended to be more dynamic.' On the other hand, there was the 'feminine' curvilinear mode that

By asking Powell to perform Robinson's famous stair dance in the context of a "tribute", Hollywood expresses a desire to "authenticate" Powell's performance as a white female tap dancer. Recall that by 1936, MGM began limiting the quantity and types of roles given to Robinson; Robinson's final contract with the studio was signed in 1938. *Honolulu* premiered one year later, perhaps as an attempt to naturalize Robinson's disappearance.²⁴⁴ Whoever replaced Robinson would have to prove him/herself to be more talented than the famous Bojangles... so who better to fill his shoes than one of his protégés, a dancer who could do all that Robinson could do, and more?

Eleanor Powell and the White Female Body

Eleanor Powell's dance on board the ship bound for Honolulu exemplifies the style of tap dancing that had become popular on the Hollywood screen in the 1930s. For example, taking up space did not faze Powell: in *Honolulu* she performs in the round, utilizing all dimensions of her body as well as the vertical and horizontal planes. Since Astaire and Hermes Pan's recent (1934) discovery that a dancing camera opens up new possibilities for filming the body in motion, Hollywood had been obsessed with dances that moved through and around space.²⁴⁵ Powell's sound is light, the mood whimsical. She wears a flowing form-fitting dress that falls to the mid-shin. Her shoes are white, more substantial than the heels worn by choristers throughout the first three decades of the Twentieth Century, but still very different than the Oxford flat tap shoes

avored such sentimental imagery 'rose[s],...garlands and baskets of flowers, fountains and jets of water, doves, female deer and nudes' (qtd. in Fischer 298). Eleanor Powell exhibited the slim-hipped female ideal of this period.

²⁴³ In 1935, Jeni LeGon became the first black woman to sign a contract with MGM.

²⁴⁴ For if MGM wanted to pay tribute to the talented tap dancer, then it could not have possibly been responsible for his disappearance from the industry.

²⁴⁵ *The Gay Divorcee* (1934) was the first film where Astaire and Pan explored this new technique of using the camera across the screen to film dance rather than coming straight down the middle. This was different than the Busby Berkley technique and changed dance for camera forever. See John Franceschina's *Hermes Pan* pp. 55-57.

worn by men at this time. These shoes allow her more pliability and offer a stronger sound than the higher-heeled, lighter-weight shoes worn by many of her contemporaries. Despite the fact that much of her lower body form—loose legs, heavy feet, stationary hips—exhibits similarities to the technique taught and executed by male tap dancers, her upper body carriage and style remains visibly feminine and the coy nature of her character in this scene is in line with a 1930s attitude of what it means to be a woman; Powell is goofy, playful, and utterly feminine.

Her *ballon*, suspension, and effortless turns evidence her ballet training, while the firm command of her feet, weighted rhythms, and ability to switch her center of gravity into her hips almost immediately following a sustained *soutenu*, demonstrate that she has also spent a great deal of time hoofing with the men. This dance, while showcasing Powell's impressive breadth of vocabulary, remains humble with regards to rhythmic choices, giving Powell an opportunity to prioritize the visual spectacle of “flash”²⁴⁶ dancing over the routine's aural components. That is, the camera helps to direct the audience's focus onto Powell's (very feminine) body and visible skill set as well as her very precise and intentional use of facial expressions and hand gestures.

This performance stands in stark contrast to the choreography, costume, and camera work in her two succeeding tributes by establishing a clear distinction between the feminine and the masculine in tap dance and defining white tap dance as something distinct so it may later be differentiated from black dance (i.e. in the “Tribute to Bill Robinson”) and brown dance (i.e. in the “Tribute to the Hawaiian Islands”). The dance that Powell performs on the ship's main deck reinforces a set of social norms regarding the performance of gender, race, and tap dance.

However, when juxtaposed with Powell's “Tribute to Bill Robinson”, it helps transition viewers

²⁴⁶ “Flash” here refers to a style of tap dance that was popular in the late teens, ‘20s, and 30s. It included “flashy” acrobatic steps like Over the Top and Through the Trenches, steps that were influenced by World War I and ways of moving through the battlefield. See Stearns and Stearns *Jazz Dance* and Constance Valis Hill's *Brotherhood in Rhythm* for more on Flash Dance.

into a 1940s way of seeing the white female body, and requires its audience to re-think the role of tap dance in relation to national identity.

In “Choreographies of Gender,” Foster contends that if one views gender as a performance (as the post-essentialist thinkers do), then one should also be able to resist and re-think routinized behavior. This requires understanding the dynamics at play between categories of race, gender, and sex that impact the behavior, or performance of one another. (Foster “Gender” 3) In the film’s first big dance sequence, Powell can tap dance in a more masculine style so long as she maintains a feminine appearance while doing so; this includes a specific set of costume, movement, and sound choices, as well as a list of facial expressions and defined angles at which her body must be shot. By the end of the number, Powell has established herself as a good female tap dancer, capable of using her space, some unique props, and staying in character .

From about 1919 through the mid-1930s, black men ruled the tap dance stage. One reason for this might be understood in terms of David Levering Lewis’ explanation for the Harlem Renaissance; he understands it to have evolved out of a “rigidly segregated United States.”

Houston Baker explains Lewis’ theory as follows:

...Afro-Americans turned to art during the twenties precisely because there was no conceivable chance of their assuming *patria*—or anything else in white America. Art seemed to offer the *only* means of advancement because it was the only area in America—from an Afro-American perspective—where the color line had not been drawn...Afro-Americans adopted the arts as a domain of hope and an arena of possible progress. (Baker 11).

However, the production and popularity of black art waned around 1929 as The Great Depression set in, the Harlem Renaissance slowed, and crime became more prevalent within many of the nation’s black neighborhoods.²⁴⁷ Lewis posits that the 1935 riot in Harlem exemplified the Renaissance’s failure; he labels the strivings of African American artists

²⁴⁷ See Houston Baker’s *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (pp. 11-13).

“delusional” because he insists that the members of the “talented tenth” believed they could uplift the entire race by “maximizing the exceptional” (11-12) when in fact the stringent economic and social restrictions (white) America placed on black “citizens” were immutable and thus any attempt to alter the economic and/or social status of black people would be futile. While artists and writers in the black community continued to speak out, this sudden shift in racial barriers had, once again, invisibilized their voices.²⁴⁸ It was not long before this perfect storm of events had resounding effects on the ways in which America treated its black citizens.²⁴⁹ With an escalating fear of the black body—in part due to its association with rioting and crime—and consequent decline in the popularity of the black image, Hollywood began employing a number of white dancers who had been trained by the black tap masters. Astaire marked a prime example in this shift from black to white, but not until Powell’s debut on the big screen did America see women as capable of executing the same rhythmic rigor as their male contemporaries. Powell’s success at replicating Robinson’s stair dance in the Second Act of *Honolulu* helped sanction in a new era of white female tap soloists. If Powell could perform her highly skilled yet visually gratifying and feminine tap dance on board the ship *and* the rhythmic complexity of Robinson’s stair dance, then America might perceive her as possessing more talent than her black male counterpart; Eleanor Powell could dance *as* a man, *like* a woman.

Within the first eight bars of choreography, Powell’s “tribute” distinguishes itself from her last routine on the ship’s deck for several reasons: for one, and as already discussed, she is dressed like a man—a black man—complete with burnt cork makeup and a man’s suit. Second, her use of space is primarily vertical—accentuated by the use of a five level staircase—and

²⁴⁸ For a good example of the kind of work that prominent black writers produced during this time, see Langston Hughes’ poem, “Let America Be America Again”. Full text can be found in Zinn pp. 404-405.

²⁴⁹ Only radicals (e.g. Trotskyists, Communists, and Socialists) made any attempt to fight these conditions.

contained; she takes up no more space than is absolutely necessary for producing certain sounds. This stands in complete contrast to her use of space in the first dance, possibly offering her viewers a subversive message about the black body. That is, the white body has command over the space in a way that the black body does not. Though it could just as easily comment on Bill Robinson's upright and minimalist style characteristic of a certain "cool" aesthetic.

The visible parts of Powell's interpretation of Robinson's stair dance offer more exaggeration than replication. While she captures the essence of his "light-on-your-feet" style, her gestures are more pronounced than anything ever gesticulated by Robinson. Within the first minute of choreography, Powell places her hands on the waist of her trousers, and continues to hold the fabric in suspension as she glances down at her feet. While Robinson on occasion pulled his trouser fabric out of the way, such a gesture served a utilitarian function; he had to ensure that nothing got in the way of his sounds. Still, such a movement lasted only a split second. Something similar happens when Powell places her hands on her stomach or in her pockets. My research has yielded no filmed performances of Robinson using such gestures/movements. I would like to read Powell's very intentional exaggeration as serving two purposes: all three of these movement choices signify insouciance, characteristic of Robinson's attitude. He not only tended to play things "cool," but was known for his, "Everything will be, everything will be, copacetic" adage. The exaggerated gestures therefore served a narrative function for Powell.

Yet in addition to serving a narrative purpose, such a decision likely served the practical function of drawing her audience's attention towards her visible dance rather than to her performance's sonic dimensions. Robinson was known for his clarity and speed and all surviving footage of him doing his stair dance shows that about a third of the way through his choreography, the tempo would speed up about five-ten percent. By the time he got to the last

quarter of the dance, the musicians often stopped playing in order to allow Robinson the opportunity to speed the tempo up as much as forty percent from the original speed. At the same time, the last third of his dance was usually full of more intricate rhythms and even more taps per measure of music. Powell's tempo never speeds up, and at times, it actually slows down in order to allow her more time to exaggerate her visible motion. In other words, she relied on the visual to mask the fact that she could not, or at least chose not, to execute as many beats per second as her honoree. Like the sonic relationship between Robinson and Temple, "*...the aural emerges as that which is given in its fullest possibility by the visual: you hear...most clearly in seeing...*" In keeping with covert minstrelsy's ability to use one phenomenological experience to distract from another, Powell's lack of sound is invisibilized by the parts of her performance that are highly visible; her makeup and facial expressions aided in the efficacy of such spectacle as well.

Her facial expressions and movements are slight: she either directs her gaze straight in front of her, or intentionally diverts her eyes to the audience with a precise turn of the head. While her face remains motionless, due to the exaggerated lips that she has painted on herself, it appears that she smiles throughout the duration of the dance. Only when the camera zooms in for a close-up can one see the static nature of her painted lips and the shocking glazed over look that results from the outline of the thick white makeup she has used to accentuate her eyes. While she dances with the set, acrobatics and turns are not the focus of this dance. In true Bojangles manner, the rhythm is paramount to the movement. That is, while the staircase is a nice gimmick, its primary function is to provide the feet and hands with yet another dance surface on which to produce sound; its material, height, and weight diversify the list of possible dynamics her body can produce: *hollow; muted; high*. Powell-as-Robinson does not assert her relationship with the camera through coy expressions or flirtatious gestures. Instead she uses her whiteness,

signified by her ability to dance in blackface, as well as her role on the ship as being one of passenger rather than servant, as means of establishing her power on the screen. That is to say, Powell gains acceptance from her white audience (and nation) insofar as she can demonstrate her ability to dance *like* a black man but *as* a white woman. The mystery of what lies behind the mask (i.e. elegance, whiteness, female-ness) is confirmed by the irony of what presents itself visibly (i.e. rhythmic precision, blackness, masculinity).

Behind the label of “tribute” resides the fact of what it means to be black in America at this moment in time as well as the fiction that American entertainment has moved beyond negative “Negro” caricatures. One concrete example can be seen in the very literal translation of some of Powell’s movements that gesture at everything from black man qua servant to black man qua animal...*hands offer a serving platter; head jerks back and forth like a wild turkey*. This dance pretends to make the tap dance stage of the 1930’s Hollywood screen one of community when, in fact, it portends a new chapter in the art of covering up racist caricature. For the tribute is never neutral; it is self-reflective and race fulfilling.

When one carefully compares Robinson’s original routine to that which Powell performs in *Honolulu*, one sees several differences. Earlier I alluded to the fact that even though Powell attempted to recreate Robinson’s famous stair dance, she managed to choreograph a dance significantly more caricatured than Robinson’s. This surfaces most visibly in two striking gestures: at one point when Powell dances down the staircase, she holds her palms out as if offering a serving platter, insinuating that servitude, or at least the role of servant, is an important part of Robinson’s person. Granted, Robinson often played the part of a butler in Hollywood films of the 1930s, but his servitude was not intrinsic to his being, but instead a persona Hollywood assigned to him. At two points in the dance, Powell jerks her head back and forth in

a manner akin to a walking wild turkey; this is not a signature move of Robinson's. Thus if we take Powell's choreography to be a signifier of Robinson's person (signified), then what are we to make of such gestures? Whether conscious or not, Powell's choreography appears—albeit invisibly to the general public—to pay tribute to more than Robinson the dancer.

This argument is further substantiated by the fact that as much as Powell might have been trying to look *like* Robinson, her use of burnt cork undermines the essence of Robinson's character. Recall that Robinson absolutely refused to perform in burnt cork. Could Powell not perform his signature stair dance without the use of burnt cork? Without drag? To pay tribute to someone generally implies that the one paying tribute capture the strengths and gifts—the legacy—of the one to which he/she pays tribute. If Powell could replicate Robinson's dancing with appropriate similitude, she likely would not have needed to look like him. So perhaps her blacking up was a way of disguising something else.

If one carefully analyzes the sonic elements of her stair dance in relation to Robinson's, one will notice that rhythmically, Powell's piece is significantly less complex than that of Robinson's. In certain parts, Bojangles' dance includes almost twice as many audible beats as Powell's. Not to mention, the way that Robinson uses space is completely different than the manner in which Powell moves about the stage. This is not to say that Powell was not an extremely skilled performer in her own right, nor is this to say that one needs to perfectly replicate her master in order to pay tribute. What I do hope to suggest is that this "tribute" was in fact more variation than replication, especially when one considers the song choice for this routine in addition to her makeup, costume, and choreography. In the fashion of covert minstrelsy, each one of these layers disguises the reality of the other and the result is a dancing body which signifies a caricatured black body more than it makes Bill Robinson its signified.

Everything from the sound to the spectacle in this number references something outside of the film's plot. This technique allows *Honolulu's* audience to forget the present moment and recall past representation. Aurally this tribute transports viewers to a time when owning a slave plantation was not only acceptable, but common; it achieves this by offering tunes like "Swanee River" and "Old Black Joe". It visually references a time when performing in blackface was not only common, but the norm; Powell's use of burnt cork and other minstrel caricatures portrayed through her gaze and gestures implicate, corporeally, the famed black tap dancer, Bill Robinson (and all black entertainers), who have offered America many artistic gifts, but also supposedly "tarnished" the image of America in the face of other nations. Powell's white body performing "blackness" demonstrates that Robinson and other black entertainers' moments in the spotlight have faded. Now the white female body will represent the nation on screen.

Camera technology opens up possibilities for covert minstrelsy to which Cohan's live stage productions did not have access. Besides the invisibility of canned music and its infinite potential to refer to many sources simultaneously, the show as a whole benefited from its lack of liveness. While Cohan was forced to work within the confines of a live stage production, Hollywood had the luxury of editing and re-editing, masking, and further masking. While lighting and backstage access provide some space for obscuring process,—i.e. lights can fade, actors can exit— a camera has the ability to power on and off, cut out, delete, block, and focus. Unlike live theatre, the camera can tell its audience where and on what to focus. Cohan's engagement with covert minstrelsy on stage depended on his use of aural, visual, and corporeal distraction in *real* time and then relied on labels and simple sound technology to alter audience members' memory of what it is they experienced live. In other words, Cohan's success with covert minstrelsy resulted over time and was partially the result of chance. Film technology,

however, made it possible for the audience to experience everything in *reel* time. That is, the camera made it possible to project a story that was fully realized before audience members even entered the theatre. The camera made it possible to direct audience gaze towards a specific image and dub in only the sounds its directors desired. This meant that image and sound need not be in synch, nor even be logical. More than creating a distraction for its viewers, the various elements involved in covert minstrelsy of the screen could work together to make new symbolic relationships. In addition to changing pre-established pairings between sight and sound, Hollywood could also challenge, uphold, and create new semiotics of race, gender, and nationality. One way *Honolulu* accomplished this epistemological shift was by citing the relation differently-raced bodies had held to tap dance in American cinema. Making “internal” references, Hollywood could find validation in its own already re-written version of history.

Through technology, for example, Powell’s tribute could allude to how far camera work had come over the last decade. Powell’s stair dance quotes Fred Astaire and Hermes Pan’s use of Bojangles’ shadow in *Swing Time*’s own (1936) rendition²⁵⁰ of a tribute to Bill Robinson by replicating the way in which the still camera captured Astaire’s shadow. In both Astaire and Powell’s tributes to Bill Robinson, the dancer’s big black silhouette provides a two-dimensional backdrop against which his/her three-dimensional image may be filmed. Whether or not

Honolulu’s technology²⁵¹ was the same as that used in *Swing Time*, the reference to Astaire’s

²⁵⁰ Two things should be noted here. First, one might view this tribute as an excuse to perform blackface. Astaire does a similar thing in the 1936 film, *Swing Time*. Here he “pays tribute” to both Robinson and John Bubbles. While cloaked in John Bubbles’ costume from *Porgy and Bess* (he played the role of Sportin’ Life, the drug peddler) he dances a Robinson-esque buck and wing in blackface make-up. The second thing that should be noted is that Eleanor Powell often performed in a top hat and tails. Though she maintained a barelegged leotard look with heels, she retained a more “boyish” look throughout the 1940s. This could be attributed to changing fashions in the 1940s, or it could say something about her overall inclination towards cross-dressing.

²⁵¹ According to John Franceschina, the shadow dance portion of “Bojangles of Harlem” was a last minute addition that delayed the projected shooting schedule of *Swing Time* by nine full days. The story is relayed as follows: “Hermes got the idea while he and Hal Borne were on the sound stage waiting for Astaire to arrive for rehearsal. He noticed three lights at the top of the stage that cast three shadows as he moved around. The idea amused him so when Astaire arrived he pointed to the shadows suggesting...If it could be done, it will be interesting. You could dance with your shadows...Vernon Walker, RKO camera-effects specialist, specialist, jumped on board immediately. ‘All you do is get Astaire in front of a screen and photograph his shadow first. Then we take those shadows and make a split screen, and then we photograph Astaire doing the same routine in

tribute within Powell's tribute draws attention to new modes of projection, both technologically on the screen, and psychologically onto the white body. Furthermore, calling upon a previous Hollywood tribute that was performed by one of Hollywood's leading men helps to legitimize Powell's act, both choreographically, in terms of gender, and as it regards the manner in which Hollywood reconciles blackface in the middle of the twentieth century. In other words, performing in blackface as part of a minstrel show is outdated, disrespectful, and politically incorrect. Performing in blackface as part of a tribute, however, is en vogue, honorable, and one hundred percent justifiable. Furthermore, recall from my performance analysis in the *Mis-en-scène*, that all of the actors attending the ship's costume ball make reference to American entertainers and entertainment of the last half century. For example, Douglas McPhail impersonating the up-and-coming Bing Crosby or The Four King's Men disguised as the Marx Brothers. Embedding Powell's tribute within this costume ball full of references, helps justify Powell's "costume" within the context of a tribute. That is, one must dress *as* the person to whom he or she refers because tributes seem to rely on visible similitude and sonic semblance.

Inasmuch as this tactic overtly flaunts the triumphs of American art and science viz. a viz. the cinema, this subtle gesture also hints at the potentially inescapable fact that no matter how good these white dancers (e.g. Astaire, Powell) are, they will always be dancing in Robinson's (black) shadow. For both blackness and blackface have cast shadows on the ways in which the public perceives tap dance; its association to the black body, whether real or fictitious, will always compromise the art form's ability to capture national representation without a racialized subtext.

Powell's performance simultaneously reiterates social codes while attempting to challenge them. One can view this disparity (i.e. reiterating versus challenging) in terms of Foster's

front of them'...Hermes Pan never ignored the opportunity to mention afterward that 'Bojangles of Harlem' is one of the few musical clips in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City" (Franceschina 80-81)".

distinction between choreography and performance. “Choreography,” then, manifests in Powell’s first (very feminine) dance on the ship’s deck and in Robinson’s Stair dance. The first makes a statement about the “codes and conventions” typical of 1930s American culture as they pertain to ideas of femininity. The second (Robinson’s choreography executed by a white woman in blackface) speaks to the values and limitations America had prescribed for black male entertainers in the ‘20s and ‘30s. Robinson can share the white stage and refrain from using burnt cork, but his movement choices are heavily influenced by the roles black men were allowed to play on the early twentieth century stage and screen (e.g. black man as servant, black man as animalistic). Furthermore, Robinson’s facial expressions and gaze reiterate nineteenth century caricatures and confirm the idea that the black man is meant to perform *for* the white. Thus Powell and Robinson’s choreographies offer a framework for understanding the social codes present at the time *Honolulu* is made.²⁵²

At the same time, however, the performance’s narrative (i.e. the film as a whole and specifically the “tribute” thread throughout) asks viewers to rethink representation of the black body. The unspoken social norm at the time *Honolulu* was conceived was that the use of burnt cork was outdated. Powell’s tribute speculates that blackface is acceptable in the context of a tribute. Tribute minstrelsy is thus the act of one using the “tribute” label in conjunction with burnt cork and various “Negro” stereotypes and convincing the audience that the makeup merely acknowledges a historical moment. Here the mask is part of the choreography; the narrative that MGM tells, however, is specific to this particular performance. Yet the on-screen validation that movie-goers experience (e.g. the applause on screen that follows Powell’s tribute, a happy care-free atmosphere captured by great big smiles from performer and audience member alike, and

²⁵² I read Powell’s tribute as an isolated “performance” that engages with her own signature choreography as well as Robinson’s famous style and steps. The performance as a whole rethinks Powell’s gender and race in terms of what they can offer tap dance.

Powell's "safe" and "beautiful" body, to name a few) only encourages the ethical soundness and viability of blackface. Furthermore, like Stephen Foster's folk music, Powell's engagement in traditions of old reminds her nostalgic audience of happy times past. Through this specific performance, Powell re-frames blackface performance as glamorous precisely through her white, highly feminine, appealing body, carving out a space for women on the tap stage.

Performing this routine in blackface and drag allows Powell to be seen in a new light. Performing this dance as a black man "authenticates" her steps and allows her audience to hear her tap dancing for what it is rhythmically, free from the visual distractions of watching a white, feminine body perform. Performing this dance as a "tribute" paradoxically creates distance between herself and the "real" black body while, at the same time, diminishing the space that prevents her, as a female dancer, from being taken seriously on the tap dance stage. Nothing about Powell's tribute number resembles the choreography of the first number, not from a visual perspective, nor from an aural one. But each movement and every sound executed by Powell in the first dance affects the meaning of her second routine. Only when one views these two dances side by side do the dynamics of gender and race as performance become clear.

Powell's "Tribute" to Bill Robinson waves goodbye to the black male body—which for the last twenty years has dominated the tap dance stage—and welcomes the white female body to take its place. The ship (on which Powell dances the tribute to Robinson) that leaves the mainland and heads for the "exotic" Hawaiian Islands mirrors this corporeal gesture. These two moving vessels—i.e. Powell's white female body and the ship bound for Honolulu—stand in for the film's overarching message regarding American national identity: if America can incorporate an Africanist aesthetic into the national narrative and "clean up" any remaining trace of blackness, it can just as easily annex Hawaii and capitalize on its "native" culture.

Natives and Nationals

*“Ladies and gentleman, for our first presentation, Miss Dorothy March, as a tribute to the islands, will do a native drum dance, a hula, and her version of a native dance done with taps...”*²⁵³ As the announcer finishes, the Fiesta Club’s revolving stage slowly rotates, replacing the all-white mainlander band with a group of darker-skinned drummers. Whether they themselves are native to the island, no one knows, but their music proves more convincing than the performance of sixteen barefooted-white women who then briskly enter the performance space. With grass skirts and leis, these “Hawaiian Natives” shake their hips swiftly from side to side, emphasizing the drums’ downbeats. Their arms gracefully skim the air and their heads offer nods on every fourth note. What begins as a simple horizontal line of “hula” dancers upstage rapidly dissolves into a complex—almost Busby Berkeley-like—spatial pattern of lines, cubes, circles, and snakes. Such spatial geometry heralds the inclusion of typical MGM choreography; the women incorporate thigh slaps, dancing more of an Astaire/Rogers patty cake than an “authentic” hula. The camera cuts to center stage where Eleanor Powell (Miss Dorothy March) shows off her virtuosic feet with a fast and syncopated step touch pattern. With hands flexed, she complements her own footwork demonstrating a contemporary *por de bras*, something that today we would see as resembling a combination of voguing and breaking. The barrel turn *sauté* that follows marks a transition in the dance itself, from one trying to emulate the island vocabulary, to one concerned more with Hollywood stunt work. Surely the Fiesta club’s patrons do not believe Powell’s *cabriole arabesque* sequence to be indigenous to the island. ---- A ukulele joins the drummers, slowing the speed, and prompting yet another choreographic shift in the dancers. The drums dissipate completely and Powell’s fifteen backup dancers come to a squat while she wiggles her way back to center stage. Powell offers her audience a tantalizing

²⁵³ Direct quote from film.

dance: she brushes her hair, waves her arms, and strokes her hips. The lyrics speak of “rolling passion” and “island serenades”. The hula ends with Powell in the center of another Berkeley-esque floor pattern.

The drums return and the camera cuts away from the big picture and zooms in on the slow graceful fingers of a white woman’s hand suspended in mid-air. The camera then shifts its focus to the strong dark hands of a drummer pounding away at his instrument. It does a quick scan of all the strong, dark hands playing the various drums, and then cuts down to the stage where two silver-heeled character shoes tap to the beat. The camera follows the line of the shoes upward, pausing mid-thigh for a full leg-shot of Powell. It continues its upward ascent, revealing her hips, waist, and finally her face. Once in full view, Powell begins a classic 1930s white female tap routine, similar to that seen in the film’s first major dance sequence: multiple light sounds crammed into a single step, interspersed with leaps, turns, and a few acrobatic surprises. While the drums carry the beat of her feet, the ukulele comes in for effect every time she does a slide or split. A mass of dark-skinned, faceless, drummers join her on stage for the finale, as do her fifteen backup dancers. The fast-pace turn sequence at the end marks a conclusion, but a ukulele pluck gets the final note. The on-screen crowd goes wild.

I have looked at Powell’s tribute to Bill Robinson in terms of gender and race as they apply to choreography within the context of this film. While continuing to tease out the ways in which the choreography of Powell’s “Tribute to the Hawaiian Islands” speaks to various social codes, I would like to view this specific performance in light of a natural shift in “love and theft”.²⁵⁴ That is, *Honolulu* exemplifies the American trend in moving from an obsession with the black body to that of the brown. In addition to lightening the aesthetic, the focus on the brown “exotic” covers

²⁵⁴ See Chapter One for this Eric Lott reference.

up Hollywood's ever-present use of Africanisms (on stage and screen) by redirecting one's attention to the ways in which Powell's white body performs Hawaiian nativeness. Similar to the way in which Cohan used the yellow body in *Little Johnny Jones* to distract viewers from seeing the Africanist presence in his work, MGM commissions a film that uses brown bodies towards a similar end. Thus Powell's "Tribute to the Hawaiian Islands" is as much a performance of brown-on-white minstrelsy as it is a spotlight on "island culture".

While in Hawaii, Powell's body exemplifies what Jane Desmond has called "Physical Foundationalism".²⁵⁵ Feminist thinkers have used Physical Foundationalism to challenge the concept of gender, and critical race theorists have done something similar with the concept of race, but I will turn now to a different use of Physical Foundationalism. Desmond looks at people, or cultural tourism, as a form of difference-making practice. The non-verbal aspect of "song and dance tourism" solidifies the act of difference-making in the imagination. She writes, "these shows underline the centrality of the performing body, binding notions of 'facticity,' presence, naturalism, and authenticity together under the sign of spectacular corporeality" (xv). In other words, those in close proximity to the body take its presence to be a clear indication of the natural and authentic. I use this framework to unpack the problems that arise when Powell attempts to represent the "natural native" when paying tribute to the Islands.

The advent of film allows contact with the exotic native body through the screen so one need not even travel to the Island to experience "authentic" Hawaiian-ness. Such technology also helps to blur the lines between the brown body and the brown-faced body, fact and façade. In the real world, bodies and art have boundaries, but can be transplanted in a way that geography

²⁵⁵ According to Desmond, Physical Foundationalism can be understood as the belief in the body as a material sign for categories of social difference, including separations based on gender, race, cultural identity, and species (Desmond xiv). Those persuaded by Physical Foundationalism problematically take bodies as natural entities. They see bodily difference and classifications of difference as natural too, and take "natural" to be "necessarily right or true" (xiv). See *Staging Tourism*, pp. 266-267.

cannot. The filmic universe, however, has no boundaries. With film, Hollywood can import the “Island” and impart new truths about its physical, geographic, and social make-up.

Powell performs two hula dances while on the Island: the first hula dance serves to ground Powell in a native tradition while preserving her whiteness. That is, Powell’s white skin stands in stark contrast to the skin of the Hawaiian native (actresses), yet these two differently-colored bodies produce the same movements. In other words, the film offers an image of visible racial difference while portraying corporeal sameness. The second hula dance that Powell performs incorporates a combination of black vernacular and tap dance vocabulary suggesting not only that hula lends itself to American (mainland) culture, but that it maintains its integrity and “authenticity” even when performed on, and by, white bodies like Powell’s.

Thus Powell’s body produces a discourse around the feminine and the exotic. While on the ship, Powell stands in as the symbol of ideal white (1930s) femininity. The fact that Powell can so easily reference the black masculine body not only solidifies a notion that the body can stand in as material sign for categories of social, but, under the “sign of spectacular corporeality”, promises that mere presence on the Island and contact with native culture will transform her body into a sign of “native authenticity”. While the film takes Powell’s body as sign (for native-ness) for granted, it purposively blurs the act of signifying and draws attention to its signified. What becomes invisible in Powell’s performance is the colonial agenda to both appropriate Hawaiian culture and mask the elements of her dance which have already been lifted from the mainland’s Africanist presence. Desmond writes, “This sign simultaneously symbolizes bodily presence (‘native,’ ‘woman’) and cultural enactment (Hawaiian-ness), and stands for the ‘destination image’ of Hawai’i” (Desmond 5). Which is to say, Powell’s presence in Hawaii

qualifies her representation of the female native, her ability to enact Hawaianness, and attracts viewers for her display of the exotic ideal.

While the signifying components of Powell's performance carry little resemblance to their purported signified, they do fall in line with a (white) Western notion of the "ideal native". Desmond places the construction of the "ideal native stereotype" within colonial expansion, racial discourse, and ideas surrounding nationhood (Desmond 7). She writes, "Nationalism, figured as white, troubled by blackness, grappled with the challenges of encoding Hawaii's racial polemics and complexity within a model of nationalism that could barely contain them" (7). In an attempt to erase a complex Hawaiian demographic and suture the fragmented concept of the white American mainland, 1930s national discourse surrounding Hawaii collapsed all Hawaiians into one image: "Hawaiians emerge in these discourses as brown (not black, not Asian), and as primitive (but delightfully so), not modern" (7). Hawaiian imagery eliminated diversity by creating an idyllic landscape of difference. For Europeans and Americans, the Hawaiian native represented an ideal type: the Hawaiian native occupied a space in what Desmond has called the "Euro-American imaginary". This ideal plays the part of the noble and the romantic savage simultaneously (57). Viewing the Hawaiian body as brown, as opposed to black or white, allowed the tourist to escape the complicated racial binaries of the mainland. It allowed for exotic bodily difference while maintaining distance from the black body. The brown hula dancer thus provided the tourist with a "safe encounter". This discourse enabled colonial expansion by figuring ownership of an exotic who was better than the mainland's black Other.

Hawaii's representation on the mainland not only blurred racial and gender lines, but challenged temporality and history.²⁵⁶ Confronting the brown body on screen was a way of avoiding both the complicated history (and guilt) tied to the black body as well as a way of reducing the fear tethered to the black body; the brown body was "safer" than the black because as a sign, it carried much less stigma and much more potential. In addition to the brown body existing outside mainland events and geography, 1930s Hawaiian discourse also dissolved concepts of time. Images of Hawaiian bodies remained trapped in a "primitive past" while the lives of tourists gazing at these images evolved with time. Mainlanders have come to Hawaii not only to escape black/white difference, but to escape modernity. Tourists construct modernity by imagining the other as primitive. By denying Native Hawaiians racial diversity and changing time, tourists create an imaginary divide between mainlanders and islanders.

Discourse surrounding the "otherness of Hawai'i" departs from traditional mainland discourses of race and nation. Unlike the mainland, writers have represented Hawai'i as the home of the "ideal native," the hula girl marks one such example of ideal "native" iconography. In the teens and early twenties, the hula girl promoted tourism more than any other symbol. Live hula performances in hotel nightclubs, like Eleanor Powell's performance in the Fiesta club, became popular tourist destination sites. While anyone could learn hula choreography, performing hula in these tourist destinations (e.g. hotels and Hawaiian nightclubs) substantiated the image of "authentic" hula dancer. Desmond writes, "Simultaneously these shows stage the 'us' in contradistinction to the 'not-us' on display. A temporary collectivity among tourists unites strangers in the same space and time through a shared experience" (xv-xvi). Through live

²⁵⁶ Desmond writes, "Although white appetites for entertainers based on racialized exotica were wide-ranging during this time, Hawaiian manifestations of this desire had the added allure of being outside time, memory, and important mainland historical events, such as slavery and its aftermath" (68).

performances, Hawai'i could distinguish itself from other popular tourist destinations. The hotel nightclub provided tourists with a safe, but exotic encounter.

Aside from skin color, hotel hula performances often underscore two mainlander stereotypes: the women must be graceful and sexy, and the men must be strong and "savage" looking. The men provide a contrast for the women's soft-primitivism (Desmond 25). In Powell's performance at the Fiesta Club, the women dancing perform feminine codes of behavior. The choreography emphasizes female sexuality: shimmying of the shoulders attracts attention to the breasts, and shimmying of the hips brings attention to the reproductive organs. The costumes and makeup accentuate the movement performed in such erogenous zones: the grass skirts are long, but revealing, giving the audience a peek, but not exposing too much; the metallic bras draw attention to the breasts, but do not reveal anything but slight cleavage; finally, the long hair, dark eye make-up and bright lipstick bring attention to the face, promising hungry audience members a possible treat after the show. The camera further exaggerates this female sexuality through its filming technique, at times fragmenting the body into parts: the camera cuts to the hips or the legs, veiling the audience from the whole body at any given time unless shown in panoramic view with men in the background. The performance showcases these women alongside muscular bare-chested drummers. The men move very little, but the wide stance of their legs combined with a broad upright posture conveys their power to the audience. The drums they strike in unison further amplify the strength behind their masculinity. The camera rarely puts the men's faces in the viewfinder; instead it zooms in on their veiny hands beating their solid drums or the infinitesimal movement of minute musculature across their broad backs.

The technology of the camera thus changes the manner in which the body can signify. In addition to being able to export the "native" to the mainland, the camera makes fragmentation of

this body possible; a partial body allows for fragmented viewing. In this way, the technology itself redirects the viewers' gaze to focus on the parts, rather than the whole. Furthermore, the camera allows for geographic/scenic flexibility: one can add or subtract various elements of Hawaii's land/atmosphere in order to realize aspects of the (colonizer's) imagination.

Consequently the film as a whole creates one more layer of separation between the Island and the mainland, the native body and the white, the truth and the fiction. The imaginary world projected on the screen carries with it more imaginative potential, and, as a result makes it more difficult for its viewers to tease apart how the Island exists for-itself, for-the-world, and for-the camera.

Popular entertainment in the U.S. that often referenced African Americans evolved into a safer, more desirable obsession with Hawaii. America owned the natives in the same way that it owned slaves, but Americans believed that Hawaiians were both more civilizable and thus more assimilable to the nation. Howard Zinn writes that the first American officials sent to scope out the Islands believed Hawaii was, 'a ripe pear ready to be plucked' (qtd. in Zinn 312).

Pleasurable tourism of the late 1930s was brown, not black. It was, to use Homi Bhabha's phrase, "the almost-but-not-quiteness" of the Hawaiian that was so alluring. As Desmond argues, the Native Hawaiians do not threaten ruling whites because Americans rule Hawaii. Recall that America annexed Hawaii in July 1898 by joint resolution.²⁵⁷

Hawaiian hotel hula performances from the 1920s up through the 1940s reenact Bhabha's notion of mimicry.²⁵⁸ The hula dancers' skin became whiter and their bodies slimmer. The ideal Hawaiian image became the *hapa-haole*, a half-white, half-Hawaiian body. A blonde-hair blue-eyed dancer was unconvincing to the white tourist, but the black dancer, or too-brown dancer ran

²⁵⁷ See Zinn p. 312

²⁵⁸ Homi Bhabha postulates that mimicry produces difference. He writes, "The discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" ("Mimicry" 86).

the risk of being too exotic. The constructed “ideal native” became a native who embodied colonial aesthetics—fairer skinned and slim—but was still capable of representing difference. Furthermore, parts of the native Hawaiian stood in for the Hawaiian native until the “ideal native” nuanced difference: Hawaii contributed to the American nation yet existed apart from the mainland. It marked “soft” difference in order to preserve the idea of a diverse national whole, one that embodied difference, but nothing too extreme.

Each of the four dance numbers Powell performs in *Honolulu* track the progression of softening the ideal²⁵⁹ exotic by creating a racialized continuum through Powell’s body. In the first dance, Powell’s feminized white body marks the white ideal of the 1930s: she dances within the “guidelines” of America’s social structure while the ship is still within the geographic boundaries of the American mainland (her dance comes within minutes of the ship’s undocking). Towards the middle of her “migration”, she tries on both blackness and masculinity, seeking to challenge America’s social structures as well as the way American audiences see her body on the tap dance stage. Once she has proved her mastery of tap dance and said farewell to the black body (she removes her burnt cork and concludes her “tribute”), she is free to carry the form with her. She earns back her femininity and inculcates herself into the “native” discourse by engaging in a hyper-sexualized hula alongside “real” brown bodies. Before departing the Island, however, she performs her “Tribute to the Hawaiian Islands” demonstrating not only proficiency in this style, but complete annexation of Hawaiian culture; by conjoining hula with tap dance, Powell not only softens the black body but dilutes the Hawaiian ideal. She returns to America a *hapa-haole* and the *hapa-haole* becomes a new means of covering up the inherent Africanisms in/of

²⁵⁹ As the image of the hula dancer traveled throughout the early twentieth century, it retained less and less “authenticity”, and the bodies that performed the hula became more site specific. On the island, dancing hula bodies retained an element of the exotic, through skin color, body shape and size, as well as movement.

her dance. That is, “browning up” replaces blackface and distracts viewers from seeing the disappearance of the black dancing body from the tap dance stage and screen.

Powell’s “Tribute to the Hawaiian Islands” reflects a time in American entertainment when Hawaii was *in* and vaudeville was *out*. Broadway²⁶⁰ commonly referenced hula dancing through costume and musical accompaniment, and Hollywood chose indeterminate island locales as themes for classic movies. Hula, by this time, had become so popular and the market for it so strong, that iconic entertainers began publishing manuals and articles on the hula, promising mainland women from all classes and backgrounds that they too could experience the exotic without ever leaving home.²⁶¹ These choreographies shared no relation to the actual hula, but enacted a very particular display of the female body. According to Desmond, the phrase “South Sea Dance” came to include a variety of “exotic” dances, all of which resembled one another and fell under an amorphous category of “Oriental dance”. The shimmy and the Charleston, despite their Africanist origins, were frequent movements in the “South Sea” vocabulary. She writes, “Such a co-existence of a simulation and its potential parody would lighten the import of the dance further, emphasizing its playful, unthreatening quality of otherness” (73). Such manuals

²⁶⁰ A process of “whitening” occurred on the Broadway stage before reaching Hollywood. On the stage, exotic elements were relegated to costumes and musical accompaniment. Although the image of the Hawaiian seemed more appealing to Broadway than did the images of black performers, the image of the hula dancer needed more refining before she was ready for Broadway. The Broadway hula girl adopted the peek-a-boo style (Desmond 61). Hula skirts became a staple on Broadway and amongst chorus line dancers. This look reached Hollywood in the ‘30s and ‘40s thus solidifying a whitened ideal for the hula image. Desmond refers to this process of associating Caucasian dancers with natives as, ‘nativizing’. She writes, “nativizing [is] a kind of temporary imaginary racial crossing signaled by visual and performative cues. It is akin to ‘going native’ but retains a brief temporality, caught in ‘vacation’ mode”(71). Although tourism creates a separation between the mainland and the island, Hawaiian imagery often blurs the line between the Caucasian woman and the native woman. According to Desmond, the blurring of this line has “nativized the white woman, ‘whitened’ the Hawaiian, and in general feminized Hawaii as a destination site” (Desmond 8).

Entertainment became linked to tourism and the image of the white mainland female becomes the native Hawaiian. This in turn insured the non-threatening imagery of Hawaii: the white Hollywood hula girl lures tourists into Hawaii, promising an all-American native experience in a far away primitive island. The rise in Hawaiian themed Hollywood films allowed a subverted form of advertising for the Hawaiian tourist industry even during the war. Eleanor Powell’s dancing in *Honolulu* promises a (safe) taste of national diversity.

²⁶¹ See Desmond’s *Staging Tourism* pp. 72-75.

showed no attempt to deliver an authentic hula, but increased an interest in Hawaii as a tourist destination and kept money flowing into the (then) American Territory.²⁶²

As is clear from the hula dance manuals pervasive throughout the teens and twenties, the hula dance became less authentic as it crossed over into the mainland. Americans felt entitled to the island dance vocabulary and began reformatting it to suit their own aesthetic and political needs. Dance manuals and Broadway shows retained only a hint of native Hawaiian vocabulary, instead turning to an African American vernacular dance lexicon for inspiration. Using only elements of Hawaiian movement and dress, choreographers began labeling this colonial interpretation of Hawaiian hula, “authentic,” promising an American public something new, exotic, and not black.

This same process surfaces in Powell’s tap dancing. The tap dance she performs references a similar black vernacular of the mainland. She emphasizes certain attributes of native Hawaiian dance vocabulary while simultaneously stressing the technique of Robinson and other well-known buck-and-wing dancers in her performance, not to mention apparent references to the Black Bottom²⁶³ and her striking choreographic and stylistic similarities to Josephine Baker.²⁶⁴

Placing tap dance and other elements of the black vernacular within the “native” dance tribute

²⁶² Even though the hula portion of Powell’s performance offered nothing new, the choice to embed a tap dance in her tribute was the first and only of its kind. Tap routines had been performed on the mainland in hula skirts and leis, but presented within the context of a mixed bag of musical entertainment, sandwiched between routines done in an array of costumes, from a variety of countries and genres. Furthermore, couples and groups, rather than soloists danced such hulas. Some examples can be seen in routines from the 1933 film, *Flying Down to Rio* where hula elements are incorporated into the acrobatic “Carioca” or in the duet that Eleanor Powell does with Buddy Rich in the 1942 film, *Ship Ahoy* that incorporates some Hawaiian drum rhythms for a little Hawaiian flare.

²⁶³ The Black Bottom was a dance that was popular in black communities of the rural South in the early twentieth century (pre-1919). According to Stearns and Stearns, the dance was a craze only second to the Charleston in popularity once it reached the Broadway stage (110). There were discrepancies between the Black Bottom performed in the black Southern neighborhoods and the version that George White popularized after seeing it performed in the 1924 Harlem show, *Dinah* (110). For a breakdown of what this dance looked like and its history, see Stearns and Stearns’ *Jazz Dance* pp.110-111.

²⁶⁴ Josephine Baker was best known for her evocation of the primitive and the exotic. However, dance scholar Anthea Kraut has explored the overlap between Baker’s dancing and both an African American vernacular and Western conceptions of Africa (Kraut 2003 438). Kraut observes that Baker’s American origins were lost in her stage and screen performances. She writes, “Wearing her now-infamous banana skirt, she appeared as the young savage Fatou in an African jungle setting replete with palm trees, a sleeping white explorer, and several semi-nude black male drummers. Though her dancing in this and later performances continued to include steps like the Charleston, her Americanness had so faded by 1931 that she was nominated Queen of the Colonial Exposition—until protestors reminded organizers that she was neither from France nor any French Colony” (438-439).

says to America that Powell can master everything with ease, as can anyone on the mainland. According to this performance, both the hula and tap dance choreography belong to America, and the white body's performance of both represents each in their highest form.

If movement is seen as gendered and raced, then the placement of Robinson's dance alongside the Hawaiian Medley amplifies the not-blackness of the hula dancer while simultaneously reinforcing the femininity of the island. Powell's performance in *Honolulu*, which includes the choreographed succession of dances, (i.e. the Tribute to Robinson on the boat away from the mainland followed by the Tribute to the Hawaiian Islands on the Island) reiterates social norms.²⁶⁵ Powell's body in *Honolulu* comes to represent the Hawaiian Islands in this routine despite her choreographic influence coming largely from an African American vernacular and classical Western tradition. Just as Josephine Baker²⁶⁶ was capable of producing a "multiplicity of discourses and acquired a range of meanings for different people at different times" (Kraut "Between Primitivism" 438), Powell's body engages in several discourses simultaneously throughout the film. She can be "Queen of the Taps" at the same time that she is the best Robinson impersonator *and* the best, safest, Hawaiian native to ever perform the hula. Her body acquires many meanings, all of which are dependent upon the specific costume, sound, choreographic, technological, and narrative decisions she (and MGM) makes.

At the same time that Powell's body inhabits multiple individual identities, her relation to each brings seemingly disparate communities into contact. Furthermore, her dancing body materializes otherwise invisible (and imagined) boundaries. The tribute to Robinson encapsulates racial and gendered ideologies thought only to inhabit the mainland. The tribute to

²⁶⁵ Susan Foster writes, "Accumulating these choices concerning the behavior of bodies, the choreography builds up an image of community, one that articulates both the individual and collective identities" (Foster "Gender" 9).

²⁶⁶ See Kraut's article, "Between Primitivism and Diaspora" pp. 438-440 (2003).

the Hawaiian Islands captures the imagined difference of the Islands, one thought to be different than the values of the mainland, but equally binarizing. Each dance represents what the national body can, and cannot represent. The choreography of placing the two dances side by side does not refigure norms, like Foster hopes,²⁶⁷ so much as it opens up possibilities for the “unprecedented” white body (and nation) while limiting those of the “Other”. The inculcation of Hawaiian imagery into mainland dance practices claims to defy “strategies of containment” by purporting an island free of difference-making ideologies and practices. However, in configuring the Islands as it does, *Honolulu* repeats an ongoing process of distinguishing *us* from *them* and further masks the cultural depth that is inherent to America’s identity.

Powell’s performance in *Honolulu* strategically mobilizes the mechanisms of covert minstrelsy. While her use of burnt cork might be the most obvious form of minstrel entertainment, her visible engagement with the “black” body means little without the film’s accompanying narrative, musical, technological, and choreographic system. Performing any one of these dances within an isolated context would significantly alter its coded meaning. The frame each provides for the other simultaneously gives Powell’s performance its power and works to invisibilize her involvement with an outdated form of racial masquerade. Furthermore, the “tribute” label serves to both qualify the performance it describes while at the same time announcing its acquittal from that which the blackface mask on its own terms would signify. Powell’s body as sign results from the signification that exists between her body as white, “black”, and “brown”, her performance of femininity, masculinity, and something more exotic, her embodiment of the mainland and that of the “Island. Powell’s body as sign has no limits; she is American.

²⁶⁷ Susan Foster writes, Choreography relies on the inculcated capabilities, impulses, and preferences that years of practice produce, but it also leaves open the possibility for the unprecedented” (Foster “Gender” 30).

Coda

Not only did Eleanor Powell's signifying body have no limits by 1939, but it delimited codes of behavior and appearance for other women aspiring to embody the white feminine ideal in America. Between 1936 and 1943, Powell's image appeared everywhere, catering to audiences young and old. Dance manuals used her utopic physique to sell tap dance while animators used her dancing as a model for an emblematic style of white femininity in their cartoons. In *Tip Top Tap Dancing*, Louis Shomer's 1937 tap dance manual, the author describes the many uses of tap dance in the book's introduction. Tap dancing, according to Shomer, is an excellent way for people to stay in tip-top fitness. He writes of these benefits in great detail:

For instance, the calf, thigh, and stomach muscles must be used. The exercise of using them will reduce the adipose tissue that so many of us find growing around the waist. Heavy thighs and legs come in for their part of the work, and as a result, instead of finding them growing, we find the excess weight melting from them. Thick ankles and fatty calves gain a pleasant and symmetrical shape, and the whole body responds to the tonic effect of the exercises. Digestion improves, the skin glows with health, the eye becomes clearer, and the nerves steadier. (forward)

In other words, tap dance is quintessential for health and happiness; a physical body conditioned by tap is the key to success.

Shomer shows readers the viability of the forward's claims with about 60 illustrated pages of "perfect" white figures—caricatures of Astaire and Powell—breaking down each of the routines. If his cartoons were not convincing enough, the conclusion further evidences the life-changing

qualities of tap dance. He describes Bill Robinson's famous "Stair Climb" as "scared," only so that he can later talk about Powell's evolution. Shomer writes of Robinson, "Finally he seems to raise enough courage to climb the first step. He's still afraid to advance further" (58). In the next paragraph, he describes Powell as the "scintillating new star of the screen." He writes of her dancing: "She is an accomplished virtuoso of the Tap-Dance. Her feet are clever enough to supply their own music, and this accompaniment is a great one indeed. Her performances are flawless exhibitions of technique and skill" (58-59). He continues to praise Powell and finally bids readers luck in their endeavors of becoming great tap dancers and successful Americans.

This manual is one of many published in the late 1930s and early 1940s that used Powell's visibly white body as the embodiment of perfection, and her dance—i.e. tap dance—as the key to a sense of belonging. Several of these manuals are decorated in red, white, and blue, further reiterating the relationship of tap dance to America and yoking a certain appearance with a sense of national inclusion. But particularly curious in this period is the manner in which this narrative accompanies an image of Powell that is almost always drawn rather than photographed or captured by the camera.

In 1936, tap dance began proliferating within the American cartoon, offering audiences of all ages an innocent form of entertainment that simultaneously taught viewers about American values. Animated bodies told stories just a little bit differently from those professed by real images. Cartoonists like Feg Murray offered the public quick movie star gossip in "Seein' Stars,"²⁶⁸ and cartoons like *Merrie Melodies*' "September in the Rain" highlighted white tap dancers alongside caricatures of insolent black entertainers. Even when the spotlight faded on Powell's perfect figure around 1944, which coincided with the birth of her only child and subsequent corporeal transformation brought about by pregnancy, her idealized white tap-

²⁶⁸ See examples of such comic strips in Appendix C.

dancing body lived on through a romanticized caricature of her *drawn* body. That is, the cartoon made it possible to both freeze and move certain fictions of representation. Moreover, insofar as it embalmed Powell's "perfect" white dancing body, it also preserved age-old tales of the "imperfect" black body. *Welcome to the 1940s, where paint speaks, birds can be black, and magic shoes steal the spotlight.*

CHAPTER THREE

Substituting Magpies for Men:

Feathered Coats, Jim Crow Tales, and “Other” Animated Footage

Mis en Scène

December 17th, 1949. 3:30PM. A young boy whispers something into the ear of his younger sister and the two giggle a bit before a piercing dial tone interrupts their banter and the shaky black static that has persisted on the screen for the last minute. This loud series of sounds marks the transition from *Mr. Belvedere Goes to College*,²⁶⁹ the feature-length film starring Clifton Webb and Shirley Temple that has just ended, to the Fox Movietone²⁷⁰ newsreel about to begin. While the movie was highly entertaining, some of the children in the audience have a hard time sitting still through the adult stuff in anticipation of the sound cartoon they know the movie house will project before the next feature.²⁷¹

Marching band music reverberates off the mystical gold accented walls of the The Oakland theatre.²⁷² After the well-known introduction finishes, a commanding voice announces, “This is Lowell Thomas²⁷³ speaking, flashing to you the News of the World, picture by Fox Movietone.” *Pause.* “Mao Tse-tong declares the founding of the People’s Republic of China.” Footage from Mao’s announcement at Tiananmen Square occupies the screen. Three hundred thousand people stand gathered around the leader. As the camera cuts to the façade of the United Nations,

²⁶⁹ *Mr. Belvedere Goes to College* is a comedy about a genius that enrolls in a four-year university with the intention of graduating in just one year. It was the sequel to *Sitting Pretty* (1948) and the prequel to *Mr. Belvedere Rings the Bell* (1951). The film was directed by Elliot Nugent, with a screenplay by Mary Loos, and released by Twentieth Century Fox in 1949.

²⁷⁰ Movietone was a method of recording sound for motion pictures that guaranteed the crisp synchronization of sound and image (picture). Movietone was one of four motion picture sound systems developed in the 1920s and achieved synchronization by recording the sound as a “variable-density optical track” on the same strip of film that recorded the pictures. See Kellogg’s, “History of Sound Motion in Pictures” in *The Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers* (June 1955), Vol. 64.

²⁷¹ The Movietone I am narrating is based on historical events I gathered from various period-specific newspapers and live broadcasts and follows the format that a typical Fox Movietone followed for the duration of the 1940s, including the same hosts and personalities. While these disparate events may or may not have been paired together in the same newsreel, their pairing is possible given historical events that occurred in late 1949, and the time that typically lapsed between a current event and its projection on the big screen.

²⁷² Now called the Fox Oakland, the theatre opened in 1928 in downtown Oakland at 1807 Telegraph Avenue. The 2800 seat theatre was known for its Eastern influences (originally the theatre was to be named The Baghdad), specifically styled after an Indian temple. The refurbished theatre now serves as a concert venue but remains architecturally intact as a theatre and is on the National Registry of Historic Places. See Jack Tillmany and Jennifer Dowling’s *Theatres of Oakland*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Pub, 2006.

²⁷³ Movietone anchor throughout the 1940s.

Thomas's narration continues, "In the United Nations, a representative of Chiang Kai-shek's "nationalist" Chinese complains that if the Communists in China win a "full victory," they will send men and arms and imperil a half-dozen neighboring states."²⁷⁴ The Oakland audience remains fixated on the screen. The Movietone presentation then offers a new title screen with the words, "Airliner P-38 Collide as Craft Start to Land". A brief recap of the worst aviation accident in American history that occurred six weeks ago at the Washington airport, along with devastating footage of the crash follows the update from China.²⁷⁵ The weight of this heavy news is lifted as Helen Claire²⁷⁶ takes over narration duties to tell the story of Vice President Alben Barkley's recent engagement to 38-year old Carleton S. Hadley, while the camera flashes to the press conference that followed the announcement as well as a close up of the ring.²⁷⁷ The screen fades out on the couple holding their hands in victory with 17-year old Janie Hadley looking up with bright eyes towards her mother's good news and future life in Washington. Thomas returns to update the nation on the recent passing of a beloved entertainment figure, Bill "Bojangles" Robinson. His popularity was responsible for the nearly 100,000 people who amassed in New York City to watch his funeral procession through Harlem. The camera zooms in on some of the notable figures that showed up to pay their respects, including Irving Berlin, Bob Hope, and Duke Ellington. The segment ends with a few graceful words from Ed Sullivan, the man responsible for organizing the whole event. The screen fades back in with comedian Lew Lehr²⁷⁸, twirling a daisy and laughing effeminately, while the words "Lew Lehr on Foot

²⁷⁴ See *The Nation* 15 October 1949.

²⁷⁵ See *The Spokesman Review* No. 172. 2 November 1949.

²⁷⁶ Helen Claire was in charge of all "Society News" segments from 1937-1949. See Cox's *The Great Radio Soap Operas*, p. 240.

²⁷⁷ See *The Spokesman Review* No. 171 1 November 1949.

²⁷⁸ Lew Lehr was a comedian, writer and editor known for his short comedy sketches on Fox Movietone News and other radio shows, as well as his famous catchphrase, "Monkeys is the cwaziest peoples."

Fungus” sit plastered against the right side of the screen. Lehr’s fungus pun elicits some laughter from the audience but his humorously narrated footage that follows has the crowd in stitches. His segment segues nicely into the last news briefing of the afternoon, Sports. The camera cuts to Ed Thorgersen²⁷⁹ speaking into the microphone in the upper left hand corner of the screen, “The camera highlights in the world of sports.” The camera cuts to a sold-out game at Ebbets Field in Brooklyn where the Yankees play the Dodgers in the 1949 World Series. “Bobby Brown races home just ahead of Gene Woodling”. *Cut.* With the game only in its third inning, the Yanks lead five nothing.” *Cut.* “Joe DiMaggio, still weak from pneumonia—.” The Oakland audience sits captivated by the fast-paced camera edits flying by on the screen. And then, the news everyone has been waiting for, Thorgersen announces, “The delirious Yankees, winning four games to one, pounce on leftie Joe Page and salute manager Casey Stengel and his courageous New York Yankees, twelfth time champions of the world.”²⁸⁰ The audience applauds as the news segment comes to a close and many of the children in the audience fidget in anticipation of the sound cartoon about to begin.²⁸¹

The well-known theme song fills the theatre as the words “Hackle and Jeckle, the talking magpies, in Dancing Shoes” appear on the screen. The screen fades to black as the music changes from a sprightly version of “Listen to the Mockingbird,” to a more solemn, concerto on strings played by a quartet of animated animals inside a hotel nightclub.²⁸² The screen swipes

²⁷⁹ Thorgersen was an actor and sports personality best known for his roles in *Life Begins at College* (1937), *The Hit Parade* (1937), *Sports Immortals* (1939), and Fox Movietone News.

²⁸⁰ Quotes taken from British Pathé news broadcast 1949.

²⁸¹ Since I could find no record of which theatres initially screened “Dancing Shoes,” I have taken some creative liberties to create a likely pairing of features and shorts. In 1949, movie theatres followed the format: feature film, newsreel, cartoon short, and finally, second feature film. Since 20th Century Fox distributed Terry-Toons’ early cartoons, the two features and newsreel I have chosen were also distributed by Fox Pictures. Furthermore, although “Dancing Shoes,” premiered on 11 November 1949, it played in theatres for several months, making a December showing very possible.

²⁸² In addition to this being one of the four songs in the tribute to Bill Robinson medley in *Honolulu*, a note on the lyricist for this song is in order: Septimus Winner wrote the lyrics for this song under the *nome de plume* of “Alice Hawthorne”. Hawthorne

left to reveal a new screen with two magpies engaging in conversation. One peeks around a corner as if spying on the wealthy patrons and introduces his crude accent. The other magpie has a stodgy British accent and a briefcase. The two magpies make a plan to take advantage of all of the wealth that awaits them and quickly scurry off to the lobby with a silent, caricatured, shuffle off to Buffalo step.²⁸³ “Yes Suh, yes suh. Here we ah ladies and gentleman, bringing you the greatest invention of the century,” announces Heckle with his rough New York intonation. The two magpies stand before an audience of foxes, dogs, and pigs, reaching their black hands into a suitcase full of oversized red loafers. “Saves wear and tear on the tootsies,” adds Jeckle with a British inflection. The two birds each hold one shoe above their heads and proceed to wind up the shoes as if they are mechanical toys about to be released for motion. Heckle performs a comical stationary run as he announces that these special shoes “put pep in your step.” Jeckle quickly responds with, “prevents fallen arches and ingrown toenails,” as he stretches out one of his awkward orange two-toed feet. “With these magic shoes your foot problems ah solved,” contends Heckle. He tosses his partner the loafer so Jeckle is now in possession of two magic shoes. “Just tuck ya toes into a pair of these little wondahs and let them do the rest.” Away Jeckle glides. He crosses his arms in a perpendicular fashion, proving to his audience that the shoes are responsible for everything that happens for the duration of this demonstration. The music transforms into a flurry of violins as Jeckle’s shoes take him clear across the room and straight up the side of a small table. He spins around and then jumps out of the shoes, onto the ground, as the music changes yet again to include a soundtrack of tap dancing feet. Four bars of

was usually the only person to get credit for the song even though Richard Milburn wrote the music in 1855. I mention Winner because he was known for a few American favorites including the song, “Ten Little Injuns.” In 1869, he wrote a similar song called, “Ten Little Niggers”. See Appendix A for full lyrics. This song later went on to become a minstrel and children’s nursery rhyme favorite.

²⁸³ A shuffle off to Buffalo is a tap step that consists of a leap onto one foot, followed by a shuffle leap onto the opposite foot, and a crossover with the original foot. This step was almost always included in vaudeville performances of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, both with and without tap shoes.

simple toe tapping take place atop the table while the camera zooms in to show the full extent of these shoes' personality. The only visible audience member is a "tribal" black hog semi-obscured in the background. When the shoes finish, Jeckle runs to join Heckle and the two reach into their suitcase to grab more loafers. They send each shoe into the air as if launching a series of paper airplanes. The mood is whimsical until the screen jumps to a large white bulldog cop (Spike)²⁸⁴ in the midst of a sound sleep. One of the shoes beelines for the back of the dog's head and, it seems, intentionally kicks him in the skull. Many of the Oakland youth in the audience conceivably let out a big laugh upon seeing this "attack".

The bulldog jumps up defensively and immediately pulls out two guns, one in each white-gloved hand, ready to fire at intruders. One shoe slowly makes its way into the frame of the camera and immediately the cop starts firing. Seconds into the shootout, the shoe places itself over the cop's head, blinding and suffocating him into a flurry. Mayhem ensues, as the white dog can neither see nor hear anything that is going on around him. He tumbles, falls, and ends up shooting himself in the face in an attempt to capture the unruly shoe. The shoe deflates and the cop removes the sagging slipper from his person.

"Hurr-y Hurr-y Hurr-y, who is gonna be the first lucky person to own a pair of these wonduhful magic shoes," interrupts Heckle's now very recognizable voice. "It's the greatest opportunity ever offered to the public," solicits Jeckle. Spike marches over to the magpies and slaps the deflated loafer onto the table. The gold sheriff star on Spike's uniform and Heckle's expressions fill in for the lack of dialogue. "House detective," reads the first star. Heckle expresses extreme shame as he slumps his winged shoulders and drops his head. "No peddlers allowed," reads the second star. Heckle shrinks even more. "Beat it!" Heckle jumps and blinks his big bird eyes, and then finally utters the words, "Well... um...so long chum." But before moving, the bird

²⁸⁴ Spike the bulldog became a regular to the series beginning with "The Intruders" in 1947.

from Brooklyn does a series of *coupé relevées* to stall for time. Fed up with Heckle's antics, Spike slams Heckle's feathered body into the ground as if striking a mallet on a high striker. The bulldog's force levers Heckle's body into the air. When Heckle's body hits the ground again, Spike's aggravated voice can be heard off screen, "Now get out, and stay out!!!" Heckle and Jeckle grab their things and make a run for it. A long cliché chase scene up and down a staircase ensues; Heckle and Jeckle use their identical twin status to fool Spike and a stray lampshade to further mask their whereabouts. The excitement of the scene is supported by a version of "Listen to the Mockingbird" played with an increasingly peppier tempo. Finally, when the coast seems to be clear, the two magpies once again set up shop.

"Who wants anothuh pai-," blurts out Heckle as he once again shows off the red wind-up loafer over his head. He continues, "Who wants to take advantage of ou' special offuh today? Not full price, not half price, but for the amazin' ba'gain of one tenth the original price." The camera cuts away amidst Heckle's monologue and we see Spike, perplexed by the precise location of his sought-after peddlers. A black Scottie dog scurries across the screen in a pair of magic shoes. This only further aggravates the watchdog and ignites yet another high speed chase through the hotel. The birds hide in the elevator while the plump Spike does a graceful little *sauté jeté* step before ramming his entire body into the elevator door. A slapstick performance of injury and insult in the elevator culminates with Spike flattened like a pancake shuffling through the lobby. The music responds to the bulldog's body language, emphasizing his emotional state with different musical crescendos and decrescendos. Heckle and Jeckle fold the compressed and depressed Spike into a little rectangular envelope, addressing the front of it to "Terry-Toons". They stick Spike in the mailbox and brush off their hands as if their mission has been fulfilled. But Spike's corpulence returns and causes the mail chute to burst; the chase continues.

Heckle and Jeckle hide behind one pole while Spike barely squeezes behind another. The two species then engage in a game of peek-a-boo: Heckle and Jeckle emerge in disguise, hoping Spike will not recognize them with their masks. Heckle is donned in blackface, a bone through his head feathers, large ivory earrings, and an ivory necklace. Jeckle simultaneously manifests in redface²⁸⁵ with a feathered headdress and side braids. The kids in the audience likely laugh. The two birds disappear, only to reemerge as a Russian and a Spanish pirate. Heckle sports a large black ushanka and beard, while Jeckle shows off his pointy mustache and three-cornered hat. The final masquerade shows Heckle dressed as a white knight and Jeckle as a British police officer; the chase continues. “Listen to the Mocking Bird,” still accompanies the chase, but has become a series of hollow brass instruments and occasional violin accents. Heckle and Jeckle leap from the second story to the first and wind up a pair of magic shoes. When the bulldog jumps from the second story, the pre-wound shoes catch him upright and proceed to take him on a wild ride through the hotel. An eclectic soundtrack of every day noises (e.g. car horns, trombones and sirens) emphasizes the absurdity of the shoes’ power. When inside the magic shoes, Spike has lost all control and must surrender to the mechanics of chance. The shoes propel him through the roof up into the air and then deflate leaving him spiraling back down to earth, through a hotel awning and into the ground. All the shoes follow suit and pile on top of the three animals lying on the pavement. Much to the surprise of everyone in the audience, Spike possesses the power at the end and he quickly brushes himself off and starts thrusting shoes at Heckle and Jeckle who scurry off into the distance as fast as they can. The shoes Spike does not thrust chase the talking magpies until the cartoon comes to a close. The audience applauds wildly as the Terry-Toons logo appears on the screen in red along with the big bold red letters spelling THE END. The screen fades to black before beginning the well-known

²⁸⁵ The term I am using to describe red face paint used to “mark” someone as Native American.

Twentieth Century Fox intro and fanfare. While *Miracle on 34th Street* is now two years old, Maureen O'Hara and Edmund Gwenn never seem to disappoint a Christmas-spirited audience. With Christmas only one week away, including the black and white classic as part of the double feature will ensure The Oakland a full house. The credits begin to roll and Cyril Mockridge's²⁸⁶ spirited tunes mitigate some of the pent-up energy leftover from the six-minute- long chase in "Dancing Shoes". His instrumentation likely makes it easier for Oakland's sun-spoiled residents to imagine a cold, white Christmas from the comfort of their warm red velvet theatre seats. They sit back, relax, and watch the story unfold.

²⁸⁶ Cyril Mockingridge composed the music for Twentieth Century Fox's 1947 Film, *Miracle on 34th Street*.

An Introduction

Seven months after MGM released *Honolulu*, the world entered into a war more widespread and destructive than history had seen to date. Over 100 million people from 30 different countries launched into a state of “total war,” forming two opposing camps—the Allies and the Axis—that erased the distinction between civilian and military resources. During the course of the war, several mass killings marked it as the deadliest in human history (Sommerville 5). The Holocaust extended over four years (1941-1945) and was responsible for killing eleven million stigmatized Others—six million of whom were Jews. The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August of 1945 resulted in the death of 129,000 people. The six-year war produced somewhere between 50 and 85 million fatalities (5) and changed the world’s social structure and political assembly. The world established the United Nations in October 1945 to promote global cooperation and prevent another war like the Second from repeating.

Documenting this war and informing the public of its devastation continued to raise challenges for both Hollywood and the Office of War Information. Doherty writes, “The War Department, the Office of War Information (OWI), and Hollywood’s studio heads colluded in keeping the awful devastations of combat from the home front screen—sometimes by outright fabrication, usually by expedient omission” (Doherty 2-3). Everything from newsreels to films had to be censored so that the stories media fed Americans were not necessarily in line with reality. From the late 1930s until roughly 1943, Hollywood used film to engage the public in a political dialogue centered around the War and highly patrolled by the OWI. The OWI believed that “properly directed hatred [was] of vital importance to the war effort” (qtd. in Doherty 122). They did not want hatred to be directed at individual rulers (e.g. Hitler or Mussolini) or at entire

nations (e.g. Germans or Japanese) but were highly supportive of films that commented on the militaristic system. Doherty quotes Nelson Pointer: “Hatred of the militaristic system which governs the Axis countries and of those responsible for its furtherance definitely should be promoted” (qtd. in Doherty 122). The OWI pleaded that Hollywood make ideologies the subject of attack rather than villainous rulers.²⁸⁷ Film thus became the mediator of discourse and social/political values: “Shocked and enlightened by the motion picture propaganda of the Nazis, obliged to obey new codes of conduct and send out life-and-death messages, the motion picture industry became the preeminent transmitter of wartime policy and a lightening rod for public discourse” (Doherty 5). While film mediated public knowledge of the war and the opposing Axis, it also did its part to interpret and control certain citizens’ bodies.

During this period, the United States continued to struggle with issues such as black/white relations and representation. Many black Americans were troubled by Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms” speech given in January 1941, as it seemed hypocritical to promise freedom for *all* men when black men were still being alienated from the war effort. Philip Randolph’s March on Washington led to Roosevelt’s ban on discrimination in the defense industry, and *The Pittsburgh Courier* launched the Double V campaign by inciting their black readers to give the war effort their all *while* calling on the Government to abide by the actual language of the Declaration of Independence (which promised to treat ALL men equally) in 1942. This campaign did not lead to total equality but stimulated people of color and liberal whites to work together to instigate

²⁸⁷ Doherty writes of this phenomenon, “Not until Hollywood enlisted as an active agent in the Second World War did the ephemeral popular art dedicated to the ‘mere entertainment’ suddenly and seriously matter—to the War Department, to the Office of War Information, to spectators made sensitive to the educational import and ideological impact of the movies. Recalibrated as a weapon of war, the mass medium that magically deployed sound and moving image, that wedded technological wonder to creative artistry, garnered the respect due to the possession of potent firepower” (5).

change and likely influenced Truman's official ban on discrimination in the Armed Forces in 1948. (Gates 2013 1)²⁸⁸

The years that followed saw a series of global changes, some of which appeared to bring humans of all colors and creeds together, and others that seemed to heighten the divide that rulers like Hitler and Mussolini created, or laws like Jim Crow upheld. America witnessed some immediate political shifts even before the war officially ended, when Franklin D. Roosevelt died in the middle of his fourth term and Harry Truman was sworn into office. Abroad the National Party (NP) established Apartheid in 1948, presenting South Africans with an onslaught of rules including the stringent segregation of “black” bodies from “white”, and “coloured” from “Indian”. The state of Israel was established in May of that year as a safe space for the Jewish people and in September, Chinese Communist leaders proclaimed the People's Republic of China. While Truman issued an executive order desegregating the armed forces in 1948, the Jim Crow Laws still blazed strong in the States. Yet despite the movements to separate and segregate that seemed to pervade the final years of the decade, 1948 observed several notable attempts to bring more equality to people of color. Harold Robinson broke the decades-long color barrier in athletics for the Big Seven Conference, the California Supreme Court voided the state statute banning interracial marriages, the tan M&M was introduced in 1949, Truman gave his “Fair Deal” speech announcing that every American should expect a fair deal from the United States, and Hollywood drastically changed its aesthetic. Most notably in film Twentieth Century Fox produced *Pinky* in 1949, a race drama starring Ethel Waters, Jeanne Crain, and Ethel Barrymore,

²⁸⁸ In July of 1942, the NAACP lobbied the motion picture industry asking that motion pictures incorporate more parts for African Americans that were not subjected to stereotype. (Doherty 208) The all black musicals *Stormy Weather* and *Cabin in the Sky* were released in 1943 in response to the work of the NAACP. These were the first all black musicals released since Warner Bros. released *The Green Pastures* in 1936. (209) As more and more black men were being drafted, films that were about combat had to reflect reality and Hollywood made available more roles for black combatants. However, as these roles increased and Hollywood portrayed the fighter of color on the same playing field as white army men, the inequalities surfaced in films that dealt with the Navy, Marines, and Air Force projected the nation's ethos of inequality: “Until 1943 the Army Air Force considered the technical skills and athletic reflexes demanded of manned flight beyond the native capacity of black Americans...” (Doherty 212).

about a light skinned black woman who gives up her “perfect” life passing for white in order to fight for justice in her home town. Not only was the subject matter ahead of its time, both from a racial perspective and as it regarded the representation of women, but Crain took a big risk by agreeing to play a black woman on screen. With the exception of it being banned in Texas, most Americans welcomed the film and all three actresses received Oscar nominations. While Hollywood still projected plenty of racism on the screen, *Pinky* did its part to challenge Hollywood’s dogmatic racial lens.

The 1940s marked a huge aesthetic shift for the screen as it concerned film technology—that is, what was possible artistically and technically, visually and sonically—and also in terms of what was appropriate, politically, socially, and even ethically. By early 1943, escapist fare became the real moneymaker. Americans wanted to come to the theatre for diversion. The Motion Picture Herald wrote of this condition: “The preponderant demand is for entertainment and entertainment of the sort that puts aside the cares of these war worn days, when every day fills the lives of the millions with intense emotional concern” (qtd. in Doherty 181). Audiences really did not need more talk of war after a war newsreel and a “war briefie”; they wanted the feature to take them away from the realities of war. By 1945, movies were such an important part of American life that 95 million Americans attended the theatre every week. (Doherty 199)

However, much of what became unacceptable in live action film became more excusable when the representation was “fake”, or rather, not “real”. Neither live action nor animated films were absolved of the guidelines set forth by the Hays Code, but animated films and shorts seemed to get away with a lot more “promiscuous” and controversial behavior than did live action films made in the same year. While 1940s animation is a site rich with radical representations of gender and sexuality (e.g. Max Fleischer’s Betty Boop cartoons) and cutting-

edge politics (e.g. Walt Disney's *Der Fuehrer's Face* (1943) featuring Donald Duck), I will be focusing my attention on the representations of race that permeated 1940s animation. This chapter examines the ways in which the diminished use of blackface in live action film of the period was actually just displaced onto Hollywood's animated productions. That is, at a time when directors were making exciting strides in racial politics on the live reel, antiquated notions of the raced body relocated to the sketched unreal: black-on-white, protean, and redface minstrelsies were deeply entrenched in Hollywood's mid-century animation aesthetic.

Depicting race in a derogatory manner on the screen was nothing new. The silver screen was a more technologically advanced continuation of the types of stereotyping and social stigmatization that had taken place on the minstrel and vaudeville stages, and Hollywood had been "racing" its pictures since film's inception. The life of cartooning was no different,²⁸⁹ but the art lent itself more freely to concepts such as imitation, exaggeration, and buffoonery, since it was these very techniques that helped to define the art of animation and distinguish it from other artistic mediums.²⁹⁰ Like all racial stereotyping, a hierarchy existed, with white people at the top, black people at the bottom, and a range of Others in between. Who these others were depended upon the particular periods and historical contexts out of which the films and shorts were made. With that said, depictions of black bodies tended to be the most grotesque and exaggerated.

²⁸⁹ Christopher Lehman remarks on the commonplace nature of ethnic jokes from animation's beginnings:

Ethnic jokes, including many that were overtly racist or anti-Semitic, were commonplace. For example, Blackton's second film, (1907), featured a pair of visual ethnic puns. The animator appeared on screen to write the African-American slur 'coon' and the surname 'Cohen' on a board. Then the word 'coon' transformed into a blackface minstrel caricature while 'Cohen' took the shape of the face with a large nose. The gag itself was not essential to the cartoon since the film had no plot. The scene was nearly one of several metamorphosis jokes... for the cartoonist to weave ethnic generalizations into his film, however, implied that somehow they belong there. (7)

²⁹⁰ Disney artists Ollie Johnston and Frank Thomas defined twelve principles of animation that they believed guided Disney animators from the 1930s onward. The tenth of these principles is exaggeration, or alterations made to a character's physical features or actions, or an overall filter for the plot itself. Exaggeration is based on reality but presented in a wilder, more extreme way. See Johnston and Thomas, *The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation* (1983).

By the mid-1940s, however, the NAACP began to take a strong stance against such representation on the screen.²⁹¹ The organization demanded that Macy's department store pull the blatantly racist *Little Black Sambo* (1935) from their shelves insisting it was, 'a picturization and caricature of Negroes in a most gross and exaggerated sense' (qtd. in Lehman 89). Although Macy's complied without too much push back, the NAACP had a harder time persuading Castle Films to stop distributing its films to stores. Castle Films offered to eliminate color versions of the film since it believed that only the cartoons' brown skin color was offensive. This of course did not fix the problem and the cartoon continued to perpetuate a series of black stereotypes. While the NAACP was not entirely successful with Castle Films, they "set a precedent by making the sambo characterization unprofitable" (Lehman 90); the year 1951 marked the last time an animation house produced a sambo caricature.²⁹²

As African American veterans returned from fighting in World War II, animated depictions of the Jim Crow South became more and more taboo. No longer could Hollywood talk about the "happy shuffling plantation workers" they once had nor could they ignore their references to slavery that had become so prominent in films taking place in Hollywood's glorified interpretation of southern life. A perfect example of this can be seen in the MGM cartoon, *Uncle Tom's Cabana* (1947), which although based on Stowe's novel, was a modern take on the slave trade.²⁹³ Despite director Tex Avery's urban spin, his images and sound bites continued to draw

²⁹¹ In February 1949, the Jewish Labor Committee (JLC) in California joined forces with the NAACP to help bring attention to the executives in Hollywood regarding races caricatures in animation.

²⁹² According to Lehman, the Pittsburgh Courier indicated that the Hollywood Screen Cartoon Producers' association, "'Planned to seriously consider adding executive meeting... The subject of harmful caricatures of minority races of American citizens'... The article identified Walt Disney and the cartoon studios and MGM, Famous Studios, Warner Brothers (recently bought by the distributor from Leon Schlesinger), Terry-Toons, and Screen Gems (Columbia Pictures' animation department) as members of the association" (Lehman 85).

²⁹³ Lehman writes, "Adapting this story to the present, director Fred "Tex" Avery depicted Legree as the owner of all the buildings in the city except for uncle Tom's log cabin. Instead of purchasing Tom, however, Legree threatens to foreclose on his home. The old images of the south—plantations, cotton fields, and slaves' shacks — appear in the film, and the film credits are superimposed over what the script describes as a 'Shot in old Southern mansion, pan to little cabin in cotton.'" For one visual gag

on a minstrel pastime. Avery's Uncle Tom, for example, was a round slave with overly turgid cheeks, duck-billed lips, and large white gloves. Facial features aside, it seems rather unrealistic to give a field-working slave oversized white gloves unless its artist is trying to evoke darky iconography. And thus marked a new trend in 1940s animation: even though animators started changing their narratives to be more "acceptable" in the public eyes, the visual and sonic content contained within such narratives remained grounded in a gamut of Jim Crow and Zip Coon stereotypes of the nineteenth century.

Along with narrative refinement came a resurgence in the use of blackface on the animated screen in the late 1930s. The use of blackface makeup was seen as less egregious to the NAACP than some of the caricatures of black characters artists had become accustomed to drawing. According to Lehman, blackface "gags" did not require a lot of screen time but still made a hefty statement.⁽¹¹²⁾ Blackface lent itself nicely to the post-war shift in narrative that occurred around mechanical contraptions as well as the black body. Prior to the war, animators would use faulty equipment as a mechanical set-up, to make the black character look inept. A person (or animal) of color would be given a faulty piece of equipment and when the device did not work properly, it would appear that there was something wrong with the black character in possession of the apparatus. After the war however, as the trend in presenting black caricatures declined, animators presented white people as the unlucky users of such machinery. An example of this can be seen in "Dancing Shoes" when Spike gets clobbered by the red shoes. Animators found humor in using the overabundance of "good" products that companies sold after the war. This gently mocked the American economy at the same time it served as an abstract method for

featuring the ramshackle cabin surrounded by urban skyscrapers, the script calls for a 'medium shot of uncle Tom hoeing cotton in front of cabin.' This shot sums up what a struggle it was for animators to fit black characters— long conceived in a rural antebellum context— into cartoons contemporary American society" (Lehman 91).

representing the so-called complexity of urban life (in contrast to the simple life led by slaves and poor black folk). This was also a set up for the perfect scenario for (excusable) blackface.²⁹⁴

Covert minstrelsy flourishes in the spaces where vision, aurality, corporeality, and technology become enmeshed and entertaining. As in Chapters One and Two, covert minstrelsy gains leverage in spaces where these perceptual modalities co-exist. This chapter highlights the shifts that occurred on the screen in the years following the Second World War. In the first section, “Animating the “Other” History: Black-on-White; Protean; Red,” I begin with a brief discussion of the transition from caricatures projected on the live reel to the even more unreal caricatures that modern science and the human hand made possible on the animated reel. I then look at the ways in which Paul Terry’s aesthetic differed from other leading animation houses of the day, such as Disney and Warner Bros. At the same time that Disney was hard at work cultivating a more “refined” aesthetic and investing in expensive, feature-length productions, Paul Terry was following the opposite philosophy: quantity over quality. That is, while Disney worked to slow down the animation process, Terry worked to speed it up. As Cavalier writes, “Terry cheerfully admitted that in animation terms he was the ‘Woolworths’ while Disney was the ‘Tiffany’s’” (96). Still, Paul Terry’s early toons were recognized by other animators (including Disney) and defined a very particular aesthetic in animation.²⁹⁵ I then paint a picture of the year 1949 in

²⁹⁴ Even some of the nations most beloved and famous characters went through colored transformations. Walt Disney, for example, changed goofy from a “rural black-haired dog to a white ‘everyman’ in a suit working in the downtown office. His skin was no longer jet-black but pink, representing a white identity” (Lehman 112).

²⁹⁵ Terry began his film career in 1921 with a series called, *Aesop’s Fables*, which sought to teach children morals and life lessons alongside animated shorts (To pursue Aesop’s Fables, Terry created his own studio, Fables Studios, and received early backing from the Keith-Albee circuit. Terry made his major sync sound film debut with *Dinner Time* in 1928, a cartoon which itself was not huge success, but marked the first time a cartoon with a synchronized soundtrack was released to the public. Like the earlier *Aesop’s Fables*, *Dinner Time* starred his then-famous Al Falfa (a character that would go on to star in Terry’s first *Heckle and Jeckle* short in 1946) and re-introduced some of his other famous furry friends. This transition into sound films had been supported largely by his business partner, Amadee Van Beuren, (of the Van Beuren Corporation) but after a falling out between the two men, Terry returned to the less-complicated techniques he had grown accustomed to and opted to churn out more low budget films than a lesser number of high quality ones. His factory-approach took him out of the running and made more space for Disney films to take center stage. See Culhane pp. 8-11.

animation, showing the notable shifts in aesthetics that occurred across the board but also shedding light on the more systemic changes that ensued behind the scenes.

The use of animals in cartoons has been a prominent feature of the art form since its inception. Winsor McCay's, *Gertie the Dinosaur* (1914), comes to mind as one of the earliest pieces of animated film to take an animal as the central plot. The point of *Gertie* was to show the audience how the artist could make his drawings, and therefore an (extinct) animal, come to life. *Gertie* then became the central character in McCay's famous vaudeville act, where he would share the stage with his animated dinosaur and interact with the motion on the screen: "She would seem to obey his commands, react to his remarks, and even catch a pumpkin thrown into her mouth as a snack. For a finale, McCay would appear to walk right onto the screen and be carried away on *Gertie's* back" (Maltin 4). Animation made it possible to breathe life into an otherwise inanimate object, and moreover, allowed audiences to engage a species with which they never would have otherwise come into contact. Animals were not the only sources from which animators drew their inspiration, but they did provide a lucrative source for artistry and design. In "Animal Protection Act: composition and de-composition," I talk about animation's obsession with sketching and anthropomorphizing animals. Using Paul Wells' notion of "bestial ambivalence," I show the benefits and pitfalls of drawing on animals for animated inspiration. Terry-toons created two black subjects, Heckle and Jeckle, who always disguised their blackness under a feather coat and on several occasions enacted a redface masquerade under a feather hat.

Understanding the anthropomorphizing process on the screen is crucial to understanding the transformation—and animalization—of the black body that occurred in 1940s cartoons. The animal was an easy way to present highly visible racial caricatures and yet still abide by the rules of the Production Code. I am most concerned with the assignment of the magpie to the black

body, since Heckle and Jeckle stem from this tradition and my research has shown its representation to be consistent across time and space; I spend the majority of this section tracing the magpie's lineage, both on screen and off. The use of animals in place of humans, and their dexterous mutability, lays the groundwork for this chapter's predominant minstrel tactic: *protean minstrelsy*.

"Protean minstrelsy" is the term I use to describe a reconfiguration and successive substitution of the "body" that performs which allows for the concealment of everything else going on in the production in question. In cartoons, this re-constituted body often takes the form of an anthropomorphized animal such as a talking magpie or a bass-playing ape. Here the animator uses the attributes of a real animal—e.g. feathers, fur, quills, tails, whiskers etc.—as well as a character's status as "cartoon" to mask a set of social²⁹⁶ caricatures. This practice is not specific to animation, but gains a lot of its puissance by dint of animation's governing principles of exaggeration and appeal, the perceptual phenomenon of persistence of vision, cartoons' association with youthful naiveté, and finally, the characters' purely pen and ink existence which allows for all sorts of abstract and delusive iterations. Like the other dominant mechanisms of covert minstrelsy—i.e. sonic in Chapter One and tribute in Chapter Two—protean minstrelsy rears its head in virtually every aspect of animated instantiations of covert minstrelsy that this chapter has to offer. The protean in "Dancing Shoes" manifests in everything from Heckle and Jeckle's tuxedo of black and white feathers that allows the birds to masquerade as black dandies under their "fowl" disguise, to their more historic and histrionic magpie existence that helps Terry-Toons invisibilize its use of common minstrel tropes and Africanisms. In other words, the magpie as vessel contains a summation of parts that appear to constitute a whole, but instead

²⁹⁶ This includes anything from race, class, ability, gender, ethnic, religious, political, and/or age.

cover up all of the cartoon's other components (sound, plot etc.) as well as a long theatrical lineage of conflating the magpie with blackness.

Cohan used the yellow body in place of the black in *Johnny*, and *Honolulu* showed Powell as capable of “becoming” both black and brown. However, Terry-Toons included the redface mask in a manner antithetical to the way that Michael Rogin has described the function of the blackface mask as being one way that immigrants became whiter. Instead the magpies’ use of redface actually makes them appear—albeit temporarily—black, or at least closer to antiquated caricatures of the black body. As I will show towards the end of the first section, blackface and redface caricatures were often used interchangeably possibly as a way of conflating notions of Otherness. My research leads me to believe that while it became passé to show iterations of classic black-on-white minstrelsy and red-on-white minstrelsy on screen, Hollywood had no problem making the Other redder. That is, Terry-Toons could use the magpie body, read as black, as a vehicle for furthering the redface aesthetic without the white body playing an active role in the charade. Which is to say, redface was yet another way of incriminating the black body through performance; with red-on-black minstrelsy white audiences could still participate in the objectification of the “native” body.

The use of redface in animation peaked in the late 1940s and early 1950s usually under the guise of historical narratives or tributes. While it is hard to say whether some of the later instances of animating the American Indian were meant to be insulting or whether animators truly thought that they were doing a service to the nation's first inhabitants by giving them air time, I see some parallels between the tribute narrative fleshed out in Chapter Two, and some of Hollywood's animated depictions of non-white bodies. I briefly discuss what this means for animated redface but devote a significant portion of this first section to what this means for the

animated black body. Animated tribute narratives were ways for artists to present more serious, gag-less cartoons (e.g. propaganda films, history lessons, and/or biblical messages) that offered crude characterizations (visible and aural) of the black body alongside the blackface mask, all under the guise of a single, unsuspected narrative.

I have located a number of cartoons dating back to 1936 that seem to follow the same trend in tribute minstrelsy that I discussed in the previous chapter. Note that Fred Astaire's 1936 "Bojangles of Harlem" marked the beginning of this narrative shift in Hollywood. Since many of the major animation houses teamed up with major movie production houses in the 1930s, such a parallel seems rather logical. I conclude this section by tracing a history of tribute minstrelsy in animation, and demonstrate how the same characteristics that applied to live action tributes surfaced in cartoons' supposed reverence for, and homage to, famous black dancers and musicians, while at the same time providing artists with an excuse to caricature the black body on the screen in an acceptable fashion. I come to the conclusion that the cartoon tributes allowed artists to show, more overtly, what Hollywood likely wished to convey in their live action performances. I argue that factors such as the Hays Code and realistic representation of skin color limited the means by which Hollywood could portray the black body. Of all the animated tributes to Bill Robinson I have located, Terry-Toon's *Mississippi Swing* (1941) stands out as the most important: not only does it portray Robinson as a decrepit Uncle Tom, but it makes several (visible) references to Powell's blackface tribute in *Honolulu* and sanctions in the practice of metonymic disarticulation as it exists in animation. I argued in Chapter Two that Powell's tribute to Robinson exhibited a shift from dancing subject to metonymic disarticulation, where her body as sign signified power for her white body and the nation at the same time it produced a rupture in the way Bill Robinson's (and others') black body could be read. In "Dancing Shoes"

this rupture occurs when the shoes become the bearers of the dance and the black body becomes an onlooker in awe of the shoes' Africanist performance. While Powell's performance asks her audience to see the black body as substitutable and re-attributable—a request that operates purely on the symbolic level—the disarticulation in “Dancing Shoes” behaves literally and figuratively in that Terry-Toons amputates the black tap dancer's shoes in every single one of its “tributes” to tap dance. I take up the animated tribute narrative as a general concept in this chapter's first section and return to its application in “Dancing Shoes” in the third and final section on dance.

In Chapter One, Cohan successfully shielded his audience from seeing the ways in which he re-mapped Africanisms onto a white narrative, devoid of certain social stigmas associated with the black body by way of a sonic intervention: he mis-labeled musical scores, substituted patriotic lyrics for ones referencing the caricatured black body, and yet still remained tied to a set of Africanist principles. The sonic intervention for “Dancing Shoes” occurs on the level of the soundtrack, where Philip Scheib accompanies the cartoon with “Listen to the Mockingbird” and dubs in a track of audibly syncopated tap dancing feet. The fact that Heckle and Jeckle do not sound “black” in the same way that minstrel shows of the last century have fashioned the black voice further masks the fact that these birds are in fact instantiations of objectified black bodies. I spend the second section of this chapter, “*Sound Affects: Voices, Detachment, and ‘Mammy’ Issues*,” listening to the general soundscape of 1930s and 1940s animation and then hone in on the sonic elements of “Dancing Shoes”. The sonic component in “Dancing Shoes” shares much in common with *Honolulu*, mainly because the thrust of covert minstrelsy's sonic constituent in both these chapters is mediated by technology; both live action and animated film were working with the same sorts of “spirituals” and sound synchronization systems. Chapter Three differs from the second chapter in the way that it uses voice work. I posit that the voices given to the

two talking magpies read as modernized representations of the Zip Coon and Jim Dandy archetypes when coupled with the birds' visible black bodies. Because covert minstrelsy relies on the simultaneity of sense perception, reading Heckle and Jeckle's bodies in this way here requires the juxtaposition of that which is visible and sonic.

While issues of narrative and dance surface in the first two sections of this chapter, I devote the third section, "Dynamic Movement: Eye tricks, Hat Tricks, and Dancing Shoes," to the more visual aspects of "Dancing Shoes," and emphasize the element of dance in this cartoon. The narrative itself depicts the magpies as possessing a copacetic attitude, yet their coats and tails cover up the markings of the Middle Passage and make the birds the new vessels of blackface minstrelsy. That is, rather than the black body existing as a legible site of trauma, their "costume" dresses up that wound as something other than what it is the real black body could represent. The collective trauma thus hides below their feathers, underneath their tails, behind their animated costume, itself a reinstantiation of what Hartman refers to as the, "inescapable prison house of the flesh or the indelible drop of blood—that is, the purportedly intractable and obdurate materiality of physiological difference" (Hartman "Subjection" 57-58). These are black birds, not white, and they come with baggage of their own in virtue of their reputation as magpies. In a way, the covert minstrelsy in "Dancing Shoes" depends upon a much longer history of animation so that the frame—that is, the way in which earlier cartoons have envisioned the black body, the magpie, and tap dance—sets up the way people see, hear, and read these two identical birds. The frame played an equally important role for Powell in *Honolulu*, where Powell's body as sign in her tribute to Bill Robinson was partially defined only in relation to the film's dance frame, or the two dances that bookended her tap dance "to" Robinson. Multiple tributes to Bill Robinson, countless depictions of the culturally black and caricatured magpie,

and years of pairing “Listen to the Mockingbird” with images of the black sambo or mammy all encase the tap dance in “Dancing Shoes” and attribute meaning to the birds’ bodies. I spend the first part of this section setting up the Africanist aesthetic I see operating in this sound cartoon. The dancing shoes, for example, have no center—they are both polycentric and polyrhythmic. They play it cool but also become the source of violence and corruption. As extensions of the magpies’ black bodies they become synecdochic for the Africanist aesthetic at the same time they reduce that black body to the source of trouble. I then look at the ways Terry’s simplicity in animation serves a logistical, aesthetic, and symbolic function for “Dancing Shoes”. This can be seen most vividly in the red shoes’ amputation from the black body, a practice that I unpack in relation to Saidiya Hartman’s analysis of the fragmented black body. Heckle and Jeckle’s performance of blackness—albeit somewhat disguised by their voices—is inseparable from an historical branding that continuously reiterates, inscribes, and re-ascribes the tortured black body at the same time it seeks to silence that pain by way of masks, makeup, and disguise. I conclude this chapter with “hat tricks,” an illumination of the triple thrust—sonic, visual, and corporeal—that gives covert minstrelsy its power. Mediated by narrative and technology, the animated body wins over the American nation with its innocence. No matter how unreal its flesh or how human its coat, the racial reification achieved through its projection furthers a marked existence for the black body. *And now, render the bodies and stories the animatic²⁹⁷ has until now obscured under the mask.*

²⁹⁷ The animatic is a film or video of still drawings that comprise a storyboard.

Animating the “Other” History: Black-on-White; Protean; Red

From Real to Reel

While cartoon aesthetics went through huge changes during the Golden Age of animation, certain representations never changed and harkened back to the vaudeville stage. In what follows I take up the major shift that occurred on the animated screen, from human caricature, to animal anthropomorphism. Animals were seen as an innocent site for ethnic identifiers, since not only were cartoon animals not real, they were not even trying to represent humans. “Protean minstrelsy” is the label I use to define any group of drawn caricatures that utilize their purely pen and ink existence to aid in a *discreet* transmogrification in order to give race or ethnicity a body on and with which to map a series of identifiers that may or may not be based in reality. This type of covert minstrelsy can nonetheless convey fallacies, exaggerations, and detrimental information about a person, group of people, culture, or way of being. While commenting briefly on some of protean minstrelsy’s fundamental properties—constituents that will surface later in this chapter—I focus most of my attention on anthropomorphized animals that manifest as black or blackfaced, and show how such gross caricatures lead to mis-information about black people and culture as a whole.

Much of the artistic experimentation that gave rise to the art of animation began in Europe, American artists quickly latched on to concepts such as stylized realism and animated imitation. Shortly after George M. Cohan debuted *Little Johnny Jones* in New York City, a Parisian artist named Emile Cohl and his group of Incoherents²⁹⁸ began experimenting with antirealism, “conceptual pranks” and art’s absurdities in the form of animation. (Cavalier 8) In 1908, Cohl’s groundbreaking *Fantasmagorie* laid the groundwork for large American animation studios such

²⁹⁸ A small group of pre-Surrealist Parisian artists that were known for, “conceptual pranks and absurdist art” (Cavalier 8).

as Bros. and Disney, which would soon come to dominate the world of cartoons for the next several decades. Italians and Germans began experimenting further with modernism and abstraction in film, paving the way for experimental cinema, including cartoons. In 1915, New Yorker Max Fleischer, invented the rotoscope,²⁹⁹ a machine used for capturing life-like movements and making more realistic drawn motion possible on the screen. This invention marked the beginning of animation's two major camps: unreal animation and real.

Several figures are responsible for the birth of American animation but I have chosen to highlight a few artists who, in addition to their artistic contributions, greatly altered the science and technology behind drawing for camera. As in the previous two chapters, technology plays a principal role in animation's covert tactics and thus establishing such a foundation will prime a better understanding of covert minstrelsy in the 1940s. John Randolph Bray is the man responsible for refining and patenting celluloid overlays (also known as cel animation)³⁰⁰ and color cartoons. (Cavalier 14) By the end of the 1920s, Walt Disney had refined the art of sound cartoons, focusing on quality rather than quantity and ease, and his work superseded that of the other leading animation house in the business, Fleischer Studios. Disney's success, combined with the work of competing artists, makes up the three-decade long period, 1930-1960, known as the Golden Age of American Animation.³⁰¹ New York studios moved West to join the rest of the movie-making industry and by 1940, Warner Bros. and MGM had become Disney's direct rivals.

²⁹⁹ Rotoscoping is the process of filming a particular action and/or subject and then tracing over the individual frames for a realistic succession of movements. Animators can choose how loosely they draw over the film in order to achieve the desired level of realism/antirealism. See Cavalier's glossary in *The World History of Animation* p. 400.

³⁰⁰ Cavalier gives a very thorough definition of this type of Cel animation: "Also known as "2D", "paper," "drawn," or "traditional" animation. The process whereby an animator or a team of animators produces a sequence of drawings which are usually then colored, traditionally by reproducing them onto transparent sheets known as cels, which are then photographed sequentially over a background by a movie camera. Moving into the digital age, the drawings are more commonly colored and recorded digitally inside a computer environment. Until the late 1990s cel animation was by far the most commonly used animation technique, but was then superseded commercially by 3D, CGI, hence cel animation is often known as 2D" (396).

³⁰¹ See Cavalier pp.14-15.

In Chapter Two I highlighted how a rising competition between Warner Bros. and Fox influenced the former's decision to move to a full-length synchronized-sound feature film and thus gave rise to major advances in sound technology such as diagetic sound and ultimately, the symbiotic relationship between all entertainment mediums. An increasing competition between Warner Bros., MGM, and Disney gave rise to huge technical advances in the field of animation. Cavalier notes, "...Disney was keeping his lead on the pack by refining character animation to a fine art; his animators could now make their characters express emotion like real actors, and his company developed (although they did not invent) technical advances like the multiplane camera."³⁰² To separate himself further...Disney imbued much of the new work with a detailed realism based on studies of live animals and landscapes"(Cavalier 15). In order to stay ahead of his competitors, Disney had to stay on top of, and experiment with, the newest technology in the field. One way that Disney broke away from the mold and distinguished himself from the other animation houses was to produce feature-length animated films. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) was the first of these features to screen, followed by *Pinocchio* (1940), *Fantasia* (1940), and *Dumbo* (1941).

In addition to Walt Disney's great strides in animated feature-length films, the Second World War helped him get ahead by forcing his main competitor, Max Fleischer, to close. (Cavalier 15) Disney stayed afloat during the war by producing government information and propaganda films.³⁰³ Still, not everyone was happy with Disney during this time, and several of his animators broke away and started the United Productions of America (UPA), a studio which

³⁰² A special type of camera where the camera, "points at multiple layers of glass surfaces on which different layers of background areas can be placed in front of and behind the animation frames, so that when the camera is panned sideways or tracked in or out, the layers move in perspective giving an illusion of depth." (Cavalier 398).

³⁰³ See Appendix C for some such propaganda.

partially prided itself on rejecting Disney's signature realistic style; UPA artists featured more simplified designs and modernist techniques.

Fast forward to 1949: Warner Bros. and Disney were the dominant forces of the American animation scene but smaller houses like UPA and Paul Terry (of Terry-Toons), still managed a following with their lower-budget cartoons. In 1949, Chuck Jones and Mike Maltese (for Warner Bros.) introduced the Road Runner series, with *Fast and Furry-ous*, a debut that perfectly encapsulated the Warner Bros. style at its purest. It was with this cartoon that the infamous chase scene, which had gone hand in hand with animation since the beginning, became a plot (and therefore parody) in and of itself. It was also in this cartoon that Warner Bros. introduced Acme,³⁰⁴ the mail order company that would come to supply Warner Bros.' cartoons with (often malfunctioning) traps and gadgets. Meanwhile, Disney teamed up with RKO Radio Pictures to create *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad*, a two-part, full-length animated feature based on the 1908 children's novel, *The Wind and the Willows* and the short story, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," respectively. Disney had a more methodical approach to animation than Warner Bros. and invested more time and money into its productions than any other studio of the day. Furthermore, it distinguished itself from other animation studios with several inventive steps: Disney began experimenting with a combination of live action and animation in its full-length films. This trend began with *Fantasia* in 1940, and became the norm for Disney films made in the 1940s. *Saludos Amigos* (1943), *The Three Caballeros* (1945), and *Song of the South* (1946) were some of their more popular live action animated films.³⁰⁵ While Disney was neither the only nor first studio to make such films, it became a signature part of Disney's

³⁰⁴ Some argue that Acme was an acronym that stood for "A Company that Makes Everything," while others believe that Acme was actually a brand name that appeared in the Sears catalogue during the early Twentieth Century. See Cavalier p. 152.

³⁰⁵ *The Enchanted Drawing*, (1900) directed by Stuart Blackton, and *Gertie the Dinosaur* (1914) by Winsor McCay, are two of the earliest examples of mixing live action with animation. See Cavalier pp. 62-64.

aesthetic. Disney also invested serious money in its actors and soundtracks. For example, the second half of *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad* was narrated by none other than Bing Crosby and had an original score by Oliver Wallace. While *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad* was not known for its musical soundtrack, other Disney films of the era had been nominated for and won major accolades for their music. *Dumbo*, for instance, took home an Academy Award for Best Scoring of a Musical in 1942, and “Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah,” (from *Song of the South*) written by Allie Wrubel and Ray Gilbert, won the award for Best Song at the Academy Awards in 1948. In this regard, animated films were well respected within the academy, and won the appeal of the movie-going public throughout the 1940s.

Over at UPA, artists were pushing boundaries politically and socially, as their leftist tendencies made many of its artists suspect to the FBI. Columbia Pictures stepped in to help save UPA and together brought about some commercial success. This rejuvenated reputation freed up UPA to continue making its own cartoons like *Mr. Magoo*, Millard Kaufman’s not so secret jab at crazed right-wing personalities. This was Kaufman’s method of seeking revenge after being blacklisted by Senator Joseph McCarthy’s committee. *Ragtime Bear* (1949), marked the first of the Magoo shorts, and helped define the UPA aesthetic in the public eye: graphic backgrounds, forced symmetry, oblique angles, and a modernist aesthetic distinguished UPA from both Warner Bros. and Disney. (Cavalier 152). The success of *Ragtime Bear*, and the whole *Magoo* series, ensured funding from Columbia Pictures and an opportunity to continue making more experimental (graphically and politically) animated films.

Like most animation houses of the day, Paul Terry (of Terry-Toons) merged with a major film production and distribution company. Disney had RKO, UPA had Columbia, and Terry, after working with Paramount and Pathe for several years, moved to 20th-Fox in 1938. (*The Film*

Daily Cavalcade 1939). By 1949, his dynamic duo, Heckle and Jeckle, had become well known on the screen since their debut in 1946. Terry, together with Fox, made five Heckle and Jeckle episodes in 1949 alone, culminating with *Dancing Shoes* on the eleventh of November. Heckle and Jeckle became known for their physical (and visible) slapstick combined with their (audible) “magpie mayhem” and tendency to freeload. These two unsuspecting black birds would use costume (often impersonating famous actors and comedians of the day) and wit to outsmart their foils. Heckle and Jeckle did not offer anywhere near the same quality that a studio like Disney offered, but Terry-Toon’s fast turnover, unique sensibility, and comic predictability held commercial value, especially as animation transitioned into the world of television and Saturday morning cartoons beginning in 1956.

Animated Blackface

Race cartoons were a huge part of this period mainly because of their popularity and moneymaking capabilities. Many depictions of black stereotypes were meant to evoke the blackface mask of the vaudeville stage. Lehman attempts to paint a picture of these race cartoons in the following description:

... images of African-Americans tended to be especially derogatory, showing little of the playfulness associated with other ethnic cartoons.... [cartoonists] blatantly drew the characters with thick lips and even went as far as putting bones in the hair or noses...Consequently, although artists’ European American designs varied from studio to studio, the images of the Sambo, Mammy, and other hoary African-American caricatures from American literature, stage, and film were fairly consistent. (9)

The minstrel archetypes that appeared in cartoons tended to take the same shapes they had on the screen, and the stage before that. The sambo figure, for instance, sometimes took the shape of a boy living in Africa and at other times manifested as someone attending to a plantation in the rural South. That is, the same generalized and essentialized models that performers presented on the nineteenth-century minstrel stage seemed to surface in cartoons as late as 1949. Ub Iwerks' *Little Black Sambo* (1935), for example, creates a scenario where a young caricatured black boy, his "mammy" mother, and their pet tiger-turned dog live in a Southern makeshift home in the middle of the African jungle. The cartoon manages to contain a reference to almost every black archetype of both the minstrel stage *and* Hollywood screen, all in a seven minute short. References to blackface surface in relation to both Sambo and the dog, but the act of blacking up is obscured, or very subtle, unlike the very intentional exposure to the act of donning blackface makeup that tended to occur in 1930s ("real") Hollywood.

Paul Terry was also notorious for blackface cartoon character design. His work in *Aesop's Fables* perfectly exemplified the oversized eyes, lips, and inky bodies for which he became known. Lehman argues that such caricature was simple for artists to draw and that it allowed animators like Terry to churn out cartoons, and thus episodes, more quickly. He writes, "African American caricature thus contributed to the first of several cost-cutting animation techniques, allowing Terry to maximize profits throughout his three decades as a cartoon producer-director" (Lehman 13). Thus, not only did racial caricature increase commercial value—after all, it had become bad taste to present such caricatures on the stage and standard screen—it also cut down on cost; drawing on blackface was a profitable endeavor for white artists.

In Warner Bros.' *Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs* (1943), artists achieved this visible racial caricature by coloring all of the characters black as coal, giving them startling white eyes, and

painting on lips as big as duck bills. Such portrayal of the black body would never have passed the Hays Code in a live action film or stage production at this time and yet the unquestioned use of exaggeration in animation, couched under the umbrella of parody—this was of course a play on Disney’s recent feature film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937)—justified its release to the public as an innocent act of humor presented through the “unreal”.

The manner in which cartoons blacked up was very different than the manner in which real actors would don burnt cork on the screen during this period. Since cartoons were shorter than live action films, animated blackface scenes generally only occupied a few seconds of screen time, and the performance of donning the burnt cork had to be strategically woven into the plot. It was here that the blackface gag became yet another “quick sight gag” of the postwar era. Lehman writes, “The violent blackface gag was one of many quick sight gags in which the postwar cartoon thrived.... Violent sight gags often incorporated weapons and explosives in order to keep up the pace of the chases and other quick moving scenes. Bombs and firecrackers took only seconds to explode, instantly changing animal and white human characters into blackface caricatures” (Lehman 113). Thus, artists could write off their use of the blackface mask as being a result of explosives and faulty technology—a “utilitarian” minstrelsy of sorts. In fact, this became so commonplace that between 1946 and 1953, all of the scenes created by Tex Avery and Dick Lundy (at this time working for Warner Bros.) that involved explosion gags were labeled “blackfaced” in their scripts.³⁰⁶ According to Lehman scripts used “ethnic identifiers” to refer to the victims of these gags: “Animators used the ‘pickaninny’ blackface caricature to a character’s immaturity as well as the inferiority of women, tying ethnicity together with gender in the process. After cartoon explosions, male figures are occasionally

³⁰⁶ In “Satisfied Customers,” a *Heckle and Jeckle* short from May 1954, a bomb explodes near a white grocery store manager explodes and the resulting image is a Stepin Fetchit character. See Cohen p. 59.

made to resemble caricatures of African-American girls” (Lehman 114). With a few tweaks of the narrative, artists could justify both crude characterizations of the black body (e.g. *Uncle Tom’s Cabana*) as well as blackface “gags” (e.g. The *Tom and Jerry* episode “Mouse Cleaning” from 1948).³⁰⁷ But faulty technology was not the only way animators could write off the blackface mask. Literal and figurative dehumanization of the human form gave animators another excuse to continue drawing on old forms of representation.

Animal Protection Act: composition and de-composition

Animals, as subjects, provide many things that a human subject cannot provide for human artists and audience members. However, all attempts to create an animal on the screen are based purely on human observation and interaction; we can never know what animals as individual species are capable of thinking, feeling, or knowing, beyond the assumptions we make about them. The result of this is representation that tends to be an anthropomorphized version of animal cognition and behavior, which although it may be based on real scientific evidence and observation, is nonetheless convoluted by human projections and fantasies of the species in question. Second, because we do not have any evidence that animals possess a human consciousness, attributing certain human attributes to them (e.g. emotions, thoughts, and sensations) presents irony and at times, absurdity, offering animators the perfect set-up for humor and comedy. Third, animals provide something incredibly economical; animals supply an inexpensive and efficient solution to storytelling. Authors have been writing about animals for centuries and consequently a wealth of plots and storylines already exist for narratives starring animals: “The use of traditional stories has proven economical because, as public domain materials, they cost nothing to use. In addition, well-known stories cut down on the amount of

³⁰⁷ See Appendix C for screenshot image from *Uncle Tom’s Cabana*.

work an animation writer needs to do. There is no need to spend time developing a character's personality or every detail of a traditional story, since the viewing public already knows the basic scenario" (Furniss 68). In other words, using a story already in the public domain, cuts down on the amount of work an artist has to invest in his storyline/character development, *and* likely already strikes a familiar chord with his spectating audience. Finally, assigning personalities and traits to animals decreases the chance for human insult, or at least gives the artist a way to deflect any potential criticism around racial representation and the like. Maltin writes, "Terry also learned that using animals in this way practically eliminated the possibility of offending anyone in the audience through ethnic stereotypes of human improprieties." (Maltin 129). In what follows, I extrapolate on each of these observations, and explain that no matter how scientific an artist's approach to animation, anthropomorphizing animals and assigning various classes or races to particular species is never ultimately based on empirical observation.

Animals tend to evoke curiosity in humans because while they are highly observable, we know little of what actually occurs in their internal world. Anthropomorphism can stem from a desire to relate to these animals in some way, yet representing these animals on the screen allows us, as humans, to still maintain our distance from them; to infuse an animal with human qualities can allow us to feel closer to a different species. Conversely, to project an animal as existing without human qualities can help us to maintain our human distinction. This dichotomy is but one of many that manifests when we consider the roles that animals have played for us in film, and specifically in animated film, which allows artists creative license to expand, limit, and create possibilities for animal behavior, cognition, and emotion. Paul Wells introduces a concept of "bestial ambivalence," or the idea that the represented (and for the purposes of this discussion, the animated) animal operates on "a set of oscillations within each text and does not remain static

and fixed” (“Bestiary” 51). Such a view allows an animal to take on stark, often conflicting, roles. It makes the space between human and animal apparent at the same time it shows the similarities between the two species. Such a concept also makes it possible for the represented animal to have metaphorical and totemic properties while simultaneously standing in as a critique of the natural world. In other words, a single animal (character) can attend to the bestial *and* the uniquely human, the organic *and* symbolic, and/or exist for the sole purpose of providing a model for antithetical opposition (e.g. when the animator places a drawn animal next to a drawn human, the human stands out as separate from the animal).

Wells acknowledges the following ambivalences: “aspirational human”, “critical human”, “pure ‘animal’”, and finally the “hybrid ‘humanimal’”. In the case of the aspirational human, the animal character is used as a tool to demonstrate more favorable and adaptive human traits such as courage or dignity. The critical human manifests when the animal character critiques mankind. An animated animal that engages with an animated human on the screen might reflect on human behavior and tendencies and then make a judgment about this human’s actions, thereby making a larger statement about humans in general. The pure “animal” is exactly what it sounds like, an animal in its most pure unadulterated form, which is directly in conflict with the hybrid “humanimal” that only operates on the symbolic level. That is, we cannot observe the humanimal out in the world; it only exists in our imagination. Wells writes of the hybrid “humanimal”, “...[he] operates at the metaphorical and symbolic level, and seeks to show when a conceptual idea is shared by the parallel terms that have evolved to define and explain both the human and animal world” (“Bestiary” 52). We see this in Shere Khan from Disney’s *The Jungle Book*, where Khan demonstrates by example the power a tiger holds within the animal kingdom and the forms power takes in Western civilization: “For Shere Khan, this is demonstrable in the

juxtaposition of being an English aristocrat and holding a position of superiority in the assumed great chain of being within the animal kingdom” (52).³⁰⁸ Thus, creatures come to represent an array of meaning depending on the specific context from which their story emerges. Animation is but one place this range of narratives can perform, and as such, reiterates *and* creates its own system of sociocultural symbolism, sometimes running parallel to the “literal one”³⁰⁹ and at other times taking a significant departure from real life.

Wells traces several viable reasons to use animals over humans in animation. One reason is that the representation of an animal therefore becomes a blank canvas (or cel in this case) endowed with the power of absorbing whatever it is humans need of them most. And yet, whatever the artistic outcome, the act of drawing an animal will always result in an imitation of the form itself. Such an imitation becomes increasingly more complex as an animator anthropomorphizes an animal for the sake of his plot. As soon as an artist starts to assign a class, a gender, and a race to his animal, the animated representation quickly becomes an imitation of an imitation. Kevin Sandler remarks, “...gender imitation in animal characters does not copy that which is prior in humans since gender is already a fiction; it copies what is already assumed to exist in humans. Anthropomorphism can be viewed, then, as an imitation of an imitation, of an imitation, a copy of a copy of a copy. By repeating this imitation, the animators create an illusion of a talking gendered animal while reproducing the illusion of gender itself” (Sandler 159). Anthropomorphism therefore reiterates various social ideologies as fact, rather than fiction, consequently blurring the distinction between the real and the unreal. According to this model, animated characters become, “phenomenological creations, predicated

³⁰⁸ For a visual, see Appendix D for Wells’ chart of bestial ambivalence.

³⁰⁹ Paul Wells writes, “...creatures in all cultures become metaphorically charged with a range of narratives, identities, and sociocultural symbolism that creates a parallel world to the literal one” (“Bestiary” 53). See *The Animated Bestiary* pp. 52-54.

on the flux of meaning caused by the relativity of representational possibility” (“Bestiary” 66). Therefore the animated animal becomes a powerful vessel for meaning making, capable of moving through multiple discourses simultaneously. The challenge is, as a viewer, recognizing the various discourses at play and distinguishing the real from the unreal, the metaphorical from the literal, and the replications from the imitations and exaggerations.³¹⁰

The act of donning (or drawing) certain abstractions—e.g. coats and tails, beaks, or masks—lends itself to a minstrel practice partially because of the way in which it itself operates on an ambivalent axis. The animal is almost-but-not-quite human, almost-but-not-quite animal. This ambiguous status causes a rupture in the signifying chain. Burt writes, “Although the animal on screen can be burdened with multiple metaphorical significances, giving it ambiguous status that derives from what might be described as a kind of semantic overload, the animal is also a marked site where the symbolic associations collapse into each other. In other words, the animal image is a form of rupture in the field of representation” (11). Like other performances of masking, there is something non-threatening in the cartoons’ pen and ink existence and yet it clearly destabilizes the reality of certain racial stereotypes and social stigmas. The “costume” itself encourages hiding in the same way the blackface mask of the past promoted an inherent slippage in the art of representation. This ambivalence is also found in the irony of animating a human stereotype by way of anthropomorphizing an animal. Animal properties alienate their viewers

³¹⁰ Many behaviorists argue that anthropomorphism is merely an excuse for humans to project human feelings into animal experiences. Bullock writes, “We do not have great difficulty in recognizing the temptation for what it is, when we find ourselves looking for a sensation or emotion we know in ourselves in order to interpret a posture or gesture in an animal. Anything that strikes us as ‘expressive’ in the behavior of another creature makes us take something in our human vocabulary of appearances to which we see a correspondence, and then let that ‘expression’ speak to us as though we have made a reliable translation from one bodily form to another” (Bullock 112). Wells takes issue with this with regards to the field of animation, mainly because he feels such a premise leads humankind to then scoff at the possibility that animals possess any sort of voice, or cognition. He writes, “Such a denial, particularly in creative idioms that seek out a particular empathy with the animal—absolutely intrinsic to much animation—is to suggest that both the animal and its representational tropes as well as points of sympathetic realization have no validity, and that there is no knowledge of the animal” (“Bestiary” 97). Through example, he shows that animal researchers have used behavioral models to demonstrate that animals and insects might have, “alternative languages that are not embedded in the textual idioms possessed by humankind, but nevertheless maybe evidenced and apprehended in factual yet quasi-narrative terms” (97). This is a slippery way to view anthropomorphism in animation as I will continue to explain.

but also bring them closer. It is in this way that the covert minstrelsy of this medium finds a great number of parallels to that of the stage and that of the live action screen. An audience confronted by so many oppositions, so many inherent conflicts, is bound to get caught up in the readings that are *most* visible and the codes that present themselves most superficially.³¹¹

Deciphering the dichotomies of an animated screen inundated with animals, humanimals, and the like, can be difficult, especially when the dichotomies themselves tend to create the comic irony and absurdity incumbent upon audience engagement. The representations on the animated screen become “comic excesses” and “culturally charged,” saying as much about the animals as they do about the humans drawing them. (“Bestiary” 197) These representations form the foundation of a good joke and since cartoons thrive on irony and comic excess, the formula encourages ambivalent performances. Wells writes, “Jokes carry with them not merely the mechanism by which an amusing sense of incongruity or misdirection might take place, but an implied set of assumptions upon which the comic event is structured” (“Bestiary” 101). That is, as humans, we assume that animals must value the same sorts of things that we humans value. As “Dancing Shoes” opens at the “Hotel Swank,” Heckle utters to Jeckle, “Oh boy! What a high class joint this is. I neva seen so many people with dough in all my life.” Here the animator entertains the idea that animals place the same value on money as we humans do, and yet the “people” to which Heckle refers are a bunch of fat swine, literally depicted as animated (bourgeoisie) pigs, but of course implying something about wealthy humans. The incongruity that emerges when an animator entertains certain recognizable tropes inherent to human life but interprets them through bestial symbolism, lays the foundation for a joke predicated on a set of assumptions about animal life at the same time it mocks the absurdity of thinking in such a way.

³¹¹ By “superficial” I mean to suggest those codes that reside on the outer most layer of performance at the same time I wish to imply a superficiality that exists in costumes and makeup which seek to cover up something deeper.

Such a joke comments on society while simultaneously assigning roles to particular members of the animal kingdom. Animation in this way can, "...visualize the space between the intention of the gag, the execution of the gag, and what might be termed its socio-comic outcome" (102).

But rarely do we as viewers choose to do such a meta-analysis of the sounds and images that fly by the screen with expediency. Even if the audience is aware of the irony at play in such joke-making, it would be wrong to assume that participants break every gag down into its ambivalent schema. Instead, audiences tend to accept the sounds and images with which they are presented and laugh accordingly without asking why such presentation evokes laughter.

The irony contained in ambivalent action, and the incongruity which surfaces when opposing personality traits define an animated character, both figure in to an animal's particular economy. As I mentioned earlier, the more familiar an audience already is with a particular plot or storyline, the easier it is for them to engage. This saves the artist time with both plot and character development and allows him more time to work out the small idiosyncrasies and gags which make his cartoon stand out from the original story. If we take Wells' theory of bestial ambivalence to be true, then we can see how the animal, in virtue of its ability to signify multiple things simultaneously, becomes a rich source for animators seeking gag victims, jokesters, and absurd representations. But economy also exists in using a character that can have a comic effect on screen without offending its audience. That is, because humans are not and do not see themselves as animals, an animal who makes a fool of himself on screen, becomes the victim of physical or emotional abuse, or even the brunt of a joke, will be less likely to offend its audience than if these same offenses were to be played out on a human representation. The final observation I will discuss regarding the common use of animals on screen concerns their ability to signify without overtly singling out particular types of humans or groups of people. Like so

many animators, Paul Terry turned to animals for the subjects of his animated shorts precisely because he believed he could caricature various personality types and/or cultures³¹² without directly offending anybody in his audience.

For all of the reasons mentioned above, animals became very popular for animators across the board. While each studio did something different with these animals and developed its own unique style, the use of animals and their aesthetic evolution became an important constituent in the art itself. Hence developing one's skill as an animator included learning how to capture and represent the animal on screen. From the mid-thirties up until about 1943, most animators tried to emulate Disney's model of 'hyperrealism' when it came to drawing animals. This, Wells argues, was, "underpinned by Walt Disney's own conviction that animals had very real personalities, expressed through their bodies, which it was the responsibility of the animator to understand, embrace, and re-create..." ("Bestiary" 94). But as studios started to break away from this mold, the need for artists to confine their representations to real world physics diminished and left open immense space for what Eisenstein has called, "plasmaticness," or the ability for a cartoon to defy the laws of gravity and immutability.³¹³ This was a return to an older animation aesthetic (e.g. early forms of Mickey Mouse or Felix the Cat), but informed by new technology and artistic advances.

Terry's animation studio went through major shifts throughout the 1930s. This was mainly the result of trying to produce too many cartoons too quickly, the challenges of sound synchronization, and aesthetic differences. The combination left animators unhappy, and Terry's

³¹² Terry's cartoons from the early 1930s are indistinguishable from the 1920s *Aesop's Fables*. According to Maltin, "There is no discernable difference in story animation values, although the company's first sound releases hewed to a theme, as described in a trade-paper advertisement: 'Each subject is based on the popular music and customs of a different nation. CAVIAR starts the fun with more excitement than a Bolshevik riot. And after that there will be a new one every other week'". Other titles included SPANISH ONIONS, HOT TURKEY, ROMAN PUNCH, CHOP SUEY, and SCOTCH HIGBALL" (Maltin 132).

³¹³ See *New Media: A Critical Introduction* by Martin Lister.

backers—Twentieth Century Fox and Educational Pictures Corporation—disappointed in the quality of Terry’s work. Terry had to reorganize his company to meet the demands of his contracting distributors and the American public.³¹⁴ Despite some rejuvenated success in 1938 and ’39 after introducing his first cartoon in color, Terry-Toons began to fall into a classic animation trap of the 1940s: the formula cartoon. By the middle of 1940, viewers found it hard to decipher one Terry ‘toon from the next. (Maltin 139) Not only did all his toons start to look alike, and follow a very formulaic plot, but because his lead sound person, Philip Scheib, tried to save money by creating all of his own music (i.e. rather than paying for the rights to use familiar music), Terry-Toons cartoons began to sound the same. Twentieth Century Fox tried to convince Terry to make a feature-length production, but Terry saw this as too much of a gamble, especially with Disney’s continuous success at making full-length cartoons. In 1942, however, Terry-Toons saw great success, with Super Mouse—later named Mighty Mouse—which got an Oscar nomination for a short film in 1945. Meanwhile, Terry was working on another success, *Heckle and Jeckle*, a long-realized dream of creating a cartoon centered on lookalikes.

The twin idea had not yet been capitalized on and no cartoon to date had made magpies the leading characters. They were also the first leads to be antagonistic. Maltin writes, “Perhaps they were the studio’s answer to the brash, bombastic cartoon stars at Warner Bros., MGM, and Walter Lantz during the 1940s. Whatever the reason, their mischievous nature immediately set them apart from such gentile predecessors as Puddy the Pup, Gandy Goose, and even Mighty Mouse” (Maltin 144). With *Heckle and Jeckle*, Terry could distinguish himself from Disney’s other hyperrealist cartoons, use the thread of lookalikes along with the lesser-used magpie subject(s) to cover up his lack of creativity in the story department, and play with a long time

³¹⁴ For more information on the types of shifts that occurred in the Terry-Toons studio throughout the 1930s, see *Of Mice and Magic*, pp. 131-139.

(unspoken of) symbolic association between magpies and an American perception of black people to make covert statements about race, class, and black culture, without being held responsible for offering such critiques of society.

The Magpie

Few people even know the magpie by name, and yet the bird has become highly recognizable in cartoons as being the bird most often associated with black people and culture; this requires a brief genealogy. One of the earliest animated examples of this correlation can be seen in Disney's 1941 feature film *Dumbo*, about the anthropomorphized elephant Jumbo Jr., who is cruelly referred to as "Dumbo" due to his unnaturally long ears. Throughout most of the film, Dumbo has only one true friend—a mouse named Timothy—but a group of magpies (referred to in the film as "black crows" and "brothers") feels sorry for Dumbo and commits to helping the poor elephant use his big ears to fly. Despite their initial teasing, they are the only animals in the film—besides Timothy and Dumbo's mother—who see beyond Dumbo's appearance. Led by Jim Crow, these five magpie "brothers" stand in as father figures for Dumbo and become the unsung heroes of the story.³¹⁵ Nevertheless, the manner in which Disney depicts these "heroes" is highly caricatured and represents a perfect example of the ways in which covert minstrelsy shows up in 1940s animation.

When the magpies meet Dumbo, they first respond by laughing and ridiculing the concept of an elephant flying. In the song and dance number, "When I See an Elephant Fly," the five birds, all dressed as some combination of Jim Crows, Zip Coons, and Dandies, begin to play the dozens. Each black bird cracks a "fly" joke in response to his brother: *Did you ever see an*

³¹⁵ The relationship between Dumbo and these five magpies might be read in terms of the mammy trope, where the mammy (here, literally) takes the young boy under her (their) wing(s).

elephant fly? Well, I've seen a horse fly. Ah, I've seen a dragon fly. Hee-hee. I've seen a house fly. Until Jim Crow finally interjects—*Yeah, I've seen all that too*—and then proceeds to sing: *But I be done seen 'bout everything, When I see a elephant fly.*³¹⁶ The dialect mimics the coon dialogue of the early twentieth century stage and early 1930s screen, with the omission of certain now-forbidden words. That is, these blackbirds do not use the words “coon” and “nigger” per se, but the manner in which they talk is a highly caricatured “Negro dialect” of the past. Musically the song encompasses a mix of the ragtime, jazz, and blues, genres. The instrumentation is accompanied by the birds’ mix of scatting, nonsense syllables, and instrumental onomatopoeia, as well as a visual cabaret of black vernacular dance forms spanning centuries: the birds dance everything from a cakewalk to a swung black bottom. They accent some of these more vernacular styles with bits resembling moves from flash acts of the 1930s. The number as a whole confirms the birds’ ties to black culture while also confirming the inextricability of this “Negro dialect” to black bodies. While the choice to assign black culture to these black birds might have simply been an artistic convenience due to the color of their feathers, such synecdoche only reiterates the fiction that certain qualities are essential to black bodies, whether those bodies are human or animal. This is, as Sandler notes, “an imitation, of an imitation, of an imitation.” At the same time Disney’s animators reduce the birds to the color of their feathers, they also rely on the double meaning of “crow” (i.e. blackbirds come from the crow family and the leader of these black “brothers” is named Jim Crow) to be the premise of a series of jokes about black culture. Hence, the fiction of Jim Crow suddenly becomes something real on which to base the imitation of a black bird, *while* making a raced “humanimal” the brunt of the joke, *and* reinforcing the idea that Jim Crow, and a series of essential traits, belong to black culture. But Disney was not the first group of artists to relate black birds to black people; this correlation

³¹⁶ These two lines are excerpted from the repeated chorus. See Appendix A for the full lyrics.

finds its roots in music and minstrelsy long before the release of *Dumbo*.

I have traced this correlation back to an all black minstrel troupe that called themselves “The Seven Musical Magpies”.³¹⁷ Although I have not been able to find much information about them, my research has shown that they reached the peak of their career around 1924, but probably formed at least a decade earlier. The following review in the Pittsburgh Courier (an all black newspaper) alludes to the fact that the Musical Magpies were well known throughout the United States, and regarded very highly within the black community: “The seven musical Magpies, after having spent a year on tour, are back in Cleveland, and are to be the feature on the Roof Garden...The magpies are known in almost every town...They are big time headlines in all show houses in the city and abroad” (*Pittsburgh Courier* 1924, 15). While it is unclear whether the members of this minstrel troupe performed in blackface, they were known for imitating minstrel troupes of the 1890s. Evidence of this can be seen in two surviving wax recordings: “Calliope Song” is a yodel³¹⁸ that imitates the Barnum Steam Organ, a popular source of imitation at the end of the nineteenth century (Abbott and Seroff 93) and “Laughing Song” which is an upbeat song that imitates the laughing songs of the nineteenth century where the chorus would feature a leader laughing and the rest of the troupe harmonizing behind him. This particular version was designed for three voices, two banjos, and a piano (“Popular Songs”). The question then becomes, why did these seven black men choose to call themselves by this name? Was this also a reference to the nineteenth century minstrel stage? Or was this simply a way to draw attention to their voices? Magpies, after all, are known for the music they make.

A few parallels exist between a real magpie and the routines performed by minstrels. For

³¹⁷ J. S. Copeland was the leader of the troupe. Other members included George Early, Wm. Banks, O.E. Brookes, Joe Cisco, and Tom Davis. See *Blacks in Blackface* p. 611.

³¹⁸ Yodeling was an extremely common practice in nineteenth and twentieth century minstrel shows. According to Peter Stanfield, “The appropriation of yodeling by blackface minstrels as a further novelty to add to their musical cacophony was not such a great leap” (Stanfield 63-64). See *Horse Opera: The Strange History of the 1930s Singing Cowboy*.

one, the way a magpie walks has been described as strut-like. If we look at the late nineteenth and early twentieth century stage, performers often performed struts. Take George M. Cohan for example—cakewalk breaks in his music were written for the strut and the strut became the most common dance to accompany ragtime music. Magpies are also known to be fiercely competitive when it comes to music, often engaging in vocal competitions with one another. They tend to mimic other birds and can be taught how to talk and trained what to say. This call-and-response form frequently surfaced on the minstrel stage, in part because of the way it lent itself to improvisation, and in part because it helped to produce a comic atmosphere. The fact that call-and-response belongs to an Africanist aesthetic is a result of the development of minstrelsy alongside African American culture; the call-and-response form as it surfaces on the minstrel stage does not make it intrinsic to an African American aesthetic.

If one takes the movement and vocal characteristics alone of the magpie, one can see why the Musical Magpies might have named themselves after this bird. If this group was really known for parodying nineteenth century minstrel troupes and imitating their manner of singing, then their actions were in line with human observations of the magpie. Furthermore, if the Magpies included dancing in their performances, then choosing to call themselves after a bird who struts with pride also makes a great deal of sense. Making such parallels, however, becomes more complicated when we look at observations that humans have made about magpie behavior and character.³¹⁹

For centuries, magpies have been objects of fear for humans. Magpies can cause serious damage to cultivated fruits, are serious predators of game birds and eggs, and frequently attack baby lambs and sheep. Shiny objects tend to attract magpies and as a result, the birds have

³¹⁹ A famous British nursery rhyme specifically talks about seven magpies, so there is a possibility that the Musical Magpies were drawing on this when naming their troupe of seven. See F A for a version of this rhyme.

become notorious for stealing shiny jewelry when left unattended. For these reasons, humans have written the magpie off as a villain and often labeled them “vermin” rather than birds. Until very recently, it was legal in Britain for landowners to kill any magpies that trespassed on their land. (Birkhead 221). In more recent years, magpies have populated more urban areas, settling in less desirable neighborhoods. Because the birds are such opportunists, and adapt with ease to their environments, they tend to thrive where other birds fail. Magpies’ observed patterns of hoarding food and building intricate nests has only solidified their notorious reputation.³²⁰

Magpies have consequently become a popular totem for myth-making in cultures across the world. While Native American legend suggests that magpies are man’s allies/helpers, and the Chinese see the magpie as good luck and fortune, Europeans tend to see the magpie in a less generous light. The Rossini Opera “The Thieving Magpie” (*La Gazza Ladra*) says a lot about magpie connotation for Italians. In Greece the bird has become tied to Bacchus, God of wine, and associated with intoxication. In several cultures, the magpie is thought to have shamanic qualities or be capable of strong magic, but when uncontrolled, this magic can quickly become destructive and selfish. Some European countries go so far as to claim that the magpie carries a drop of the devil’s blood, insinuating the magpie’s ties to black magic.³²¹ Overall, the magpie holds a precarious reputation due to its proclivity for death, destruction, and conniving behavior.

Nothing inherently wrong arises when humans make observations about a particular animal and then assign value to that animal based on the ways it impacts their individual society. However, anthropomorphize that animal, give it a race,³²² and suddenly scientific observation and interpretation turns into a semiotics of race. Wells contends that the choices animators make

³²⁰ See *Flights of Fancy* pp. 76-81 and *The Magpies* pp. 216-145.

³²¹ “Magpies: A Story of Seven”

³²² This gesture is contingent upon the idea that audiences have been trained to recognize certain physical traits and dialects as referring to particular races (e.g. skin color, facial features, accents, vocal qualities, etc.).

regarding character assignment to particular animals is not arbitrary, but instead a “potent instinct.” (“Bestiary” 105) While I agree with Wells that humans utilize their knowledge of animals to produce animated likenesses of them, the reasons for which certain groups of people get assigned to such animals is not based any more in reality than on the projections with which humans anthropomorphize such animals. That is, while a magpie might be known for certain behavioral qualities due to scientific observation and empirical research, the decision to assign blackness—as a race, as a culture, as a way of being-in-the-world—stems from the assumption that black people behave in a manner similar to magpies. This knowledge, however, is not based on scientific observation and empirical research, but rather on the stigmas that humans have assigned to the black body for centuries, which, at their root, were never based in reality. Hence the manner in which the black bird is portrayed in-itself on the screen may be syntonetic with blackbird-ness, but the assignment of black bodies to these birds is a result of the purely psychic, symbolic, and social; many humans have been socialized to assume that all black people act in a certain manner and are thus similar to magpies.

The association between magpies and people of color in popular culture dates back to the turn of the century. Beginning around 1908, Springfield Illinois’ *Sunday Star* began publishing “Sambo and His Funny Noises,” a comic about an “ink-black” child who speaks in a black dialect and is known for his sneaky yet cowardly behavior and is always the brunt of the comic’s jokes. In one particular issue, Sambo befriends some magpies, likely because the strip’s writers saw the birds as being similar to the sambo character. Sambo says, “I sure am delighted to meet de Australian branch ob de Jim Crow family.”³²³ In 1940, MGM released, *Romeo in Rhythm*, a cartoon featuring two highly caricatured magpies dressed up as black takes on the Shakespearean

³²³ See Appendix C for image from this 1911 edition.

classic. Romeo serenades Juliet with some be-bop swing sonnet and speaks to her in a half spoken, half scatted monologue with “coonified” Shakespeareanisms.³²⁴ In 1946, around the same time that Terry released *The Talking Magpies*³²⁵ Paramount Pictures’ Famous Studios came out with the Noveltoons series wherein Buzzy the Crow made his debut in “The Stupiditious Cat.” Buzzy speaks in a Negro dialect and performs “blackness” for comic effect. By the time Terry-Toons trademarked *Heckle and Jeckle*, magpies’ symbolic relation to blackness had been marked in American minds. All of these imagos, I argue, helped shape Terry’s magpie aesthetic.

As I have shown in previous chapters, the black body was not the only stigmatized object to gain artistic appeal within a covert context. In Chapter One I demonstrated how Cohan’s use of the “yellow” body served to cover up his lack of blackface and avoidance of the black body. This corporeal distraction surfaced in a similar manner in Chapter Two with the “brown” or Hawaiian body. By 1949, the “red” Native American body became the black body’s foil. Much like the use of yellowface in *Johnny* and other stage productions of the era, “red” in the 1940s was defined in terms of certain metonyms: feathers, drums, and teepees, often signified “Indian territory” while big noses, side braids, and red faces usually delineated the red body. As in representations of the Chinese body, live performances rarely required an actor to wear colored makeup or make extreme facial modifications (e.g. enlarging one’s nose) to his costume. Actors playing Chinese characters would likely use makeup around their eyes, but not be asked to mutate their teeth or paint their faces yellow.³²⁶ Instead, as with Native American caricatures, the artistic team would create a whole set of signifiers to refer to the character’s color; tom-tom leitmotifs, deep raspy voices, and elaborate head dresses would signal to the audience the

³²⁴ See Appendix C for image from this cartoon.

³²⁵ This was the first episode of what would soon be called “Heckle and Jeckle.”

³²⁶ For examples of this, see screen shot from Paul Terry’s *Chop Suey* (1930) in Appendix C.

presence of a red body. Animated depictions of the American Indian, however, could use the same metonymic devices as the stage *and* incorporate the most extreme and exaggerated sets of corporeal features. In addition to presenting a metonymic masquerade, animated representations of the Native American almost always included coloring these cartoons' skin red or reddish brown up through the 1950s.³²⁷

Redface: An Act of Reorganization

For twenty years, animators played with various “Indian” stereotypes on the screen, projecting “red” symbolism onto cartoon imitations of Native peoples. Indian stereotypes had become well engrained in the American psyche by the 1930s. A lot of it stemmed from the language used by federal commissioners of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) who believed that, “Indians—like children—often did not know what was best for themselves” (qtd. in Vickers 15).³²⁸ The fictions these commissioners professed were designed to convince the (non-Native) American public that too much federal support would lead to laziness and dependency (amongst other things) of the Native peoples. Vickers writes, “Commissioners of the BIA became both the spokesmen for the national conscience regarding the treatment of Indians and also the designers of a racial ideology with which to justify westward expansion of Manifest Destiny. The language used by these commissioners laid the foundation and language for the construction of and reinforcement of Indian stereotypes” (16). Consequently, the BIA claimed that the only solution to “deal” with these “Others” was to either exterminate, or assimilate them: “The goal, until the administration of John Collier in 1933, was consistent and unrelenting: ‘to impress

³²⁷ See screen shot from Disney's *Peter Pan* (1953) showing the prominently caricatured features of the Chief in “What Makes the Red Man Red,” in Appendix C. The chief says, “Teach ‘em pale face brother all about red man.”

³²⁸ This federal agency was established in 1824 to try and “control” the Indians and their territory. See Scott B. Vickers' *Native American Identities*, Chapter Two.

American civilization upon the Indian, to whiten the red man,' whether by political, religious, or military might" (Vickers 18). This attitude was summed up in the Dawes Act (1887-1933), which aimed to assimilate Native Americans into the American mainstream.³²⁹ The 1934 Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), or Indian New Deal, banned the (further) sale of Indian land, required that un-allotted land be returned to tribal control, and granted judicial autonomy to certain Indian communities. However, the act was enforced too late to save the 100,000 landless Indians that had already surfaced as a result of allotment since 1887. Consequently few Native Americans could sustain themselves economically, and the BIA's budget was not large enough to provide these Native Americans with adequate health and educational facilities. World War II further exacerbated the financial problems of the BIA, and as a result, Native Americans lost another million acres of land. Not to mention the war's impact on Native American attitudes. Of approximately 350,000 Native Americans in the United States in 1941, 25,000 served in the armed forces.³³⁰ This was a higher proportion than from any other non-white minority, including African Americans. In the years following, efforts were made to relocate Native Americans to parts of the country where jobs were more fruitful. But, like African Americans who had fought for their country and still received an onslaught of hurtful representations on the screen, many of the country's "Native" stereotypes would not budge. Despite Native Americans' uphill struggle to become equal citizens of the United States, the animated screen remained an acceptable outlet for rehashing age-old stereotypes about the "red" body.

³²⁹ "Federal Indian policy feigned several things about Indian culture that reinforced earlier stereotypes and created others. William Medill, commissioner from 1845 to 1849, assumed Indians to be 'ignorant, degraded, lazy, and [in possession of] no worthwhile cultural traits.' Medill possessed no prior knowledge of Indian affairs, yet was able to say, with great persuasion, that too much federal support of impoverished tribal welfare led to 'the means of living for a time, independent of industry and exertion, in idleness and profligacy, until the disposition to labor for the habit of impermanence become so strong, that [the Indian] degenerates into a wretched outcast'" (Vickers 16-17).

³³⁰ See *History Today* for exact statistics.

What stands out in most animated representations of the Native American throughout the 1930s and '40s is animators' coupling of the red stereotype with that of the black. Contrary to the yellowface that Cohan *substituted* for blackface, redface and blackface were often presented side by side. Some examples of this were purely sonic, as was the case in *Johnny*, but others were highly visible, as in the pairing of brownface alongside blackface in *Honolulu*. In Van Beuren's *Molly Moo-Cow and the Indians*, (1935) animators mixed the soundtrack to be a medley of Foster's "Oh Susanna!" with what became standard "Native" music: a tom-tom beating in the background, often with a cow bell accent, and likely some version of screaming or howling, thought to emanate from the mouth-tapping chants of the Native American caricature. In 1937, Disney produced *Little Hiawatha*, which highlighted the importance of animals to Native American culture, but took liberties with what this relationship looked like. This was one of the few cartoons featuring a Native American stereotype that neither colored the subject dark red/reddish brown nor included any blackface coupling. Fleischer Studios produced "Big Chief Ugh-Amugh-Ugh" (1938) as part of its *Popeye the Sailor* series. Because the cartoon is in black and white, the Native American characters are darkened and read as black as they do red. Their noses are disproportionately large, and the chief is inexplicably larger than the rest of his clan, as was common in most animated depictions of Native American people. The short opens with all of the "Indians" howling around the fire to a repetitive song, "Ugh-Amugh-Ugh". Each clansman is dressed in a feather headdress, moccasins, a skirt, and flaunting a bare chest. The chief's voice sits at the bottom of the vocal register, and his sentences register as half English, half gibberish. He is played by Gus Wickie, a baritone frequently used by Paramount, and often used as the voice of the villain in *Popeye* shorts. With a constant tom-tom beating in the background, all of these visual symbols become tied to the red body and a particular sound.

Recall that the tom-tom was also the sound used to denote the yellow body in early Broadway, and the black body in live action film. This same year, Warner Bros. produced *Jungle Jitters*, blurring the line visually and sonically between what constituted Native American and what constituted the African Native on screen. Animators designed the “teepees” out of raffia and most of the characters’ skin was colored somewhere between a red and a brown, with an occasional charcoal black body thrown into the mix. This juxtaposition further intensifies the ethnic ambiguity at play. These nonspecific “Natives” perform generic circle dances to the beat of a tom-tom while howling like animated caricatures of Native Americans were shown to do, but stomping their feet as if performing an African gumboot dance. Moreover, the characters are neither fully animal nor fully human. Thus, in addition to conflating two natives into one nonspecific “ethnic” stereotype, Warner Bros.’ bedims the line between “Native” and animal. Fleischer reuses “Ugh-Amugh-Ugh” in his 1940 short, *The Dandy Lion*. The first minutes of the film look exactly like Disney’s *Little Hiawatha*, and the plot is once again a fictional take on the significance of animals to Native American life, but this cartoon includes a red braid-wearing Mammy figure, shown washing her son in a wood basin. All of these cartoons reiterate the stereotype that the Indian is violent and bloodthirsty, and has a proclivity for acting crazy. Rain is also a recurring theme in these cartoons. In Walter Lantz’s *Boogie Woogie Sioux* (1942), salvation from a deadly desert drought comes when “Tommy Hawk and His 5 Scalpers,” a traveling jazz band of redfaced African Americans arrives with magical music. Tommy Hawk saves the tribe with his swingin’ boogie beat. Just the title in Tex Avery’s *Big Heel-Watha (Buck of the Month)* from 1944 implies a blurring of these two types of caricatured bodies. Terry plays with the Native stereotype in 1947 with “The Super Salesman”. This *Heckle and Jeckle* short featured Spike, the bulldog cop, and the two magpies. The premise is almost identical to that in

“Dancing Shoes” except, they masquerade as American Indians in order to sell their “tonic” to the animals that roam the city park. We know that Heckle and Jeckle are posing as Native Americans because Jeckle dons a gigantic headdress, almost bigger than he is, and pulls out a small hand drum from his suitcase. *Heckle and Jeckle*’s creative team syncs in the sound of a tom-tom so that the now-standard Native leitmotif can be heard alongside the feathered headdress and hand drum. This song then gets woven into the sequence’s medley, which includes “Listen to the Mockingbird,” the magpies’ signature song. In Famous Studios’ *Heap Hep Injuns* (1949), a narrator attempts to teach children the origin of Indians, and goes on to explain that Indian brothers were once divided into tribes: “...such as the black feet, the flat heads, the hot foots, and of course, the Cleveland Indians. The Indian tribes were all led by famous chiefs, among whom were, Big Chief Crazy Horse and Big Chief Rain in the Face.”³³¹ A highly literal picture accompanies each part of the narration. For example, the black feet Indians have gigantic black feet and Chief Crazy Horse is a senile man with a hunchback and no teeth that transforms into a horse. Once again the soundtrack is a mixture of “Oh Susanna!”, “My Pony Boy,”³³² and the generic tom-tom. One of the “Indians” is filmed yodeling into a microphone, a sound and image that evoke the nineteenth and twentieth century minstrel stage. This cartoon, along with all the rest I have mentioned, contain a very particular dialect as well, referring to the first person as “Me” rather than “I” and adding an “um” to the end of every sentence spoken by a person of color. I trace this history to show that much like the yellowface of Cohan’s era, and the brownface of Hollywood’s golden age, redface pervaded the animated screen. As I have shown, redface minstrelsy was also often coupled with traces of blackface minstrelsy. This was sometimes as subtle as the sonic coupling of “Oh Susanna!” with a tom-

³³¹ See Appendix C for select screenshot images from these films featuring redface alongside blackface.

³³² Written in 1909 by Charley O'Donnell, “My Pony Boy” was a song that became cliché in Westerns and cartoons.

tom phrase, or as obvious as the insertion of a red mammy in *The Dandy Lion*. Regardless of the blatancy of these pairings, the use of redface helped to cover up deliberate references to the black body and a continued use of certain minstrel tunes and archetypes. Similar to the function of the brownface effect in *Honolulu*, the ties between the Native American body and certain visual (e.g. the feather headdress, war paint, and bow and arrow) and sonic (e.g. tom-tom, deep voice, and word “um” at the end of sentences) symbols became so intertwined that the anthropomorphized animal could replace the human body and still signify the human “Indian”. Thus, by the time Terry released “The Dancing Shoes”, Jeckle could masquerade in a headdress, side braids, and red face paint and the allusion to “Injun” would be obvious, just as Heckle could appear with a bone through his ears, an ivory necklace, and a black face and reference the “African Native”. Furthermore, it is precisely their protean nature that allows the birds to appear “red” with the blink of an eye, or “black” with the whistle of a piccolo. These cartoon forms are versatile, adaptable, and many-sided. But what about the juxtaposition of these two forms of imitation? Does it go back to a nineteenth century belief that the Native American and the African American share many of the same traits and are thus comparable and equally abhorrent?³³³ Or does this integration do something more subtle for animators? It is here that protean minstrelsy meets redface and the anthropomorphized animal begins to reiterate fictions about the Native American body and its culture in the face of blackface performance. The result is a cultural “masquerade”—part of the “gag”—capable of covering up a studio’s use of racial masks.

What makes the corporeal element of covert animation stand out from both stage productions and live action film is, in part, the fact that the unreal-ness of animation takes away autonomy

³³³ In *Roughing It* (1872), Mark Twain writes of the Indian, “Such of the Goshoots as we saw, along the road and hanging about the stations, were small, lean, scrawny creatures; in complexion a dull black like the ordinary American Negro; their faces and hands bearing dirt which they had been hoarding and accumulating for months, years, and even generations, according to the age of the proprietor; a silent, sneaking, treacherous-looking race; taking note of everything, covertly, like all the other ‘Noble Red Men’... (Twain 98).

from the visible, performing subject and places it in the hands of the unseen animator. The cartoon becomes an extension of the artist who creates it, but the artist possesses the power and ability to choose how his audience sees his performance. That is, suppose an artist desires to perform a blackface routine. He is neither the animated subject nor the performer that becomes visible (and audible) to his audience. By creating an “Other” removed from his own (likely white) subjectivity, he absolves himself of the responsibilities that have historically complicated the art form. Instead, the artist creates an Other, one that is as far removed from self as possible, to act as the perpetrator. Hence the one thought to be reinforcing certain stereotypes and fictions by its audience, is actually a fictitious body at the mercy of its creator; animation that pairs redface with blackface is a prime example of this process. Just as blacking up a white animal reads differently to an audience than blacking up a white human, blacking up an “Indian”—or the opposite, “redding” up a black archetype—takes the blame away from the white man, further incriminates the Other, and still succeeds in reinforcing certain behavior (i.e. blackface performance or other more covert forms of minstrelsy). As I demonstrated in Chapter One, white immigrants often blacked up in order to become whiter. By the 1940s, however, white Americans began creating red characters (animals and humans) that could black up (and vice versa) in order to preserve certain power dynamics while making white people look progressive. At the same time that animators blurred the line between red bodies and black on the animated screen, they continued to write off all of these caricatures as tributes. That is, Hollywood justified blatant caricatures of Native Americans by placing them within didactic narratives. If a studio hired a narrator to narrate these films about American Indians—as about 80 percent of these cartoons demonstrate—then the Production Code could not classify these “stories” as offensive. Didactic cartoons were doing everyone a “service”: teaching Americans about its

“real” history. I liken this narrative tactic to the tribute minstrelsy I explicated in the last chapter. But as I will show, “tributes” to black tap dancers were just as popular on the animated reel as they were on the live reel and they continued to pervade animated films at the same time these “didactic” redface cartoons persisted. Real or not, “histories” and “tributes” teach the spectating public something about the Other.

Cartoon Tributes

The most common use of tribute minstrelsy in animation from the mid-1930s to 1949 was a repeated use of the image of Al Jolson kneeling in blackface while singing “My Mammy” from *The Jazz Singer* (1927). A memorable instance of this tribute to Jolson is Leon Schlesinger Production’s 1941 war bonds commercial, *Leon Schlesinger Presents Bugs Bunny*. Dressed as Uncle Sam, a blackened Bugs Bunny pays tribute to Jolson singing the word “Sammy” in place of “Mammy” during the main song, “Any Bonds Today”.³³⁴ Elmer Fudd and Porky Pig are dressed in war uniforms, and together, the three toons solidify the patriotic American image alongside blackface makeup. As I demonstrated in the last two chapters, blackface was a uniquely American artistic practice, and Americans tended to believe that it needed the art in order to adequately reflect its esteemed song and dance tradition while making sure to keep a great enough distance between the nation’s white bodies and black. Thus, the very act of wearing blackface gestured at patriotism and helped rally a national spirit during the War while at the same time it upheld (social) distance between white citizens and people of color. Furthermore, the continued use of this pairing (of patriotism and blackface) on the screen, congealed Americans’ nostalgia towards the use of such makeup, viewing blackface as in some way intrinsic to national belonging.

³³⁴ See Appendix C for screen shot from this cartoon.

Another recurring image in animated instantiations of tribute minstrelsy was that of a highly caricatured Bill Robinson dancing a rendition of either “Doin’ the New Lowdown” or his famous stair dance. What makes this manifestation of tribute minstrelsy different from both the animated tributes to Jolson and the live action tributes I discussed in Chapter Two is that Bill Robinson’s caricature was used to signify Bill Robinson, as opposed to the task falling to the film’s other characters (e.g. Bugs Bunny or Eleanor Powell. In both *Clean Pastures* (1937) and *Have you Got Any Castles?* (1938), Robinson’s caricature pays tribute to Bill Robinson the man.

*Clean Pastures*³³⁵, itself a “tribute” to the 1936 film *Green Pastures*,—a Bible story as told through the eyes of African Americans—was one of the most controversial animated shorts created in the 1930s, due to the derisive nature of the cartoon’s images, sound, and narrative. In addition to lampooning African Americans, the PCA considered this cartoon to be deeply offensive from a religious/spiritual point of view. Yet despite its controversial nature, Warner Bros. was able to convince the PCA to compromise because it included a large number of references to famous black entertainers of the day, and because it was one of the few color (meaning not black and white) cartoons of the day. The PCA saw these two attributes as advantageous and agreed to green light *Clean Pastures* after removing a select number of particularly triggering songs and images.³³⁶

Early on in the cartoon, a caricature of Bill Robinson enters the stage doing the famous riff (*heel toe scuff toe toe, heel toe scuff toe toe, heel toe scuff toe, toe scuff toe, toe scuff toe toe*) section of his “Doin’ the New Lowdown” routine to the tune of “Swanee River”. His face blacker than coal, his teeth bigger and whiter than those of an elephant, his hands sporting the

³³⁵ Directed by I Freleng, produced by Schlesinger, and released to theatres by Warner Bros. and Vitaphone in 1937.

³³⁶ According to Lehman, the PCA “operated under a double standard.” This can be seen in the apparent contradiction between from those images and songs they found to be acceptable and those they chose to deny. See Lehman pp. 42-44.

same oversized white gloves we saw the “Darkys” wearing in Cohan’s era. Robinson gets very little screen time, but his cartoon image imitates the real dancer’s movement quality so precisely that no question exists as to whether this is the “Bojangles” that everyone has come to know and love or some other “old black Joe” Schmo. Just in case, however, animators include an impeccable recreation of Robinson’s suit and bowler hat costume, and dub in convincing wooden tap sounds and humming. Following Robinson’s performance is another blackface tribute to Al Jolson, a minute-long tribute to Cab Callaway³³⁷ and his orchestra, and a bit dedicated to Louis Armstrong. None of these tributes are particularly flattering, but the premise of the film seems to excuse such representations.

Warner Bros.’ *Have You Got Any Castles?*³³⁸ builds its premise around a series of classic books that come to life. The cartoon opens with a comical *pas de quatre* danced by Dr. Jekyll, an extremely grotesque yellow caricature of the Fu Man Chu, a Phantom skeleton (from *Phantom of the Opera*), and the Frankenstein monster. The screen cuts to a round of applause given by hundreds of storybook characters popping out of their respective books. The camera then zooms in on a praying globe that sits behind Pearl S. Buck’s Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *The Good Earth*, mumbling gibberish with a very thick caricatured Chinese accent. The camera pans left to reveal H.G. Wells’ *The Invisible Man*, placed next to a copy of Mark Twain’s *Tom Sawyer*.³³⁹ *The Invisible Man* has an animated cover image of a tap-dancing invisible man—costume and tap shoes are alive and visible but detached from the body that wears these signs—subtly suggesting a connection between the invisible black body (or newly visible white body)

³³⁷ Lehman notes, “The script for the film, as approved by him [Freleng], crudely identifies Calloway’s scatting as African American by twice calling for his caricature’s ‘coon shouting’ (Lehman 41).”

³³⁸ Directed by Frank Tashlin, produced by Leon Schlesinger, and distributed by Vitaphone as part of the *Merrie Melodies Series* in 1938. The film was reissued into the “Blue Ribbon Classics” series in 1947.

³³⁹ Since the author of *The Invisible Man* is partially obscured, someone reading this performance in 2016 might attribute very different meaning to the invisible tap dancing body atop *The Invisible Man*, instead reading this as a slap in the face to Ralph Ellison (and his 1952 novel by the same name) and an ironic juxtaposition next to *Tom Sawyer*.

and tap dance. As the camera pans right, the book *Topper* comes into focus with a second tap dancing invisible man leaping off the pages of Thorne Smith's 1926 work while engaging in a little call-and-response with the tap dancer atop Wells' work. While these two tap dancers possess blank space in lieu of, their costumes and styles invoke the performances of Fred Astaire that were so popular in the 1930s. The camera continues to pan right to show John Buchan's famous novel, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. After zooming in on the title, the cartoon pans downward to expose the brown dancing body of Bill Robinson. This time the full body is intact, along with his famous bowler hat and suit, and with the now common cartoon-addition of the oversized white gloves—a part of the costume that was never present in Robinson's live renditions of the stair dance. His skin is noticeably lighter than in earlier cartoon tributes, and his lips and teeth seem to have shrunk in size since the last year's *Clean Pastures*. Changes have been made to his face, however, to include pudgier cheeks, a rounder nose, and a plastered smile, adjustments that make him look more like a servile bobble head, than an imitation of the real Robinson. The camera pans directly down to capture another Pulitzer Prize winner, *So Big*, with the female protagonist luxuriating in a sand dance variation of Robinson's famous Shirley Temple bits in oversized high heels. The screen tilts back up, stopping one book above *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, to catch sight of Marc Connelly's book *Green Pastures* of recent Merrie Melodies' fame. It quickly becomes clear that using *Green Pastures* is an economical move on the part of Warner Bros. since the next 35 seconds of animation have been lifted directly from *Clean Pastures*. The music transitions from Calloway's jazz orchestra to an Ella Fitzgerald-inspired scat. However, the very Aryan looking Heidi, of 1881 Swiss fame, manages to belt the sounds *Heidi Heidi Heidi Ho*, a word play on Cab Calloway's famous *Hi De Hi De Hi De Ho* line from the song, "Minnie the Moocher." Other tributes ensue—a character from *The Thin Man* that transforms into a

political caricature after visiting the *White House Cookbook*, a whistling “Whistler’s grandmother” that sings on the cover of an art history book, an Andrews’ Sisters-like song that accompanies the dancing of three *Little Women* characters, a very zaftig Old King Cole of nursery-rhyme fame is white but sings like Nat King Cole of the then-“King Cole Swingsters”³⁴⁰—ensue. The Andrews’ Sisters impersonators add the line, “He waved his scepter with a swing” after Cole’s solo and the camera cuts away to a very phallic image of *Rip Van Winkle*’s long beard strewn between his legs. When *Van Winkle* awakes, he jumps into the book next to his and chops off the white hair of a very decrepit Uncle Tom, atop Harriet Beecher Stowe’s famous title, using the slave’s white cotton-like hair as ear plugs so he can fall back asleep. A very caricatured Native American drums on the cover of *Drums Along the Mohawk* while a very stereotypical naked Indian plays an Indian brass horn in front of the Taj Mahal and two asps. This Indian looks almost indistinguishable from the Aladdin that appears later in the cartoon, implying the visual similitude of all Indians and Arabs. The camera cuts more rapidly, as the music speeds up, and the caricatures become broader in nature. The animators have a field day with critiquing culture, class, politics, and race for the remainder of the short, but nothing reads as intentional and pervasive as that which they do with the black characters and parts of African American culture.

The narrative premise of *Castle* lends itself to a cavalcade of “tributes” and leaves a large window of opportunity for animators to subtly remark on all aspects of culture through magical realism, parody, satire, word play, and irony. As was the case with the artistic choices behind the Seaman’s Fund Ball that takes place early on in the film *Honolulu*³⁴¹, the directors of the book sequence in *Castles* create meaning out of deconstruction, imitation and juxtaposition. In

³⁴⁰ *Have You Got Any Castles?* was released before Nat King Cole became a big solo artists (c. 1943).

³⁴¹ See Chapter Two.

Honolulu, the casting plays a major role in the way the audience reads each of the small tributes. For example, the choice for The Four King's Men to impersonate the Marx Brothers, says as much about the King's Men as it does about the Marx Brothers. Similarly, the choice to have Eleanor Powell pay tribute to Robinson in the costume ball's closing event, says as much about Powell, as it does the role of women in 1939, the nation's relationship to tap dance, and the country's perception of blackness, and Bill Robinson. In fact, the individual performances that propound a reading of "tribute-worthy" personalities say *more* about the choreographers, directors, and actors playing the part than they do about the ones to which reverence is attributed.

A major difference between live action tributes to Bill Robinson and ones that were animated is the fact that in the case of the former, an actor from the film will dress up as the person he/she is impersonating, pay tribute, and then undress; this action is an important part of the meaning-making process for audience members. If Powell does not make her application and removal of blackface makeup intentional, the audience might view Powell as black in real life. However, when the tribute exists within the world of the unreal to begin with, there is no need for the actor to show the making-up process; there is no perceived fear of misidentification. This not only saves time, but opens up the possibility for more grotesque caricatures to be depicted: in a world that is sketched and colored, the possibilities for representation are endless. Additionally, the very act of obscuring the process—that is not showing the act of making one's self up—might in fact confirm the realness of the performance. That is, if there is no "dressing up", then nothing existed before the cartoon representation. The repeated use of certain visible characteristics, (e.g. coal black skin, gigantic lips, and oversized white gloves) soon become engrained for spectators, until an image of the real person vanishes. Moreover, if children were the target audience for most of these Merrie Melodies, and a vast majority of these children had never seen

the real images of the artists these tributes were representing, then the ONLY image they have of someone like Bill Robinson, is the Ducky or bobble head image. Furthermore, the art of deconstruction and juxtaposition, as in the corporeal deconstruction that animators engage on the cover of *The Invisible Man*, or the thought-provoking placement of Rip Van Winkle next to Uncle Tom, allows animators to interpret and re-interpret history in the most covert of ways.

The cartoon tributes allowed artists to show, more overtly, what Hollywood likely wished to convey in their live action tribute performances. Because Powell's tribute to Robinson existed in the real, "live" world, directors had to temper their representations. Proof of this can be seen in earlier versions of the *Honolulu* script, where the language used to describe her scene, as well as the script itself, were much more crude than what MGM left in the final cut. The majority of *Honolulu's* critique—with the exception of the black face paint—was left to more covert aspects of her performance. The number's soundtrack and the very intentional movement modifications she made to emphasize "essential black traits" like servitude (e.g. silver platter gesture) and primitivism (wild turkey head move) are two such examples of covert, but still legible minstrel tactics. *Clean Pastures'* artists, on the other hand, could be much more vulgar in their representation of Robinson because of the short's parodic nature. In the end, Powell's tribute is as much a caricature of Robinson as those presented of him in *Clean Pastures* and *Castles*, but the animated versions draw on older representations of the "coon" or "darky" and do not purport to be a representation or imitation of life as live action tributes imply during the act of donning the burnt cork—or blackness—as makeup.

I have drawn out the facets of Bill Robinson's caricature in order to show a direct parallel between what was occurring in live action films and animation of the late 1930s and 1940s, but also to highlight a pattern of internal referencing that began to occur in both types of films.

Recall that internal referencing came up in both Cohan's era and in 1930s cinema, but that it played a crucial role in the latter. As America became more established in its national aesthetic, citing another movie or practice within the current performance became a way to include the audience, remind them of other artistic feats, and ignite a nationalistic spirit around art and culture. It arises naturally in all tribute performances, costume balls, and book reviews, but it also surfaces in less obvious instances, like when Powell quotes Astaire's "Bojangles of Harlem" when her black silhouette starts doing its own dance during her tribute to Bill Robinson, or when Fred Astaire tips his hat to his mentor John Bubbles in the same dance by wearing the costume Bubbles wore as Sportin' Life in *Porgy and Bess*. In this way, characters build upon one another and new stories help remind audiences of old stories; the history of art is written, remembered, and re-written with each new recitation. Along with these readings afforded by narrative and visual stimuli, sound offered cartoons yet another layer of interpretation. In what follows, I examine the ways in which all aspects of the soundtrack contribute to the meaning of the cartoon as a whole. As in the last chapter, the work of Stephen Foster becomes a driving force in covert minstrelsy's more sonic constituents, as does Richard Milburn's "Listen to the Mockingbird," which comprised part of Powell's tribute medley. The voices of Heckle and Jeckle, construed as Brooklyn-based and British, offer this chapter a unique type of sonic minstrelsy. Sounds as signs often refer to more than meet the eye.

Sound Affects: Voices, Detachment, and ‘Mammy’ Issues

Like early live action film, the animation industry was limited by the sound technologies available to them, and not until 1928 could the industry experiment with sound synchronization. As was the case with live action films, the early cartoon studios would provide theatres with sheet music that could be played by a live pianist to accompany the shorts. In fact, one of the early goals of pairing sound with cartoons was to advertise new musical hits; studios could engage in self-promotion by requesting that certain songs to which they owned the rights get played alongside the animated shorts they were distributing. In addition to promoting new songs on the market, animation studios also relied heavily on the very recognizable, free tunes that had been in circulation for almost a century. The most common of these timeless tunes were Stephen Foster classics such as “My Old Kentucky Home” and “Old Black Joe. (Lehman 14).

From the beginning of sound synchronization, cartoons relied heavily on the minstrel tradition. Walt Disney was among the first cartoonists to fall back on minstrel archetypes and following his success, competitors began exploiting the blackface tradition as well. Take Mickey Mouse for example: prior to his falsetto voice, Disney paired songs commemorating African-American bondage with his image, including the song, “Turkey in the Straw,” the main track in his first sound cartoon, *Steamboat Willie*.³⁴² (Lehman 16) While the lyrics written for “Turkey in the Straw” were seemingly inoffensive, cartoons such as *Steamboat Willie* did away with the lyrics and utilized only the tune, which was really an instrumental version of “Zip Coon”, arguably the

³⁴² “Mickey-mousing” is the term given to the exact synchronization of music to action. As Goldmark points out, the use of this term implies a musical simplicity at the same time it seeks to point out that the music is question is too literal: “it is telegraphing to the audience too much information: that is, the music is calling attention to itself as it describes what is happening on screen” (Goldmark 6).

most popular coon song of the mid-19th century that closed almost all minstrel performances.³⁴³

(16-17) The use of minstrel music served a few functions. First, it was free; these minstrel tunes had been around for about 100 years, so they belonged to the public domain. Second, audiences tended to recognize tunes like “Turkey in the Straw” and “Carry Me Back to Old Virginny” precisely because they had ties to minstrelsy and the vaudeville stage. Using these familiar tunes drew people in and inculcated into American audiences new artistic sensibilities by appealing to their affection for past modes of representation. It is worthwhile to note that in addition to frequently using Foster tunes, animators would draw on syncopated “marches” such as the famous “Yankee Doodle Boy” by Cohan. Finally, like a film score, the role of cartoon music is to establish a setting, draw an audience into the story, give the viewer any helpful supplemental information about a scene, tell the viewer how to feel, and infuse life into the characters; this last task is of utmost importance since the characters are not alive to begin with.³⁴⁴ (Goldberg 7) In virtue of certain tunes’ ties to the minstrel stage and thus the black and blackfaced body, the use of minstrel tunes as background soundtracks to cartoons could evoke a particular mood, feeling, and perception of character from their listeners. That is to say, music helps an audience fill in the gaps, form opinions, and make meaning out of limited visual stimuli on the screen. Music tends to “telegraph” meaning to the audience, which includes situating a scene within a particular geographic and historical context due to its “high degree of cultural coding” (Gorbman “Unheard Melodies” 58). Such cultural coding resulted from years of pairing certain types of songs with certain types of images, both on the minstrel stage, and on the screen of live action film.

³⁴³ See *The Colored Cartoon* p.17 for a list of other minstrel tunes utilized by Disney in the early days of sound cartoons.

³⁴⁴ Many cartoon composers began as film accompanists, which accounts for the frequent use of generic melodies used to establish musical identities (Goldmark 31). Goldmark writes, “Use of such music would ensure that the viewer was properly prepared for the ethnically, sexually, or racially inflected situation to follow” (31).

Music that could help the audience quickly identify particular races, classes, and genders, was the most common use of these tags or short songs. Henry Jenkins writes, “Characters and situations needed to be immediately recognizable. An elaborate system of typage developed: exaggerated costumes, facial characteristics, phrases, and accents were meant to reflect general personality traits viewed as emblematic of a particular class, ethnic group, or gender... Whatever its racist implications, such stereotyping was a necessary aspect of the highly economic style of vaudeville performance” (Jenkins 70-71). Thus, like Cohan’s use of the various “Oriental” leitmotifs in *Little Johnny Jones*, animators had a collection of songs from which they could draw in order help them refer to just about any type of individual or group of people. This was especially prominent after World War II in order to quickly identify foreign nationalities. For example, in scoring Japanese (or broadly any “Oriental” culture), studios tended to use, “stereotypical pentatonic melodies, and occasionally songs such as ‘Nagasaki’ and ‘Chinatown, My Chinatown’” (Goldmark 33). Such sonic repetition and generalization, as I showed in the last section, applied to the Native American as well: the ways music composers chose to signify Native American-ness was often indistinguishable from the music played for other “Natives,” and studios re-used the same tunes over and over again. But more than any other targeted group, the relationship between background music and the black body tended to be the most pervasive and complicated. Hence, I trace the meaning behind the two prominent styles most often (if not always) used to signify the black and blackfaced body, which includes everything from the compendium of highly stylized minstrel archetypes of the last 100 years to the more recent use of blackened “humanimals” that saturated animation culture.

***Mis-en-Bande*³⁴⁵ and Banned Music**

Animation has, since its inception, correlated the black body to well-known minstrel tunes and jazz music. Minstrel tunes were often used to signify plantation life, a glorified Old South, or a highly caricatured black body as represented in early minstrel theatre (e.g. the pickninnie, Uncle Tom, or Jim Crow type). Jazz tunes, on the other hand, were often used to represent urban culture, freedom, and an overall lack of inhibition. In times past, black bodies were portrayed as hollow, lacking any sort of complex emotions. Animation, on the other hand, succeeded in presenting the black body as being emotionally complex. However, the emotions assigned to these cartoons were merely projections, and the meanings they assigned to the black body on screen greatly impacted the way real black people were perceived. Minstrel tunes often conveyed the message that slaves were happy and content with plantation life while jazz music frequently insinuated a slave's sadness about being forced to leave his master's plantation. At the same time, another common musical trope in 1940s animation was to deliberately pair Stephen Foster tunes like a markedly slowed version of "Swanee River" with images of lazy, indolent black people. In such instances, jazz music would often come at a later point in the cartoon in order to try and "save" the lazy black people; jazz offered salvation to those in need. Hence audiences received very conflicting messages about "black music" and the black body while watching animated films.

The animation industry effectively dichotomized two musical forms affected by diaspora, placing plantation songs at a completely opposite end of the spectrum than jazz music.³⁴⁶ The

³⁴⁵ Literally meaning, "putting onto the soundtrack"—looks at the interaction among the various components making up the soundtrack. Here this would be the song "Listen to the Mockingbird", the dubbed in tap dancing feet, and any other sound effects used by Philip Scheib when composing the score.

³⁴⁶ Lehman sums up this dichotomy very well when he writes, "The Association of minstrel songs with blackface gags in cartoons helped to present the black image as an escapist 'other' image. Musical scores from cartoons frequently contain portions of Foster tunes to accompany gags in which middle class or upper upper-class characters we're transformed into a poor

plantation tunes they chose, however, were usually those composed by Foster and other white minstrel composers. The screen became yet another opportunity to try to make Foster's music more black in virtue of its pairing with the black body. Such attribution not only sought to make Foster's music blacker, but it succeeded in glorifying the plantation as something positive for black slaves. While white animators were busy meshing plantation songs to the black body, they were also doing what they could to re-attribute jazz music to white culture. Early uses of jazz music in cartoons sometimes tried to show that a white man was responsible for bringing jazz to the African Jungle as was the case in *King of Jazz* (1930).³⁴⁷ In a less blatant example of such appropriation, the ones bringing jazz music to the "Old South" in *Scrub Me Mama With a Boogie Beat* (1941) are fairer skin mulattoes that exhibit more human features, while the ones being saved (from lazy plantation life) are depicted in a more animalistic way, bordering on animated imitations of black chimpanzees, and other anthropomorphized caricatures. Thus the sonic narrative subtly remarks on the inherent laziness of black people while making a statement about jazz's ability to save, at the same time that the visual narrative quietly alludes to the whitened urban influence of jazz music and the apparent physical differences between Southern black "slave" types and whiter, more sophisticated assimilated black types.³⁴⁸

African American rural folk. Refusing to address African-Americans' postwar concerns, the studios embraced the antebellum 'Benevolent master-loyal slave' stereotype in songs whose titles referred to slavery, allowing the blackface representations and musical associations to justify contemporary practices of segregation such as the exclusion by whites of African-Americans from suburban neighborhoods. The blackface 'other' represents the incongruity of the primitive African American in an affluent white suburban. The films even depict the darkened characters as evil intruders in peaceful societies. MGM used the song "Massa's in the Cold Ground" in *The Flying Cat* (1952), in which Jerry sets fire to a ladder that Tom is using to reach a birdhouse in a suburban backyard. The blackened Tom is the unwelcome visitor to the bird's neighborhood" (114).

³⁴⁷ See *Tunes for 'Toons* pp. 80-82.

³⁴⁸ 1930's jazz music played alongside ethnic imagery became as popular as the minstrel tunes that had proliferated the cartoon screen the decade prior. Cartoons began not only taking up themes such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but began borrowing images from popular all-black films such as *Hallelujah!* and *Hearts in Dixie*. The cartoon *Dixie Days*, for example, Van Beuren took a nostalgic look at the antebellum South and plantation life. Lehman writes, "For *Dixie Days*, the animators constructed broad visual racial stereotypes that contributed to the representations of African Americans and animals. These images, which came from popular culture, distinguish the slave animals from the free (white) ones. The slave animals, mostly dogs, wear ragged clothes and lazily pick cotton. Recalling the metamorphosis gags of the silent era, a watermelon transforms into a close up image

When white people were not shown to be the “inventors” of jazz, animators sometimes drew out the ways in which jazz was potentially dangerous: “The cartoons that simultaneously presented the ideas of jazz and primitivism also (in a tone mixing envy and condemnation) emphasized the stereotyped notion that blacks live their lives with careless freedom” (Goldmark 86). Other late cartoons featuring jazz music sent the message that too much jazz music would cause one to lose sight of reality, as was the implication in *Tin Pan Alley Cats* (1943). Here the narrative taught that too much jazz music—a life of excess and a free spirit—was a sure path to damnation. (Goldmark 99). No matter how much American animation relied on diasporic culture for its soundtracks, the black body could never win. The manner in which these tunes circulated—via sonic minstrelsy—and the messages they spread, perfectly exemplify the notion of love and theft to which I keep returning.³⁴⁹

While America saw a short wave of cartoons featuring caricatured black human jazz musicians (e.g. *Green Pastures* featuring Cab Calloway and his Orchestra or the more generic *Swing Social*, which painted slave figures sonically through jazz music and the coon dialect, narratively through church worship and voodoo, and visually through blackface, extremely exaggerated lips, and Africanist vernacular movement), by the end of 1940, the Motion Picture Production Code cracked down on animation studios and forbade the representation of black bodies and behavior as such. Studios were soon required to explore jazz culture without the use

of the whistling slave’s face. Images are even less subtle, as in the scene in which a group of chained slaves skip along happily singing for holding a sign that reads, ‘Slave auction today.’ (Lehman 20).

³⁴⁹ Almost every major film studio went through a period of casting black musicians in their films during the 1930s and 1940s. This was yet another acceptable role for the black body that stemmed from a simultaneous love of “black culture” and attempt to capitalize on what it had to offer an American aesthetic. The inclusion of black musicians in these films paralleled the use of black vernacular dance forms and Negro spirituals that had infiltrated the minstrel stage just a few decades prior. In both instances, white people could control and contain the black body—relegating it to a very specific set of roles and functions—while co-opting its Africanist aesthetic, to be woven into the national aesthetic. While it may be hard to see the appropriative side of this practice in live action film, the use of black musicians in animation during this period highlights the extremely covert manner in which this transition from black to white occurred. See *The Colored Cartoon* pp. 30-40.

of black bodies. One of the earliest examples of this shift can be seen in *Swing Wedding* (1937), which demonstrates how MGM rose above the code's confines by exploring a humorous love triangle with animals: "...a Callaway caricature attempts to woo an Ethel Waters frog as she prepares to marry a Steppin' Fetchit frog. Also, the female frogs keep their feet still will swaying their hips—a dance move prohibited by the Code... there is no threat of miscegenation, and the songs contain no references to sex and drugs..." (Lehman 40). Thus by turning Harlem's greatest musicians and Hollywood's most popular black caricatures into frogs, MGM found a way to circumvent the Production Code and give the public what it apparently wanted.

The combination of the Hays Code, World War II, and overall decline of the Harlem Renaissance effectively put an end to the (blatant) racist human caricatures that had previously pervaded animated films and instead turned all black subjects into animals at the mercy of quick sight gags and sonic reattribution. Even the voices studios paired with black characters went through a transformation in the 1940s. With the advent of synchronized sound, animators failed to figure out a way to make cartoons' lips move in-sync with a "Negro dialogue". Consequently, artists had to either do away with the fictions of "Negro speech" (Lehman 20)³⁵⁰ or create animals that did not require such precision in lip movement as humans; Paul Terry covered all his bases, creating two animals whose beaks would not interfere with the visible dialogue and whose voices would cover up their ties to black culture. Note that the beak through which Heckle and Jeckle spoke was not far removed from the overly gigantic lips given to earlier representations of the black body.³⁵¹ In this way, protean minstrelsy worked in the service of keeping long-standing caricatures in circulation.

³⁵⁰ This is not to say that the sonic was not a consideration: the opening of *Dixie Days* features the song "Carry me back to Old Virginny" and the climax of the film features Stephen Foster's "Old Black Joe."

³⁵¹ See Appendix C for image of such animated mouths.

Unlike Disney's magpies in *Dumbo*, Terry's magpies' voices are far removed from a stereotypical "Negro dialect"; Heckle's voice hails from New York City while Jeckle speaks as if he has just returned from Buckingham Palace. Historically black characters—on stage, screen, and animated film—have been associated with a "Negro" or "coon" dialect. This dialect has mutated over the years, adopting certain slang for people of color and at times replacing uncouth idioms with more "acceptable" phrases. Writers and performers would often change letters (e.g. "d" in place of "th" as in the word "dem" rather than "them" or the letter "b" in place of "v" as in the word "lub" instead of "love") and manipulate syntax in order to make the speaker sound less intelligent. Regardless of the specifics, the absurdity of the dialogue ensured that certain meanings stayed tied to the black body. With *Heckle and Jeckle*, however, the image remained black but the highly caricatured voices changed to reflect a rough New Yorker and a high-class Brit. I venture to say that the reason Terry chose to give these two identical birds distinct voices was so his audience might be able to distinguish between the two, find humor in the irony of giving two black birds two very unexpected voices, thereby subtly referencing two famous archetypes of the minstrel stage without visibly reproducing the Zip Coon (Heckle) and Jim Dandy (Jeckle). That is, by giving Heckle and Jeckle these two very atypical black dialects, Terry's team clearly established two extreme caricatures on opposite sides of the spectrum—comically and covertly—thereby (invisibly) recounting old black archetypes and reinforcing new parallels between blackness and magpie-ness.

In Chapter One, I alluded to Daddy Rice's use of the Jim Crow character and briefly described this caricature's evolution on the minstrel stage. What I did not discuss was the origin of Rice's character. Contrary to the simplicity of many authors' stories surrounding the evolution of Jim Crow, Rice's inspiration came from universal trickster folklore: in Yoruba

culture, this character happens to be a crow named Jim. Adams writes of this Yoruba trickster: “the country bumpkin whose luck and nascent cleverness help rescue him from disaster” (Adams 37). Like the Harlequin of Western Europe or Juan Bobo of Spain, Jim Crow was another clever trickster. What Rice did with this stock character is a different story. Rice’s minstrel performances turned Jim Crow the trickster into a dumb-witted caricature of African American descent who speaks unintelligibly, makes a fool of himself, and frequently takes the blame for others’ mistakes. The success of Daddy Rice’s interpretation of this Yoruba myth inspired other minstrel performers to create their own caricatures. George Dixon, for example, created “Zip Coon” as a foil to Jim Crow.

Unlike Jim Crow, Zip Coon was birthed entirely on the minstrel stage. Zip Coon was known as the “pretentious city slicker, plotting devious strategies, and getting caught in his own trap” (37).³⁵² Like Jim Crow, however, Zip Coon still spoke in a highly demeaning black dialect and the inherent irony of his situation formed the brunt of his jokes. In the case of Jim Crow this irony was to be found in the mere fact that Jim Crow always took the blame for something he did not do. In the case of Zip Coon, the irony was in the very idea that a person of color could be so concerned with appearance and possess any sort of social stature. Cockrell writes:

‘Zip Coon,’ in his sartorial remoteness...in his aspirations to be a ‘larned skoler,’ and in his mien and bearing was the antithesis of the way that common people—and especially, of course, black people—should act...Zip...gives character to the reason why blacks cannot possess the ‘honorable’ status accorded whites, and at the same time, expression to the abstract, distant, unnatural, and finally, unworkable pretensions of the powerful. (94)

³⁵² See Appendix A for “Ole Zip Coon” song.

The humor in Zip Coon was thus the very irony created when performers juxtaposed presumed opposites. Heckle, I believe, embodies this Zip Coon figure—the New York City slicker with a rough accent and street smarts—and augments the absurdity of his twin Jeckle, who behaves in the same way as Heckle, but speaks as a British black dandy.

The Jim Dandy, or Long Tail Blue, was a more commodified version of the Zip Coon archetype. Like Zip Coon, each of these stock characters had his own song³⁵³ and a particular way of dressing. More so than Zip Coon, these dandy figures were defined by the ways in which they presented themselves in the world; audiences found humor in a black man who was concerned, above all else, with high fashion and his appearance. These performances were, to cite Dennison, “ludicrous mimicry of white values and a presumption of equality by blacks” (138). Many found humor in the paradox of the black body dressed in white symbols of class and power. Heckle and Jeckle’s animators, for instance, designed a feather coat that makes the birds appear to be black men wearing tuxedos with tails. Such paradox served a purpose for audiences who saw disparities in culture that could not be reconciled. Quoting Jessica Feldman, Monica Miller writes of the dandy, “He is the figure of paradox created by many societies in order to express whatever it is the culture feels it must, but cannot synthesize” (qtd. in Miller 179). Clearly black people existed that did not fit the stereotypical notion of “negro” and performers used the dandy to reproduce the black man’s (as presented by the white man) unstable identity. Heckle and Jeckle straddle this paradox sonically with their voices and visibly with their costumes (which includes the magical red shoes). Like so much of minstrelsy, the performance of black dandyism produced an extreme amount of slippage and yet, at the same time, allowed for humorous presentations: “...like any performative act, dandyism is contingent and unstable, a liminal art...because the primary tools of the dandy’s art...are tied to

³⁵³ See Appendix A for lyrics to “Long Tail Blue” and “Dandy Jim from Caroline”.

consumption, the ambiguity of the dandy's political power is amplified" (Miller 16-17). We might read Jeckle's performance in "Dancing Shoes" as one of black dandyism, defined in terms of his relation to commodity (i.e. the red dancing shoes) and class (i.e. his high class British accent). In fact, his character parallels that of the eighteenth century black dandy from London, Julius Soubise, who was known to complete his outfits with diamond-buckled red-heeled shoes. (Miller 17) While such specificity might be far-fetched,—red shoes only appeared in one *Heckle and Jeckle* short—Jeckle's presence as a British-speaking black body is a recurring theme. Moreover, in most shorts, Heckle and Jeckle are seen to peddle commodities (e.g. in "The Super Salesman" where the two birds dress in redface, they peddle a health tonic). Regardless of the item these two birds sell, their obsession with money and consumerism, combined with their menacing, often devious, behavior, undoubtedly gets the magpies into trouble. This goes hand in hand with the very definition of dandyism: "Black dandyism has had and always will have a difficult, indeed, a tortured, relationship to consumption in that procurement of clothing, accessories, and luxury goods, that enables the performance comes literally, and sometimes metaphorically, at a high cost" (Miller 17). While Spike is initially deceived by the birds' appearances (this includes the visible as well as the sonic), he gets the upper hand. Consequently the characters' instability manifests at the juncture between appearance and behavior: let not anyone be deceived by these birds' feathers or falsetto; these magpies are "dangerous".

The cartoon's soundtrack also corroborates such a reading, as the persistent theme is a version of the popular minstrel tune, "Listen to the Mockingbird," and the highlight of the short is a comical tap dance performed by the shoes. The soundtrack as a whole (i.e. the choice of song titles and the use of tap dancing feet) refers to a minstrel pastime whether or not Terry presents all the elements of a nineteenth-century minstrel show. London writes of the disparity between

sound and imagetrack that frequently occurs: “It is often said that certain portions of the musical soundtrack of a film ‘refer’ to characters or actions that may (or may not) be present on the imagetrack. That is, particular melodic and/or harmonic figures serve as sonic tokens for persons, objects, and/or ideas that have a significant role in the film’s narrative” (London 85).³⁵⁴ The literal use of blackface may not be present, but “Listen to the Mockingbird’s” century-old ties to the minstrel stage and tap dance’s association to the black or blackfaced body suggest a parallel between the magpies’ performance and those of Thomas “Daddy” Rice and George Dixon. The *mis-en-bande* consequently affects the way spectators see.

The soundtrack turns the spectator into an unquestioning, uncensored viewing subject capable of harnessing meaning from spatiotemporal discontinuity. Film music relies on cultural codes to anchor the cartoon image in meaning. In the case of “The Dancing Shoes,” Scheib relies on listeners’ associations with blackface minstrelsy to ground “Listen to the Mockingbird” and tap dancing feet in meaning. Terry and his animators rely on Scheib’s music to predicate a relationship between magpies and minstrelsy. In doing so, the creators of this cartoon diffuse the threat of uncertain signification (Smith “Unheard” 234) and leave their audiences uncritical of what this association actually consists, or upon what this parallel is based. Furthermore, music has the capacity to distract a viewer from seeing a film’s “technological basis of cinematic discourse.” The soundtrack has the potential to, “smooth over gaps and roughnesses, cover spatial and temporal discontinuities, and mask the recognition of the frame through its own sonic and harmonic continuity” (Smith 234). That is, in the music’s appeal to a spectator’s pre-oedipal

³⁵⁴ London writes, “A leitmotif can (1) underscore the obvious presence of a character, place, and so forth that is clearly visible on screen; (2) indicate the presence of someone/something that is otherwise obscure (out of the frame, hidden in the scene, in disguise, and so forth); and (3) indicate the ‘psychological presence’ of a character or idea, as when character A is contemplating the absent character B—we see A while hearing B’s leitmotif” (London 89). Musical leitmotifs, London argues, contain an “expressive content” that proper names do not. That is, music can signify an emotion at the same time it refers thereby granting the soundtrack an ability to both refer to *X* at the same time it makes a statement (or judgment) about *X* so that, through the course of the film, certain properties become inextricably linked to, or essential properties of, *X*. (London 90).

state it has the ability to mask incongruities and deficiencies that may have surfaced had the film been silent. Smith writes, “In this respect, film music does not so much displace the importance of narrative in engaging the process of suture, but rather makes narrative a more efficient means of implementing the identification upon which the text’s positioning of the subject depends” (234). Consequently the music activates a spectator’s nostalgia for a lost minstrel stage and invigorates an imagined sense of national belonging. Scheib’s music therefore fills in the gaps for what the animators’ censored imagetrack lacks. The soundtracks for these shorts not only helped audiences to identify with a national aesthetic, but transported adults watching *Heckle and Jeckle* cartoons back to their childhood. But for those audience members who lacked such pastimes—namely the children in the audience—the soundtrack likely referenced earlier animated representations of the magpie, as those less covert adaptations found in *Dumbo* or the performance of Buzzy the Crow in Famous Studios’ *Noveltoons* series.

Identifying with Sound

While Heckle and Jeckle neither dressed in a stereotypical fashion nor talked like the Jim Crow caricatures of cartoons past, the various “coon” tropes employed by *Dumbo*’s crows and Buzzy were present in their black coat and tails in virtue of the ways in which Americans have been socialized to associate a specific type of “blackness” with the animated image of the magpie. In addition to the highly caricatured costumes and voices that animators exploited through the magpie character earlier in the decade, the lyrics to songs like “Listen to the Mockingbird” became inseparable from the magpie image. Buzzy, for instance, makes his debut singing, with lyrics, an exceedingly crude version of the song. This song becomes Buzzy’s leitmotiv in the *Noveltoons* series such that the song itself delineated an important symbolic

element for its audience. By the time *Heckle and Jeckle* debuted, “Listen to the Mockingbird”—including all of its lyrics and the exacting manner in which it was sung (i.e. in a Negro dialect)—was so tied to a particular species of black birds that it would be hard to imagine a child who did not make this reference, at least on a subconscious level. Thus what Terry-Toons sought to silence—both the lyrics of this song and a Negro dialect—was actually already present in the magpies’ visible presence, especially when accompanied by the “Mockingbird” tune and the sound of tapping feet. Generational gaps thus seem to make little difference when sound accompanies the image of the magpie. Just as Cohan’s lyrics masked his syncopated rhythms and MGM’s omission of lyrics covered up Powell’s use of Foster’s tunes, the voices given to Heckle and Jeckle and the dynamic changes Scheib made to “Listen to the Mockingbird” concealed Terry’s integration of the Jim Crow trope into this 1940’s cartoon. To the same end, the sonic foundation for “The Dancing Shoes” was two distinct sounds with long ties to the minstrel stage: “Listen to the Mockingbird” and the sound of tap dancing feet were as symbolically tied to the “Negro” stereotype as Cohan’s early coon music and Powell’s blackened face. To hear Milburn’s tune in the face of the magpie, to see the magpie’s black coat as tied to the sound of syncopated tap dancing, was to at once attend to the changing image of 1940s America while remaining tied to a century-old semiotics of race.

Like any of the covert minstrel performances I have discussed, “Dancing Shoes,” with its distinct soundtrack, has the potential to prime a state of simultaneous fear and desire of the black body for its spectator: “The scene where the stereotype is seen, heard, or read is a scene of disavowal and fixation” (Oliver 59). In viewing this cartoon, the soundtrack rearticulates the representation of identity—and therefore meaning—according to the metonymic relationship between self and Other. Sound in this case acts as a linguistic modifier (Smith 240) and

contributes to subject formation.³⁵⁵ The music clarifies the mood of the cartoon, says something about the bodies of Heckle and Jeckle, and infers meaning about the significance of these magpies. The visuals, narrative, and voices, on the other hand, help solidify the music as possessing a certain value in American culture. A simultaneous “Mammy” and “Sammy”³⁵⁶ that calls on a viewer’s attachment to and repulsion from the black body. This irresolute subjectivity invoked through the sound image of the black body provides a sense of belonging at the same time it threatens identity.

The soundtrack to “The Dancing Shoes” speaks to the constant slippage of the minstrel stage. This highly ambivalent space continuously plays out the master/slave dialectic³⁵⁷ at the same time it rehearses love and theft.³⁵⁸ The soundtrack in conjunction with the image and its narrative, mediated by animation technology, produces difference while at the same time becoming the basis for knowing the self, both through the Other and through the nation. I have shown how the aural component of “The Dancing Shoes” contributes to this way of knowing. In what follows I will explicate the numerous ways in which the visual affects all of the performance’s other modes of symbolic discourse: the dance fetishizes the shoes rather than allowing the dance to race and/or gender the body that dances. This final participant in covert minstrelsy distracts viewers from registering the narrative, recognizing the music, and acknowledging—consciously—the ways in which watching *Heckle and Jeckle* echoes involvement in the minstrelsy of Cohan’s stage or Powell’s blackface.

³⁵⁵ See Jeff Smith’s essay “Unheard Melodies?” in *Post-Theory* (1996) for a more detailed analysis of this psychoanalytic theory.

³⁵⁶ This is a reference to Jolson’s famous song “Mammy” in *The Jazz Singer* and the Bugs Bunny “Sammy” tribute to Jolson in “Any Bonds Today”.

³⁵⁷ See Kojève’s reading of Hegel.

³⁵⁸ See Eric Lott’s *Love and Theft*.

Dynamic Movement: Eye Tricks, Hat Tricks, and Dancing Shoes

Henceforth I have devoted my energies to writing about the visible and highly invisible ways “Dancing Shoes” reintroduces old minstrel tropes at the same time it establishes new ones. I have not yet focused on the highly visible Africanisms present in Heckle and Jeckle’s performance. In both Chapters One and Two, Africanisms were present but made invisible by the white bodies performing them. In “Dancing Shoes” the Africanist aesthetic surfaces in everything from the framing narrative to the actions and movement qualities of the “black bodies” to the polyrhythmic nature of the soundtrack. As such, the Africanist aesthetic becomes even more visible because of the magpies’ semiotic significance. Thus, unlike the way covert minstrelsy succeeded in slipping in the Africanist aesthetic under the guise of whiteness in the first two chapters, covert minstrelsy in the third chapter becomes naturalized by way of the Africanist aesthetic, as the body that performs these discernible traits has become black by association.

The swing aesthetic dominated 1940’s animation: narratives would revolve around this conception as in Disney’s *Mr. Duck Steps Out* (1940), soundtracks would include medleys of popular recordings of the day but depict animals as the musicians as in Warner Brothers’ *Goldilocks And The Jivin’ Bears* (1944), and cartoons would depict grossly caricatured black humanimals as the free-spirited dancers benefiting from swing as in MGM’s *Swing Social* (1940). But amidst this heightened attraction to the swing aesthetic came the continued interest in the old South and Stephen Foster’s black folk music. As discussed earlier, this was often a narrative strategy that animators employed alongside the jazz aesthetic in order to venerate the modern urban aesthetic and make clear society’s evolution, amongst other things. I have focused on the narrative and more audible elements of these cartoons, but the visuals that accompanied

these shorts assisted both the narrative and sonic aspects of covert minstrelsy in shifting the focus away from the use of literal burnt cork to the makeup's more invisible implications. In what follows, I focus on the way that Africanist movement pervaded the sound cartoon and critique the role that tap dance, as defined through a minstrel lens, played for America.

In addition to animators' obsession with the swing aesthetic, Tex Avery set into motion the popularity of the Be-bop aesthetic in animation, creating Bugs Bunny as the first cartoon to truly embody an Africanist cool. Lehman posits that Terry-Toons used Avery's be-bop-folktale aesthetic and split Bugs Bunny's character into two identical talking magpies, Heckle and Jeckle. Lehman describes the two birds in the following way, "The bird with The British accent exhibited the refined, humble aspects of the folktale figure. His accomplice, speaking as if from the urban northern United States, displayed bebop's cool... working in tandem to frustrate and defeat their opponents. They signaled Paul Terry's acknowledgment of the popularity of the bunny and his embrace of contemporary characterizations" (Lehman 65). Terry-Toons thus took a cue from Avery and made Heckle and Jeckle in his image. Heckle and Jeckle, who share many of Bugs Bunny's personality traits and behaviors, seem also to exhibit a firm grasp of the copacetic attitude: *no matter what, we (birds) will survive, and everything will be OK*. The two magpies have security in their knowledge that life does not seem to faze them and they are secure in knowing that in the end, everything will work out in their best interest. (Maltin 144).

Other Africanist qualities appear throughout "Dancing Shoes" all under the umbrella of their signature cool aesthetic. Thompson and Gottschild's notion of contrariety or "embracing the conflict" surfaces most obviously in the narrative itself, where Spike and the magpies always engage in conflict. The language given to Heckle and Jeckle also demonstrates contrariety in that one bird speaks rough and sarcastically while the other bird's tongue is polished and proper.

The voices themselves complement such dialogue as Heckle sounds like a bird from the seedier parts of New York City while Jeckle sounds like he comes from a stuffy London flat. Contrariety can also be found in the less obvious narrative subtext: these magpies, for example, both appear to be innocent at first. They are themselves youthful (and ephebsim as such is another Africanist quality) and seek to attract America's youth. And yet, neither Heckle nor Jeckle is remotely innocent. They are conniving, trouble-making derelicts. Furthermore their simultaneously innocent and seductive behavior allows them to struggle in a power dynamic that does not usually get assigned to the black male body. That is, they initially trick the house detective without consequence, which is divergent from the story that usually accompanies the minstrel plot. They encompass qualities such as, "power, vitality, flexibility, drive, and attack," (Gottschild "Digging" 15)—keys to ephebism—but still, in all of their "kinesthetic intensity," fail to exhibit any sort of complex movement patterns. Their movement is flat and broken and yet still very agile. The birds keep things simple but are also capable of inhuman feats; they are cartoons, after all.

By now Terry's simple aesthetic should be clear: Terry-Toons kept its forms austere and opted for quantity over quality. I have shown how this applied to some of the logistical/ technological decisions made by Terry and his team as well as how this manifested through sound. For example, recall that using blackbirds in lieu of humans allowed Terry more leverage with dialogue. A common challenge for animators was to keep their characters' mouths in synch with the dialogue, but with birds, Terry's artists only had to make their beaks flap open and shut. This simplicity afforded by talking magpies (as opposed to animals with more human-like mouths), I argue, applies to the scenario of moving, dancing magpies as well. That is, for all of

the possible socio-political intentions and ramifications signified by the black magpie, these birds served a highly utilitarian function for their animators.

Heckle and Jeckle rarely fly. In “Dancing Shoes” the two birds dance, walk, and run on two feet; their wings serve no functional purpose. This makes their movement similar to that of humans or ducks and a little easier to animate than animals that get around on four legs or flap their wings.³⁵⁹ Second, with the exception of Spike, none of the other animals move in this cartoon. This allows animators to focus on the movement of the leads and drastically cuts down on the amount of time needed to draw background cels. Furthermore, when Heckle and Jeckle dance, their animators utilize the cross-over technique, executing exactly the same action at exactly the same time.³⁶⁰ Finally, the birds’ movement occurs singularly in the vertical, horizontal, or sagittal planes. This makes the cartoons appear flat and unidimensional but also reduces the amount of movement research Terry’s animators had to perform. This movement aesthetic shares some traits of ephebism (e.g. broken movement). A perfect example can be seen when Jeckle first puts on the magic shoes. Because they are mechanical and have a will of their own, the shoes begin rolling across the screen with expediency. The shoes, and thus Jeckle’s body, move through space horizontally but occupy no more space vertically than the length of his body. Before the tap solo, the shoes flex 90 degrees, placing Jeckle’s whole body at a 90-degree tilt as he travels straight up the vertical plane for a few counts. When the shoes reach the flat surface of the table, they tilt down 90 degrees, lowering Jeckle back down to the horizontal plane. The simplicity of movement makes this tap sequence comical in its primitiveness and

³⁵⁹ See Appendix D for movement analysis of ducks.

³⁶⁰ Cross-over technique: when two or more characters do the same action. Thomas writes, “...by having inkers trace one drawing in two different places on the same cel, matching it to sets of small crosses on the drawing. By animating a lone figure going to the left in a simple dance step, the animators could get these drawings traced over and over to make a whole line of dancers. At the appropriate time, the drawings could be flipped over and traced from the back, causing the line of dancers to sashay to the right” (Thomas 42).

allows for a smooth transition into a dance performed by inanimate objects. It also makes Jeckle's body highly polycentric and unpredictable. The dancing shoes take this polycentrism to a new level: they have absolutely no center, respond adeptly to the soundtrack, demonstrate a sense of swing, thereby encapsulating ephebism and polyrhythm simultaneously, and offer "high affect juxtaposition" in their flashy and unpredictable shifts from inanimate machine to dynamic dancing shoes. Moreover, their autonomy from Jeckle's body creates an element of surprise, which itself is indicative of high-affect juxtaposition as Gottschild defines it. She writes, "The result may be surprise, irony, comedy, innuendo, double entendre, and, finally, exhilaration" ("Digging" 14). Because the audience knows not what action will follow, it stays in a constant state of heightened anticipation and exhilaration.

The shoes' unpredictability challenges the audience to accept their movement without preparation. According to Disney's second principle of animation, the audience watching an animated scene requires, "...a planned sequence of actions that leads them clearly from one activity to the next. They must be prepared for the next movement and expect it before it actually occurs. This is achieved by preceding each major action with a specific move that anticipates for the audience what is about to happen" (Thomas 51). Disney believed that anticipation as such was crucial to audience enjoyment, but Terry-Toons chose specifically to omit the principle of anticipation in order to create more shock, more surprise, and more irony. While some of the narrative in *Heckle and Jeckle* is predictable—e.g. the chase scenes—the movement is highly unpredictable thereby offering yet another way in which "Dancing Shoes" may be read as Africanist. Thomas writes of anticipation, "This is the oldest device of the theater, for without it, the audience becomes nervous and restless" and wonders what on earth

the actor is doing. (Thomas 52); the Africanist aesthetic in dance uses such anxiety and unrest to its advantage by allowing the high affect juxtaposition to be a driving comedic force.

Dancing Shoes and “Other” Objects

Dance serves an important function for animators, regardless of the dancing subject’s (or object’s) qualities. Wells understands the dynamics of movement to be a narrative principle for animators. He believes that in an animated film, artists often play out narrative purely through the body’s movement(s), where the body might be understood as a human form, animal form, or inanimate object form. As such, he believes that Laban’s theories of movement have much in common with principles of movement in animation: “Both contemporary dance and animation create narrative through the ramifications of movement” (“Understanding” 112). Thus, the very manner in which the animated figure moves tells its audience a lot about the film’s plot and helps the viewer to make meaning out of an otherwise improbable set of images.³⁶¹

Animators have placed so much emphasis on their cartoons’ precision of movement that they have, almost always, turned to live dancers for movement inspiration. Felix the Cat, for example, was the result of a rigorous study of Charlie Chaplin and his very idiosyncratic movement qualities. Marge Champion served Disney’s animators when they were creating the character of Snow White, and Champion’s dance partner, Louis Hightower, provided a model for the prince’s movement. The principles of replication and imitation were thus generative for the art of animation and gave cartoons a more realistic feel. But sometimes the origin of the dance found its muse through mimicry, where a real live dancer provided the *source* of inspiration for its animator but the animator then took liberties with the character performing the dance by way

³⁶¹ Quoting the filmmaker Norman McClaren, he writes, “No matter what it is you’re moving, whether it’s people or objects or drawings; and in what way it’s done, it’s a form of dance” (qtd. in “Understanding” 112).

of the principle of exaggeration.³⁶² That is, animators sought to replicate and imitate the *movement* of Marge Champion for the fictional character of Snow White so that audience members would read her character as *more human*, but they used the *idea* of Bill Robinson tap dancing on a staircase as a plenteous site for racial caricature and humorous exaggeration, so that audiences might come to see the man—or the black race—as *less human*.

In the first section of this chapter, I highlighted two very specific instances where animators in the 1930s wrote off very caricatured representations of Bill Robinson as being the result of an homage, montage, or tribute. This practice continued into the 1940s with Terry-Toons' *Mississippi Swing* kicking off the new decade in 1941. Unlike the two tributes to Robinson in *Clean Pastures* and *Have You Got Any Castles?*, the "Robinson" in *Mississippi Swing* bears absolutely no resemblance to the real man other than the color of the cartoon's skin. Instead, this depiction is one of an old decrepit Uncle Tom, hobbling onstage with a cane. We know this black man is supposed to signify Robinson because of the staircase that awaits him in center stage and the very rhythmically complex (for a cartoon at least) tap dance that follows. Even "Robinson's" hat is a top hat more akin to the type Astaire wore in his films than the bowler hat for which Bojangles was known. The soundtrack makes a dramatic shift from the "Swanee River" tune that plays for the majority of the cartoon to the song "Old Black Joe" that Hollywood has reattributed to Robinson in recreations of his stair dance in films like *Honolulu*. Unlike most of Terry-Toons' work, the tap dance routine performed by the Uncle Tom version of Bojangles exhibits close attention to detail both musically and from a movement perspective: animators managed to attempt foot articulation that was in-synch with the more rhythmically complicated stair dance. But two thirds of the way in, Bojangles' shoes jump off his feet and begin tapping down the staircase on their own. They continue to shuffle off the stage, off the

³⁶² See *Imitation of Life* for a better understanding of Disney's tenth principle of animation, exaggeration.

“showboat,” and finally into the ocean. This dance, in its numerous references to *Honolulu*, responds to Powell’s 1939 tribute on board the ship and calls into play a new 1940s aesthetic of shoes that become detached from their dancers, a phenomenon made possible by animation’s protean advantage. I devote the rest of this chapter to unpacking the reasons why I posit a shift in the way that tap dance was shown in animation and attempt to explicate the ways in which imbuing the magic shoes with talent not only fragments the black body but also makes the art form available to the masses.

Inoculating the magic shoes with the capacity to dance provides Terry-Toons with logistical, aesthetic, and symbolic potential. Logistically, making the shoes the source of musicality lessens the time and effort required by the animators for this scene. If one watches the tap dance portion of this scene without sound, the elementariness of the movements surfaces. The shoes bounce up and down, turn in, turn out, and slant. The question arises whether a human executing a dance of such invariability would be booed off the stage. Not to mention the fact that the sound with which Terry-Toons has dubbed the visuals does not perfectly match the shoe-work. And yet, this scene stands out as the cartoon’s most memorable moment—so memorable that “Dancing Shoes” derives its title from this number.

Isolating the performance of these tap dancing shoes presents spectators with an opportunity to appreciate the sonic register free from distraction. The movement is neither crude nor embellished, but rather “cool”. It strips the movement down to its most elementary sound: the aural heightened by the peeling away of a visual spectacle; the shoes’ charm amplified by their sonic clarity. The appeal of this technique can be seen in the live tap dancing of Honi Coles and Cholly Atkins, who, at the time “Dancing Shoes” was made, were perfecting their Class Act at Harlem’s Apollo Theatre. In their famous soft-shoe, “Taking a Chance on Love,” Coles and

Atkins dance in perfect unison to a very slowed-down version of the jazz classic. This soft-shoe was typically followed by a challenge dance in which, “each dancer showcased his specialty...Coles performed speedy, swinging, and rhythmically complex combinations...” (“Tap Dancing America” 161).³⁶³ Hence I have reason to believe that an exceedingly basic combination, unvarnished in its *flash*, yet generous in its *class*, merely corresponds to this balance of the cool Coles and Atkins were exploring on the live stage. Something about this juxtaposition sets an audience up for a successive intensity, whether that is to be found in the “speedy, swinging, and rhythmically complex combinations,” executed by Coles, the be-bop cadence proliferating all aspects of American life in the 1940s, or the wild and fast-paced chase scene about to ensue in this film. Despite their immateriality, these shoes embody the Africanist aesthetic—visibly, sonically, and *incorporeally*—and offer the cartoon a narrative advantage.

The shoes also possess comic appeal because of the absurdity of their actions. The idea of animating inanimate objects is itself an oxymoron and provides the cartoon with comic irony (another quality of high affect juxtaposition). An artist’s ability to (doubly) “animate” the shoes allows his creation to participate in activities otherwise unavailable to inanimate objects,—e.g. walking on the table or jumping ship—believable only in virtue of the expediency with which they morph and the supinity with which these transformations are made visible on the screen. Protean minstrelsy thus allows subjects *and* objects to change and re-present themselves as something other than who or what they were just moments before this change took place. Humans can become animals, animals can become black, and body parts can detach from one object and re-attach to another almost instantaneously. Such transfiguration offered audiences

³⁶³ Lynn Dally has noted that the dance these shoes execute are reminiscent of Honi Coles’ famous dance, “My One and Only,” choreographed for a Broadway musical of the same name in 1983. The simplicity of Coles’ feet allow the audience to really hear his rhythms just like the cartoon’s simplicity really “‘shows’ the magic of the shoes with all parts enlivened...toe tappings, heel clickings, ins and outs.” (Personal correspondence with Lynn Dally 11 March 2016). For a look at this choreography, see Lynn Dally’s *Masters and Mentors* documentary, Disc Four: “The Entertainers” for a restaging of this dance by Harold Nicholas.

something different than the 1930's screen could provide and imparted something virtually impossible for the live stage. Dis-figuration, as proffered by protean minstrelsy, held a certain appeal.

Appeal, as that found in the shoes' liveliness, is very important to animators; Disney posited it as its twelfth animation principle. Thomas defines "Appeal" as, "anything that a person likes to see, a quality of charm, pleasing design, simplicity, communication, and magnetism. Your eye is drawn to the figure that has appeal, and, once there, it is held while you appreciate what you are seeing...the ugly and repulsive may capture your gaze...there is shock value" (Thomas 68). While shock value exists in the "ugly and repulsive" and is often employed by artists, it does not have the lasting appeal that pure charm possesses. Finally when the dance radiates from the shoes rather than from the human or animal, the animator takes power away from the subject. In this case the artistic team takes away the power from Jeckle, or the black body. Until the 1940s, cartoons tended to show black bodies—or caricatures of black bodies—as the tap dancers. Something shifts in 1941 with *Mississippi Swing* when the shoes dance off of Robinson's feet. I argue that this small change masks a larger attempt to cover up a conscious decision to move tap dance as far away from the black body as possible so that white bodies can engage with the art form without fear of being associated with the black.

Saidiya Hartman has written on the idea that acknowledging the black body entails remembering the fragmented, or "amputated" body, produced through slavery. She notes:

The recognition of loss is a crucial element in redressing the breach introduced by slavery. This recognition entails a remembering of the pained body, not by way of a simulated wholeness but precisely through the recognition of the amputated body in its amputatedness, in the insistent recognition of the violated body human

flesh, in the cognition of its needs, and in the anticipation of its liberty... History is illuminated not only by the recitation of the litany of horrors that characterized the “commercial deportation of Africans,” but also by performance practices that serve as a means of redressing the pained body and restaging the event of rupture or breach that engendered “the other side.” (“Subjection” 74)

If, as Hartman contends, African American music and dance of the antebellum period—assuming the foundations of tap dance can be traced back as far as the Middle Passage—both recognized the subjectivity of the black body and also sought to heal it, then 1940s animation reopens the wounds of the Middle Passage by re-rupturing the site of subjection. Hartman writes, “The (counter)investment in the body as a site of need, desire, and pleasure and the constancy of unmet needs, repressed desires, and the shortcomings of pleasure are articulated in the very endeavor to heal the flesh and redress the pained body” (74). Thus if Robinson’s black dancing body visibly bore the spiritual wounds inflicted by slavery—or more generally, a diasporic condition/process—*as well as* those cultural practices—i.e. the (tap) dance—which have attempted to suture the breaks, or wounds, then the 1940s cartoon re-amputates the black body both as a means of forgetting the black body and as a way of covertly appropriating the dance as representative of an America free from this “counter” narrative of slavery. By detaching the dancing shoes from the black body, as Terry-Toons does in “Dancing Shoes,” the “unmet needs” and “repressed desires” are invisibilized and made inaudible.

“Dancing Shoes” was not the only cartoon to amputate the black body. In March 1941, just one month after Terry-Toons released *Mississippi Swing*, Universal Pictures released Walter Lantz’s *Scrub Me Mama with a Boogie Beat*, which, like *Mississippi Swing* opens in the rural South with Foster’s “Old Folks at Home” playing the background. When the lighter-skinned

woman from Harlem arrives in “Lazy Town,” all of the “lazy” mammies, bucks, pickaninnies, and sambos get off their butts and start dancing and playing jazz music. Animators detach the gloved hands of the jazz pianist so that they can play a set by themselves. Something similar happens in both Leon Schlesinger’s *Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs* (1943) and his *Tin Pan Alley Cats* (1943), only instead of detaching the playing hands or dancing feet, animators detach the singing mouth. These modes of black corporeal disarticulation stand in stark contrast to the way the white body gets portrayed in 1940s sound cartoons. In Tex Avery’s *Red Hot Riding Hood* (1943), *Swing Shift Cinderella* (1945), and *Little Rural Riding Hood* (1949), for example, the white jazz singer/jazz tap dancer stays whole and highly visible (bordering on nude for the 1940s) for the duration of her musical solos. In MGM’s live action film *Anchors Aweigh* (1945), which features a tap dance with Gene Kelly and the animated Jerry Mouse (of Tom and Jerry), not only do the animators keep the white mouse’s body intact, but show him directly alongside one of the leading white tap dancers of the day. Animation thus offers a *lighter* tap aesthetic up for the taking, free from the historical “weight” of the black diasporic body.

The music and dance created to heal the black body, which have, historically, forced spectators to *remember* a history, get trumped by the inanimate “realities” of the world of cartoons. The cartoons become *simulacrum* (in the Baudrillardian sense), offering viewers more “truth” than copy.³⁶⁴ The boogie beat of the hands or the syncopated counts of the feet become *dismembered* entities; objects free from the human condition. I argued in Chapter Two that Powell’s tribute to Robinson exhibited a shift from dancing subject to metonymic disarticulation, where her body as sign signified power for her white body and the nation at the same time it produced a rupture in the way Bill Robinson’s (and others’) black body could be read. In “Dancing Shoes” this rupture occurs when the shoes become the bearers of the dance and the

³⁶⁴ See Jean Baudrillard’s *Simulations*.

black body becomes an onlooker in awe of the shoes' Africanist performance. The disarticulation consequently occurs most literally in the visible breaking off and fetishization of the red shoes, and more figuratively (and invisibly) at the level of amputation that follows for the black body. Here the audience is not only asked to see the black body as substitutable and re-attributable (as was the case in Chapter Two), but spectators must watch the black bodies on screen (Heckle and Jeckle's) praise the work of these magic shoes, thereby making audible their approval of the way this art has been passed down. De-racing tap indicates an attempt to erase tap's complicated ties to slavery, minstrelsy, and lynching, but fails in its complete amputation by way of the sonic, heard in the syncopated rhythms of the dancing feet and the familiar notes of "Listen to the Mockingbird." That is, no matter what animators do to sever the dance from the visibility of the black experience, the objects themselves resist being silenced completely.

Eye Tricks

The art of animation, and specifically the technology that makes it distinct from any other mode of representation, often makes it difficult to read the counter narrative, especially because of the governing principles of comedy and naïveté that give animation so much of its appeal. Persistence of vision, for example, is a perceptual/physiological phenomenon wherein "our eyes hold on to images for a split second longer than they are actually projected, so that a series of quick flashes is perceived as one continuous picture" (Laybourne 19). This illusion forms the basis of film and television and is responsible for viewers' experience of movement on the screen; the images themselves do not move, but one's persistence of vision (when viewing still images in quick succession) allows one to experience motion. Persistence of vision occurs unconsciously with the blink of an eye at the same time numerous other slippages and

displacements fail to register on the conscious level. As was the case with covert minstrelsy in both Cohan and Powell's periods, one mode of representation has the ability to mask another. Here the combination of technology (mechanical and perceptual) and multi-sensory experience distract viewers from *seeing* the full story. Moreover, the parts of the story the audience does grasp transude through a highly regulated filter. While this performance differs from *Johnny* and Powell's tributes in its medium, aesthetic, and technology, it also divaricates from these demonstrations of white power because of the way in which Heckle and Jeckle offer the Africanist aesthetic through their black bodies. Rather than trying to *hide* the black body—like Cohan—or trying to dress up *like* the black man, Heckle and Jeckle confront the audience with their simulation of blackness, as learned through popular culture. Which is to say, after years of being confronted by the magpie as a substitute for the real black body, caricature has “masked and perverted” a basic reality so that the magpies, as simulacra, come to represent the “fact” of blackness.³⁶⁵ Baudrillard writes, “It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real” (4). As one is confronted with Heckle and Jeckle in “Dancing Shoes,” one is confronted with a *precession* of simulacra; the (unreal) magpie precedes and regulates the real.³⁶⁶ However, as verity in their own right, the animated magpies and their dancing shoes lose touch with an original sonicity.

Fred Moten has proposed that the act of listening breaks down the opposition between live performance and mechanical reproduction. It is in the break, between the event and the word, the act and the moan, that silence erupts and music reverberates. The spirit of this music, of its rhythm, provides a key to black performance, to remembering the Other, and to resistance. I would like to suggest that inasmuch as technologies of the brain and technologies of the machine

³⁶⁵ A reference to Franz Fanon (1952).

³⁶⁶ See Jean Baudrillard's *Simulations*.

assist artists in slipping in these subtle attempts to forget the black body, one might be able to affirm the value of black life through these cartoons in virtue of listening so that the “apparent nonvalue” of the black body, as projecting gross caricatures and detaching hands and feet might suggest, functions as “a creator of value” (“In the Break” 18). In other words, in denying that the object has a voice, one denies the mourning and *moaning*, of blackness as a mode of being. However, the value is to be found in the music that is “painfully and hiddenly disclosed always and everywhere in the tracks of black performance and black discourse on black performance” (18). In the jazz music and syncopated rhythms that pervaded these 1940s sound cartoons, we might be able to see this aesthetic as equally in *love* as in *theft*. However, the simultaneity of masks at play in this piece of art make it virtually impossible to hear that cry, or *see* that history of oppression, because of the many layers of disavowal operating along with this rupture.

Few people “watching” “Dancing Shoes” avert their eyes and just listen; few people strip away the layers and consider what messages Terry-Toons actually conveys. If people were able to listen to the bodies that reside under these birds’ layers, they might in fact be able to hear that moan about which Moten speaks. But because so much energy has gone into covering up the real bodies attached to various Africanisms and because people’s eyes are capable of holding on to images for longer than they are presented, onlookers’ ideas of what the black body is, what it sounds and looks like, will *persist* until their lens shifts its focus onto reality. A cartoon that harps on old minstrel tropes only prolongs this cycle of tearing open the flesh.

Hat Tricks; A Conclusion

Heckle and Jeckle pose a triple threat. Their coats and tails camouflage their relationship to blackface, their voices mask their visibility as caricature, and their movement reaffirms their

existence as black. Mediated by narrative and technology, their animated bodies succeed in furthering a long-standing relationship between American identity and minstrelsy. This national identity shapes what the American public sees and determines how it hears; it also depends upon collective imagination. Wells contends that animation provides a mirror into our relationships with humans and other animals. He writes, “Animation, in its intrinsic artifice of representation of phenomenology and hyper-illusionism, has always been predicated on the idea of ‘seeing ourselves looking,’ (the co-existence of human and human, human and animal, animal and animal) and the revelation of human endeavor and foible, animal cultures, and the art of animation itself” (“Bestiary” 197). The images one projects on the animated screen clue an audience into the way society sees itself in relation others (and Others) but also define how one shapes one’s own identity. Despite its perceptible ambivalence the animated screen is a place of clearly defined values, which condition viewers to see the body in a particular light. The protean nature of these cartoons allows them to become something different than what they are too quickly for an audience to register this change; this change comes easily and seamlessly. The very nature of animation aids in the efficacy of its covert spectacle: it uses its innocence as the first point of entry and then relies on the confluence of other phenomenological experiences at play to distract viewers from seeing the whole “picture.”

Coda

Heckle and Jeckle survived well into the 1970s, but changing technology and an ever-evolving set of values altered the manner in which they were projected on the screen. By the 1950s, television was the primary means through which Americans received information. Competition from this new form of viewing forced animation studios to affiliate themselves with television networks so that they could transition their cartoons from the public theatre screen to the privacy of people's homes.

Heckle and Jeckle first appeared on television in 1956 as part of CBS's Cartoon Theatre—later syndicated as *The Heckle and Jeckle Cartoon Show*—the first primetime network animated series. Before the cartoon would start, Dick Van Dyke and the Terry-Toon menagerie would interact: one cartoon would march across the screen with a signpost that read “hosted by Dick Van Dyke” and another would carry Van Dyke's headshot on a stick. Then Van Dyke would attempt to introduce the segment only to be interrupted by the magpies' jokes. After a little banter back-and-forth, the episode would begin. The quality of these 52 previously animated cartoons reformatted for television was not quite as high the cartoons shown on the theatre screens, but this new format allowed for a bigger, more diverse audience, the viewing experience became more intimate, and the regularity with which people of all ages could “tune in” allowed for relationships between humans and cartoons to be formed. Terry-Toons went through a restructuring and new episodes were finally written for the two birds in 1960 under the direction of Dave Tendlar and Martin Taras and the final *Heckle and Jeckle* episode, “Messed Up Movie Makers,” was completed in 1966.

Over the next two decades, advances in sound synchronization, colorization, and television sets themselves allowed the cartoon to reach new heights aesthetically and achieve new symbolic potential. As televisions transitioned from black and white to color, racial distinctions once again surfaced on the screen. Yet at the same time certain prejudices became more visible, new editing techniques allowed animation houses and networks to re-work old forms of representation. Some cartoons were removed from circulation altogether, such as the “Censored Eleven,” eleven Loony Tunes,³⁶⁷ which were suspended from syndication in 1968 for their outdated racialized content. Other cartoons had scenes edited out, as was the case with Hanna and Barbera’s *Gallop in’ Gals* (1940), which had one scene involving a dark horse removed from reruns of the cartoon in later years. And some cartoons, as evidenced by MGM’s *Tom and Jerry* episode “Mouse Cleaning” (1948), not only changed the visuals but re-dubbed the cartoons’ voices. Over the course of a decade, animators edited the fully exposed black mammy present in “Puss Gets the Boot” (1940) to show just her legs. By the 1960s, the mammy character reappeared in full as white on CBS. Sound was also edited over these two decades: Originally Steppin’ Fetchit voiced Tom and Lillian Randolph voiced Mammy Two Shoes. In later years these voices were not only made less caricatured, but the studio literally cast these characters as white.

In 1979, the magpies appeared in a second show, *The New Adventures of Mighty Mouse and Heckle and Jeckle*. Their characters and plots were unchanged, but their quality enhanced to keep up with more modern technology. From 1951 until 1977, four different comic book series featuring the magpies were released, along with dozens of other *Heckle and Jeckle* products. While the mediums through which Heckle and Jeckle’s characters were transmitted to the nation have changed, the talking magpies continue to represent a very old notion of the black body.

³⁶⁷ These eleven included: *Hittin’ the Trail for Hallelujah Land*, *Sunday Go to Meetin’ Time*, *Clean Pastures*, *Uncle Tom’s Bungalow*, *Jungle Jitters*, *The Isle of Pingo Pongo*, *All This and Rabbit Stew*, *Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs*, *Tin Pan Alley Cats*, *Angel Puss*, and *Goldilocks and the Jivin’ Bears*.

The evolution from theatrical screen to home viewing coincided with a major shift in the art of tap dance—its accessibility, popularity, and recognition altered greatly in the 1950s. While many have referred to this period as the “death” or “demise” of tap dance,³⁶⁸ the reality is that tap was just going through a transitional phase, only to reemerge in the 1970s as a leading form of entertainment. Broadway shows began privileging ballet in the 1940s and 1950s so fewer tap dancers were being cast on the stage. The 1950s saw a scarcity of film plots that featured tap dance sequences. Part of this was likely due to an aesthetic shift after the war, and part of this might have been the result of the high cost of dance floors and performers. Constance Valis Hill explains the latter in terms of the post-war tax on dance floors. Citing jazz drummer Max Roach she writes, “ ‘It was the 20 per cent war tax levied just after the Second World War. It was levied in all places where they had entertainment. It was levied in case they had public dancing, singing, storytelling, humor, or jokes on stage. This tax is the real reason why dancing, not just tap dancing...was just out’ (qtd. in “Tap Dancing America” 168). Many theories exist as to why the “attractiveness” of tap dance declined during these years, but it is important to see that the art form never “died.” As television rose in popularity, the black body reemerged as tap’s privileged “authentic” vessel, at least temporarily. Peg Leg Bates, the one-legged tap dancer, made frequent television appearances, as did many of the leading black tap dancers that had been relinquished to the “underground” black stages of New York and Los Angeles in the preceding decades. Thus tap dance never died, but America’s relationship to the art and to the bodies performing its rhythms, changed.

³⁶⁸ See Valis Hill’s *Tap Dancing America* pp. 168-170.

EPILOGUE

The use of blackface has continued to permeate mainstream media and American popular culture. However, a heightened awareness of the form's flaws and insensitivities, along with an increase in the number of modes of representation America has come to identify as its own, have likely aided in an overall decrease in the use of the blackface mask as a primary form of representation and signifier of racial difference. Still, despite the collective consciousness the nation purports to have "learned" or finally come to "recognize" about this portion of its history, a surprising number of blackface masquerades have surfaced in the last few decades. Contrary to other historical moments, performances that have transpired in the last few years have sparked a zealous outpouring of thoughts and feelings through various social media platforms, but the ensuing dialogues seem to be more reactive than reflective. We have witnessed a heightened awareness of various uses of *overt* blackface, but are sidestepping a series of important questions that come from overlooking numerous *covert* performances.

Modern uses of blackface have varied in their presentation but several incarnations have used the concept of "exaggeration" to justify their noticeable practice of masking. Some performances have recapitulated old tropes of the nineteenth century minstrel stage while others have emerged under the guise of "entertainment". *Forbidden Zone* (1980), the musical comedy featuring the Mystic Knights of Oingo Boingo, offers the minstrel mask at its crudest. The minstrel slathered in burnt cork who appears at three different points in the film serves no narrative purpose other than to retell old fictions of the nineteenth century stage. The film was immediately banned from theatres and its director, Richard Elfman, received backlash for his "tasteless" portrayals of black and Jewish people. In later years, cult film fans have labeled this film "satire", arguing that

because the film contains no real character development and is completely absurd in all respects, one cannot criticize its apparent racism and anti-Semitism too harshly. In 1993, Ted Danson “roasted” his then lover Whoopi Goldberg by donning the mask and repeatedly uttering the word “nigger” during his short monologue. Within 24 hours of delivering his speech, the press and other major media outlets slammed Danson. Goldberg defended his performance, claiming that it took courage on Danson’s part to get up in front of 3,000 people with a coat of blackface. Roger Ebert quotes black supermodel Beverly Johnson on the issue, “If you can’t see the humor at a place where there’s supposed to be over-the-line jokes, then there’s something really wrong.”³⁶⁹ Goldberg and Johnson’s remarks show that, once again, hyperbole justifies the existence of the mask. These comments also highlight the way in which the black voice has been used to validate the use of the blackface mask: if a person of color does not find the mask offensive, then it must be okay. But can we justify the use of the mask or the utterance of the word “coon” a hundred years ago just because Bert Williams and George Walker put on the mask and called themselves “two real coons”?

Ben Stiller, director of the movie *Tropic Thunder* (2008), sought out validation from the NAACP before releasing his film starring Robert Downey Jr. who played an Australian actor who goes so far as to get a skin procedure in order to play the role of a black man in a fictional movie about the Vietnam War. Downey Jr.’s role required more than two hours of intense makeup application and “obliged” him to use the word “nigger” throughout the film’s dialogue. *Tropic Thunder* received mixed reviews, some praising the actor’s performance as an incredible illustration of method acting and others criticizing it as absolutely “unacceptable.”³⁷⁰ Like Danson, Stiller and others have relied on *The* black voice (of the NAACP) as the arbiter of

³⁶⁹ See Roger Ebert (1993).

³⁷⁰ See Scott Feinberg (1999).

“acceptability”. What stands out as being significant about all of these modern examples is the way in which their narratives overlap with those told by the white majority sanctioning early forms of covert minstrelsy. The “exaggeration” narrative used to cover up the minstrel in *Forbidden Zone* and Danson’s blackface at the 1993 New York Friar’s Club Roast, bethinks the way in which animators like Chuck Jones, Tex Avery, and Paul Terry relied on a cartoon’s absurdity and use of exaggeration (as an organizing principle of animation) to vindicate quick site gags and other protean instantiations of covert minstrelsy; we might read Danson’s roast as a “tribute” of sorts, since he wrote his monologue to honor and bring attention to his lover; and *Tropic Thunder* uses the show-within-a-show formula that *Swing Time*, *Honolulu*, and so many other 1930’s Hollywood films used to justify the use of burnt cork.

Other modern examples of the minstrel mask recrudescence into older patterns of covert minstrelsy where the bodies of black and brown people are used to either authenticate the mask or lessen its perversion. The actress of mixed-Latin descent Zoe Saldana has recently received criticism for allowing the film crew of *Nina* (2016) to blacken her skin so that she could play the part of Nina Simone in a recent biopic of the black artist. Her naturally brown appearance has lessened the perversion of blacking up for some—positing that adding a little more color to her skin does not constitute blacking up—but caused others to vocally express their disapproval—claiming that blacking up is never okay—on a range of blogs and other online media networks. This debate, and those surrounding Downey Jr.’s role in *Tropic Thunder*, invite the question of whether or not race is a character trait that one must embody on the stage or screen in order to accurately describe or denote the person he/she wishes to represent. Does race fit into the same category as gender in this regard? Is it merely a role? Can someone *act* black or does acting a particular race immediately qualify the performance as caricature?

Spike Lee couches his film *Bamboozled* (2000) as a “satire”, poking fun at the practice of black-on-black minstrelsy by recreating the “New Millennium Minstrel Show” for television. The film’s framing narrative (including its designation as “satire”) and various modes of representation, elicited a range of responses: some critics have taken the stance that *Bamboozled* re-stages the “trauma” of minstrelsy while others have sided with Lee, arguing that as a parody the film exposes the fictions of blackness. Debates of the latter sort received the most press, likely because they agreed with the artist’s stance and allowed Lee’s audience to abstain from a complicated dialogue precipitated by minstrelsy’s ill-defined borders. Here the label “satire” exonerates Spike Lee from potential backlash, the show-within-a-show formula absolves the plot of its obscenities, and the casting of a predominantly all black cast of A-list actors exculpates the use of blackface and racial slurs, even when donned or spoken by the cast’s white actors. According to this viewpoint, the black body somehow authenticates the use of the blackface mask. But this interpretation fails to acknowledge what *Bamboozled* actually *does*; framing the film as a satire speaks to what Lee may have intended it to do but circumvents the repercussions that supervene when old tropes are *re-presented*, regardless of their framing narrative.

As I have tried to articulate throughout *Masks in Disguise*, the simultaneity of modes at play in a demonstration of covert minstrelsy is what allows a mask to disguise itself and moreover, in so doing, the masks themselves become more powerful than the show’s choreographer; this process gives covert minstrelsy its staying power. Cohan might have consciously chosen to label his scores in a particular manner and Hollywood very well might have designed certain narratives in order to skirt the guidelines of the Production Code, but the interaction between an arrangement of complex forces allowed a set of masks to surface in chorus, creating a complete spectacle conducive to their audiences’ “blindness”. In this way, examining the countless

impacts *Bamboozled* had on its viewers offers a richer analysis than merely isolating one's examination of Lee's film to that which the "choreographer" *intended to do*, Stuart Klawans review in *The Nation* and Gregory Laski's analysis of *Bamboozled* in *Callaloo* demonstrate that Spike Lee's film "accomplishes" many of the same things that other performances of covert minstrelsy achieved through different means and at different historical moments.

In keeping with the complexity of minstrelsy, ambivalence functions at many levels within *Bamboozled*. As Stuart Klawans aptly notes, Lee's use of the minstrel narrative demonstrates that minstrelsy necessarily straddles a thin line between entertainment and pain. He writes, "Spike Lee has applied his erudition to this American tradition and discovered not just how it wounds but also how it entertains. ...that the entertainment is the wound—the louder the laughter, the worse the damage." Which is to say, the primitive jokes that the character Womack works on *Bamboozled*'s satirical minstrel stage prompt horror *and* laughter, pleasure *and* pain. Klawans argues that inasmuch as he went into the film thinking that he could *never* laugh at the racial jokes that pervaded the nineteenth century stage, Lee's film proved him wrong. He writes, "Is the moment humiliating for Womack? You bet. Did I laugh? You would, too." Thus, what became troubling for many twenty first century audience members was not just the material, but the idea that such material could still be funny, even in the new millennium. In this way, whether or not Lee planned for it, *Bamboozled* restages an encounter with the abject. Minstrelsy, regardless of its historical context or framing narrative, has as the ability and power to simultaneously attract and repulse those individuals with whom it comes into contact.

In addition to offering a highly ambivalent piece of art that produces meaning on multiple registers simultaneously, *Bamboozled* manages to refer to a historical "past" through performance at the same time that this performance creates a new narrative in the present. In

choosing to *perform* the minstrel types that *Bamboozled*'s lead roles require, the performers become players in a modern minstrel show. We might understand this in terms of what David Roediger has referred to as taking a "long view" of "thinking about race and change". He writes, "...so that we don't blind ourselves to the important relations between the past and the present by focusing too narrowly on what we presume to be a fixed past, beyond which we've progressed" (x).³⁷¹ That is, in performing these "roles"—and even laughing at their jokes—are we merely referencing a past, or are we actively participating in the perpetuation of these ways of *seeing* and *knowing* the black body? Laski contends that performing these minstrel types on the modern stage proffers the "traumatic return of the repressed history of minstrelsy—a history that is inextricably bound up with the physical and psychological violence of slavery" (1094-1095). Like trauma, *Bamboozled*'s narrative, replete with black tap dancers entertaining white men, Jolly Nigger banks, and 'coon' references, has the potential to disrupt its viewers' notion of time, collapsing the borders between the past and the present. Whether or not Lee issues his film as satire, the material itself generates numerous slippages. Thus, rather than looking to the framing narrative used by Lee and others who have sided with him as the *only* vantage point for understanding modern re-presentations of race, might we examine two synchronous tropes? Laski suggests the "need to differentiate what Lee suggests about *Bamboozled* from what *Bamboozled* suggests about itself" (1110). Like every other instance of minstrelsy I have explored, one must examine the mask from both sides *and* from multiple vantage points.

In recent years, Halloween has become a popular time for white people to dress up as their favorite black actresses and singers: In 2013 actress Julianne Hough costumed herself to read as the black character Crazy Eyes from the Netflix series, *Orange is the New Black*, possibly

³⁷¹ See Roediger (2008).

making a statement about how *white* is in fact “the new black”; Heath Morrow, a Southern-based school teacher received a lot of heat for his Halloween appearance as hip-hop artist Kanye West; in 2015, the country music singer Jason Aldean was disparaged for going out on October 31st dressed as hip-hop artist Lil’ Wayne. All three of these costumes included blackface as part of the “look,” in addition to particular costumes, ways of moving, and attitudes. Hough, Morrow, and Aldean all received raucous condemnation from the press and the community, but nobody was considering the wealth of other *black* “face masks” appearing at their front door: is donning black face paint more offensive than wearing the “politically incorrect vacuform Obama mask” or the “adult deluxe Barack mask” that present a caricature of the black president more outrageous than some of T.D. Rice’s original Jim Crow costumes?

Such masquerade—especially on a holiday that supports disguise as a means of invoking fear and/or eliciting laughter—would have never precipitated such public outrage even thirty years ago. The nation’s response has expressed awareness of America’s *blatant* uses of the blackface mask and demonstrated an ignited interest in having a dialogue—any dialogue—around race and representation. But, in what ways are these accusations and dialogues actually masking deeper-seated issues and covering up performances that may in fact be equally damaging? The public seems to be quick to label things “acceptable” and “unacceptable” and not as quick to invite questions of why one performance is tolerable and another one intolerable. Asking these questions might invite a deeper investigation into the roots of minstrelsy and allow us, as a nation, to probe deeper into those performances that we hide or choose not to acknowledge. What would it mean to turn our attention towards those public performances that feel off but offer no blatant caricatures or racial slurs? What would it mean to listen between the cracks and behind the masks, suspending that which we accept at face value in favor of holding on to clear

distinctions and previously defined social boundaries? Uncovering the mask may in fact make things more complicated: "...masquerade unsettles and disrupts the fantasy of coherent, unitary, stable, mutually exclusive divisions. It replaces clarity with ambiguity, certainty with reflexivity, and phantasmic constructions of containment and closure with constructions that in reality are more messy, diverse, impure and imperfect...It also challenges the whole discourse of difference that emerged with modernity" (Tseëlon 3). A fine line exists between love and theft, hybridity and appropriation, honoring and imitation. Yet if we do not continue to ask questions and explore America's invisible spaces, these lines will continue to go undefined and the practice of masking will perpetuate itself indefinitely. May we continue to be curious, ask questions, and make ourselves vulnerable, so that *silence* does not become the dominant mode of masking in the ensuing decades.

APPENDIX A: SONG LYRICS, SCORES, AND POETRY

CHAPTER ONE

Lyrics to “Virginia” or “Ethel Levey’s Virginia Song”

*I was born in Virgin-ya
That’s the state that will win-ya
If you got a soul in-ya
Ain’t no Southern Frown*

*In the city of Norfolk
Home of beauties and war talk
Reckon you’ll like, if you should strike it
That doggone town*

These lyrics were likely adapted from this popular coon song with a similar tune.³⁷²

O I’m a genuine bulgine,
Old Virginny nigger,
And just come out before you all,
To show my style and figure,
To sing and dance is my delight,
The white folks to amuse,
And when I throw these feet of mine,
There’s music in these shoes.

.....
To the piano and the fiddle,
White folks dance and figure
.....
They couldn’t hold a candle to,
The music in these shoes.

³⁷² For full lyrics, see Sam Dennison’s *Scandalize My Name* (pp. 272-273).

CHAPTER TWO

Oh! Susanna Lyrics

I come from Alabama,
Wid a banjo on my knee,
I'm gwyne to Louisiana,
My true love for to see;
It rain'd all night the day I left,
The weather it was dry,
The sun so hot I froze to death; Susanna, don't you cry.

Oh! Susanna, Oh don't you cry for me,
cos' I've come from Alabama,
Wid my banjo on my knee

I jumped aboard the telegraph,
And trabbled down the ribber,
De 'lectric fluid magnified,
And killed five hundred nigger;
De bullgine bust, de horse run off,
I really thought I'd die;
I shut my eyes to hold my breath,
Susanna, don't you cry!

“The Old Folks at Home” Lyrics

Way down upon de Swanee Ribber,
Far, far away,
Dere's wha my heart is turning ebber,
Dere's wha de old folks stay.

CHORUS

All de world am sad and dreary,
Eb-rywhere I roam;
Oh, darkeys, *how my heart grows weary,
Far from de old folks at home!

All round de little farm I wandered
When I was young,
Den many happy days I squandered,
Many de songs I sung.
When I was playing wid my brudder

Happy was I;
Oh, take me to my kind old mudder!
Dere let me live and die.

One little hut among de bushes,
One dat I love
Still sadly to my memory rushes,
No matter where I rove.
When will I see de bees a-humming
All round de comb?
When will I hear de banjo strumming,
Down in my good old home?

“Old Black Joe” Lyrics

Gone are the days when my heart was young and gay,
Gone are my friends from the cotton fields away,
Gone from the earth to a better land I know,
I hear their gentle voices calling “Old Black Joe.”

I’m coming, I’m coming, for my head is bending low:
I hear those gentle voices calling, “Old Black Joe.”

Why do I weep when my heart should feel no pain
Why do I sigh that my friends come not again,
Grieving for forms Now departed long a go?
I hear their gentle voices calling “Old Black Joe.”

I’m coming, I’m coming, for my head is bending low:
I hear those gentle voices calling, “Old Black Joe.”

Where are the hearts once so happy and so free?
The children so dear that I held upon my knee,
Gone to the shore where my soul has longed to go.
I hear their gentle voices calling “Old Black Joe.”

I’m coming, I’m coming, for my head is bending low:
I hear those gentle voices calling, “Old Black Joe.”

“My Old Kentucky Home” Lyrics

The sun shines bright on my old Kentucky home

Tis summer, the darkies are gay
The corn top's ripe and the meadow's in bloom
While the birds make music all the day
The young folks roll on the little cabin floor
All merry, all happy and bright
By 'n by hard times come a-knocking at the door
Then my old Kentucky home good night

Weep no more, my lady
Oh, weep no more, today
We will sing one song for the old Kentucky home
For the old Kentucky home far away.

They hunt no more for the 'possum and the coon,
On meadow, the hill and the shore,
They sing no more by the glimmer of the moon,
On the bench by that old cabin door.
The day goes by like a shadow o'er the heart,
With sorrow where all was delight.
The time has come when the darkies have to part,
Then my old Kentucky home, good night.

The head must bow and the back will have to bend,
Wherever the poor folks may go
A few more days and the trouble will end,
In the field where sugar-canes may grow.
A few more days for to tote the weary load,
No matter, 'twill never be light
A few more days till we totter on the road,
Then my old Kentucky home, good night.

“Listen to the Mockingbird” Lyrics

Last night I dreamed of my Halley
Of my Halley, my sweet Halley
Last night I dreamed of my Halley
For the thought of her is one that never dies

She's sleeping now in the valley
In the valley, my sweet Halley
She's sleeping now in the valley
And the Mockingbird is singing where she lies

Listen to the Mockingbird, listen to the Mockingbird

Oh the Mockingbird is singing oe'er her grave
Listen to the Mockingbird, listen to the Mockingbird
Still singing where the yellow roses grow

How well do I yet remember
I remember, I remember
How well do I yet remember
For the thought of her is one that never dies

It was in that sweet September
In September, I remember
It was in that sweet September
That the Mockingbird was singing far and wide

Listen to the Mockingbird, listen to the Mockingbird
Oh the Mocking bird still singing oe'er her grave
Listen to the Mockingbird, listen to the Mockingbird
Oh the Mockingbird still singing in the spring

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CHAPTER THREE

“Ten Little Niggers” Lyrics

Ten little nigger boys went out to dine;
One choked his little self, and then there were nine.
Nine little nigger boys sat up very late;
One overslept himself, and then there were eight.

One little, two little, three little, four little, five little nigger
Boys.
Six little, seven little, eight little, nine little, ten little nigger
Boys.

Eight little nigger boys traveling in Devon;
One said he'd stay there, and then there were seven.
Seven little nigger boys chopping up sticks;
One chopped himself in half, and then there were six.

Six little nigger boys playing with a hive;
A bumble-bee stung one, and then there were five.
Five little nigger boys going in for law;
One got in chancery, and then there were four.

Four little nigger boys going out to sea;
A red herring swallowed one, and then there were three.
Three little nigger boys walking in the zoo;
A big bear hugged one, and then there were two.

Two little nigger boys sitting in the sun;
One got frizzled up, and then there was one.
One little nigger boy living all alone;
He got married, and then there were none.

One little nigger with his little wife,
Liv'd all his days a happy little life;
One little couple dwelling by the shore,
Soon rais'd a family of ten niggers more.

Taken from *Scandalize My Name* pp 254-255

“When I See a Elephant Fly” Lyrics from Disney’s *Dumbo*
Music and lyrics by Oliver Wallace and Ned Washington

I saw a peanut stand, heard a rubber band
And seen a needle wink its eye
But I be done seen about everything
When I see an elephant fly
When I see an elephant fly

I've seen a front porch swing, heard a diamond ring
I've seen a polka dot railroad tie
But I be done seen about everything
When I see an elephant fly

I saw a clothes horse rear up and buck
And they tell me that a man made a vegetable truck
I didn't see that, I only heard
Just to be sociable, well, I'll take your word

I heard a fireside chat, I saw a baseball bat
And I just laughed till I thought I'd die
But I be done seen about everything
When I see an elephant fly

But I be done seen about everything
When I see an elephant fly
When I see an elephant fly

Seven Magpies Poem (British Nursery Rhyme)

*One for sorrow,
Two for mirth,
Three for a wedding,
Four for a birth.
Five for rich,
Six for poor,
Seven for a witch -- I can tell you no more.*

Qtd in “*Magpies: a story of seven*”

or

*One for sorrow,
Two for mirth,*

*Three for a wedding,
Four for a birth.
Five for heaven,
Six for hell,
Seven you'll see the de'il
Himsel'.*

Qtd. in *Flights of Fancy* p. 77

“Ole Zip Coon” Lyrics

G.W. Dixon - ca. 1835
Fiddlin' Doc Roberts

(3x) O ole Zip Coon he is a larned skoler,
Sings posum up a gum tree an conny in a holler.
(3x) Posum up a gum tree, coonny on a stump,
Den over dubble trubble, Zip coon will jump.

Chorus:

O Zip a duden duden duden zip a duden day.
O Zip a duden duden duden duden duden day.
O Zip a duden duden duden zip a duden day.
Zip a duden duden duden zip a duden day.

O ist old Suky blue skin, she is in lub wid me
I went the udder arter noon to take a dish ob tea;
What do you tink now, Suky hab for supper,
Why chicken foot an posum heel, widout any butter.

Chorus:

Did you eber see the wild goose, sailing on de ocean,
O de wild goose motion is a berry pretty notion;
Ebry time de wild goose, beckens to de swaller,
You hear him google google google gollar.

Chorus:

I went down to Sandy Hollar t other arternoon
And the first man I chanced to meet war ole Zip Coon;
Ole Zip Coon he is a natty scholar,
For he plays upon de Banjo “Cooney in de hollar”.

Chorus:

My old Missus she's mad wid me,
Kase I would'nt go wid her into Tennessee
Massa build him barn and put in de fodder
Twas dis ting and dat ting one ting or odder.

Chorus:

I pose you heard ob de battle New Orleans,
Whar ole Ginerall Jackson gib de British beans;
Dare de Yankee boys do de job so slick, creek.
For dey cotch old Pakenham an rowed him up de first.

Chorus:

I hab many tings to tork about, but dont know wich come
So here de toast to old Zip Coon before he gin to rust;
May he hab de pretty girls, like de King ob ole,
To sing dis song so many times, 'fore he turn to mole.

Chorus:

See Demons of Disorder

Long Tail Blue

Long Tail Blue
I've just dropt in to see you all,
And ax you how you do?
I'll sing you a song, it's not very long,
It's about my long tail blue.
Some niggers they have but one coat,
But I you see got two,
I wears a jacket all the week.
And Sundays my long tail blue,
I stopped some time at Virginia springs,
And at Baltimore City too,
But I guess I made the niggers squat,
When they saw my long tail blue.
Jim Crow was courting a brown gal,
And the white folks called her Sue,
But I guess she let the nigger drop,
When she saw my long tail blue.

Jim Crow got mad and swore he'd fight,
 With sword and pistol too,
 But I guess I backed the nigger out,
 When he saw my long tail blue.
 I went to the City of Washington,
 To see what I could do,
 I stopped at one of Jackson's levee's
 And swung my long tail blue,
 Old Jackson he came up to me,
 Said he, sir, how do you do,
 He treated me to some Champaign,
 For to swing my long tail blue.
 I thought it then time to be off,
 Pray stop a day or two,
 So he offered me a handsome price,
 For a pattern of my long tail blue.
 So coming off soon after that,
 A thinking about my Sue,
 Major Downing followed me straight out,
 For to speak with the long tail blue.
 The General's dander's up I hear,
 Come I will go with you,
 And like all natur stop his wrath,
 When I show your long tail blue.
 The Cabinet cried out in great grief,
 Oh! Lord what shall we do,
 This fellow beats the Major's axe,
 With his swinging long tail blue.
 Now all you chaps that wants a wife,
 And don't know what to do,
 Just look at me and I'll show you how,
 For to swing your long tail blue.

*Taken from Duke University Libraries Digital Collections

“Dandy Jim from Caroline”

I've often heard it said of late
 Dat Souf Carolina was de state,
 Whar handsome Niggars bound to shine,
 Like “Dandy Jim from Caroline.”
 For my ole massa tole me so,
 I was de best lookin Nigger in de County O,
 I look in de glass an I found it so,

Jus what massa told me O.

I drest myself from top to toe,
And down to Dinah I did go,
Wid pantaloons strapp'd down behine,
Like "Dandy Jim from Caroline."
For my ole massa &c.

De bull dog clar'd me out ob de yard,
I tought I'd better leabe my card,
I tied it fast to a piece ob twine,
Signed "Dandy Jim from Caroline."
For my ole massa &c.

She got my card an wrote me a letta,
An ebery word she spelt de betta,
For ebery word an ebery line,
Was "Dandy Jim from Caroline."
For my ole massa &c.

Oh, beauty it is but skin deep,
But wid Miss Dinah none compete;
She chang'd her name from lubly Dine,
To Mrs. Dandy Jim from Caroline."
For my ole massa &c.

An ebery little one we had,
Was de berry image ob he dad,
Dar heels stick out tree feet behine,
Like "Dandy Jim from Caroline."
For my ole massa &c.

I took dem all to church one day,
An hab dem christened widout delay,
De Preacher christened eight or nine,
Young Dandy Jim from Caroline.
For my ole massa &c.

An when de Preacher took he tea,
He seem'd to be berry much perplex,
For noting cum across he mine,
But "Dandy Jim from Caroline."
For my ole massa &c.

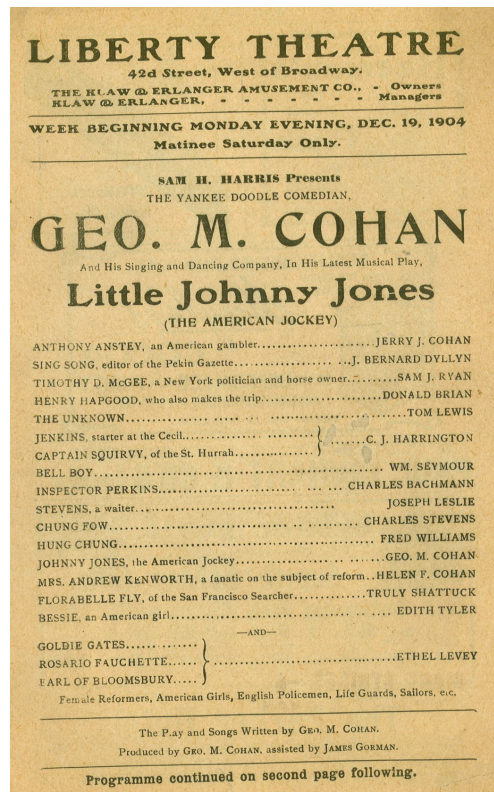
*Taken from "Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture"

APPENDIX B: NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS, PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS,
ADVERTISEMENTS, AND PROGRAMS

CHAPTER ONE



“On the Home Stretch” Political Cartoon by Clifford Berryman
Printed on November 7, 1904



Little Johnny Jones Program from December 19, 1904
From the George M. Cohan Collection at the City Museum of New York City, All Rights Reserved

Musical comedies

Stage: Cohan Revival, 'Little Johnny Jones'

By FRANK RICH

BEFORE "Little Johnny Jones" begins, the audience is invited to rise and sing "The Star-Spangled Banner" to a flag that's been set up in the Alvin Theater's stage-right box. And so the flags keep unfurling right through the curtain call, at which point a gargantuan Old Glory drops from the heavens to fill the entire proscenium. Along the way, a delicate question is raised: With so many stars and stripes on view, is it treason to be bored stiff from beginning to end of "Little Johnny Jones"? If it is, more than a few theatergoers may soon find themselves under house arrest.

This musical is a listless, not to mention listing, farrago that arrived on Broadway last night by way of Connecticut's Goodspeed Opera House and a long tour of the hinterlands. Ostensibly a revival of the 1904 musical that brought early fame and fortune to George M. Cohan, it can't even be enjoyed as a bona fide historical artifact. Alfred Uhry, who doggedly "adapted" the original text to no particular purpose or avail, has reshuffled the libretto and replaced the majority of the show's original numbers with other Cohan songs. No doubt the 1904 "Little Johnny Jones" would be just as unworkable as this synthetic hodgepodge — one of the now-excised tunes was titled "March of the Frisco Chinks" — but at least it would be an

authentic slice of ragtime-America jingoism.

The only honest verve at the Alvin comes from the star, Donny Osmond, who is known to television fans everywhere for his flashing white teeth, clean-cut graces and Hawaiian Punch commercials. The young Mr. Osmond is as yet a limited performer whose dancing is more like prancing and whose expressions range from a mild pout to a broad grin (with few gradations in between). But he is sincere and does know how to sing. One believes that he was born, at least spiritually, on the Fourth of July. His renditions of "Yankee Doodle Boy" and "Give My Regards to Broadway" are clear-voiced and fervent, even if they're unlikely to dent anyone's memories of Cohan, James Cagney or even the Joel Grey of "George M."

Mr. Osmond is also a give-his-all professional in a show in which professionalism is not exactly the holy grail. Without exception, the supporting cast is at the flimsiest summer-stock level — starting with Maureen Brennan, a charmless leading lady who squeals and yelps and slides into her notes on the best interpolated song, "Oh, You Wonderful Boy." Miss Brennan plays Goldie Gates, a San Francisco copper heiress who chases Johnny Jones, "the most sought-after jockey in the world," all the way to the British Derby and then back again to Saratoga. Heiresses crossed oceans by ship in Cohan's day, and, after sampling the speed of "Little Johnny Jones," one understands just why someone later had to invent the jet.

Among Goldie's fellow travelers are her loud dowager aunt, a meddling society journalist and a villainous fortune-hunter — all played by overbearing, profusely guffawing performers who seem to be engaged in a winking competition. Presumably the director coaxed the cast's unrestrained antics, but one cannot say with authority who the director is. Gerald Gutierrez, who receives the credit, sent a letter to the press last week in which he stated that prior contractual commitments to other productions ended his active involvement with "Little Johnny Jones" some months ago.

Whoever's responsible, the show's staging gives it the aura of a wax museum, with sets (mainly drops), costumes and at times sepulchral lighting to match. The choreographer, Dan Siretta, tries to levitate the dead with prolific dance numbers in which ragged gymnastics substitute for inspiration. Unlike Gower Champion in "42nd Street" or Donald Saddler in the last revival of "No, No, Nanette," Mr. Siretta doesn't reinvent yesteryear's tap routines and kicklines to make



Martha Swope

Donny Osmond

them seem freshly minted. He just heaps on clichés with a trowel.

Even so, the original author's ghost occasionally peeks through all the evening's ersatz, unstyled nostalgia. We hear him in his wisecracking put-downs of Old Europe, in the unalloyed brassiness of his better melodies, in his heartfelt lyrical paeans to the red, white and blue. In sharp contrast to his posthumous collaborators at the Alvin, Cohan didn't settle for wrapping himself in the flag. He had the real live Yankee Doodle spirit that's required to wave it.

Hit From 1904

LITTLE JOHNNY JONES, book, music and lyrics by George M. Cohan; adapted by Alfred Uhry; entire production directed by Gerald Gutierrez; choreography and musical staging by Dan Siretta; scenery by Robert Randolph; lighting by Thomas Skilton; costumes by David Toser; sound by Abe Jacob; musical direction by Lynn Cripser; additional orchestrations by Eddie Sauter and Mack Schiefel; dance arrangements by Russell Warner; vocal arrangements and additional dance arrangements by Robert Fisher; musical consultant, Alfred Simon; production associate, Warren Pincus; production supervisor, Robert V. Straus; general manager, Marvin A. Krauss. Presented by James M. Nederlander, Steven Leber, David Krebs and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. At the Alvin Theater, 522 Street West of Broadway. Starter at the Hotel Cecil, Announcer at English Derby and Captain Squibb Jack Silver Anthony Ansley Peter Van Norden Florabelle Fly Jane Galloway Timothy D. McGee Tom Roloff Goldie Gates Maureen Brennan Sing-Song Bruce Chew Whitney Wilson Ernie Sabella Belboy Al Micacchion Johnny Jones Donny Osmond Mrs. Kenworthy Anna McNeely Newsboy David Fredericks American Boys, Porters and Sailors Richard Dodd, Mr. Fredericks, James Homan, Gary Kirsh, Bobby Longbottom, Mr. Micacchion, David Montone and Keith Seave. American Girls Coleen Ashton, Teri Corcoran, Susie Fenner, Linda Gradi, Debra Grimm, Lori Lynott, Annette Michelle and Mayme Paul.

Entertainment

Musical

METROPOLITAN OPERA, "Die Entführung aus dem Serail," E. OPERA ORCHESTRA OF NEW YORK, Carnegie Hall, 8. SEQUOIA STRING QUARTET with MICHAEL ZUKOVSKY, clarinetist, Alice Tully Hall, 8. GROUP FOR CONTEMPORARY MUSIC, 92d Street, 8. DETLEF KRAUS, pianist, Carnegie Recital Hall, 8. RUTH GLASSER, cellist, Abraham Goodman House, 129 West 67th Street, 8. THOMPSON STREET TRIO, Symphony Space, Broadway and West 65th Street, 8.

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Centerfold advertisement for new dance manual,
Vogel musical score published c. 1930

CHAPTER 2

Sung by
**THE
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Names with box-office draw and scenes of dancing, merry-making, comical didoes and romantic tropical shots make this accessory an exceptionally strong magnet for the picture's playdates. Order the Trailer from your M-G-M exchange.

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ORDER DIRECT FROM Morris Liberman, 241 W. 46th Street, N. Y. C. All shipping charges are extra.

ALL picture music is exploitable, of course, but there are times when it means more to the attraction, and the public, than ordinarily. This is one of those times! The title, "Honolulu", is suggestive of moonlight and romance in the tropics. Powell's dancing is a hy-word among movie patrons while the comedy of Burns and Allen is a weekly hit with radio audiences. Put these names behind your music contacts and you are using a very influential force. See that the three song numbers are featured in sheet music window displays and plugged by all local radio, club, restaurant and ballroom bands.

Male Ushers Wear Paper Leis — Females the Leis And Paper Hula Skirts

On the next exploitation page we offer orange-colored paper leis and gaily-colored paper hula skirts as novelty picture accessories. Order some of each for theatre promotion by your staff. Male ushers can wear the leis around their necks and female attaches the paper hula skirts. Utilize this stunt a week in advance of and during play dates. It's old—but ever new!

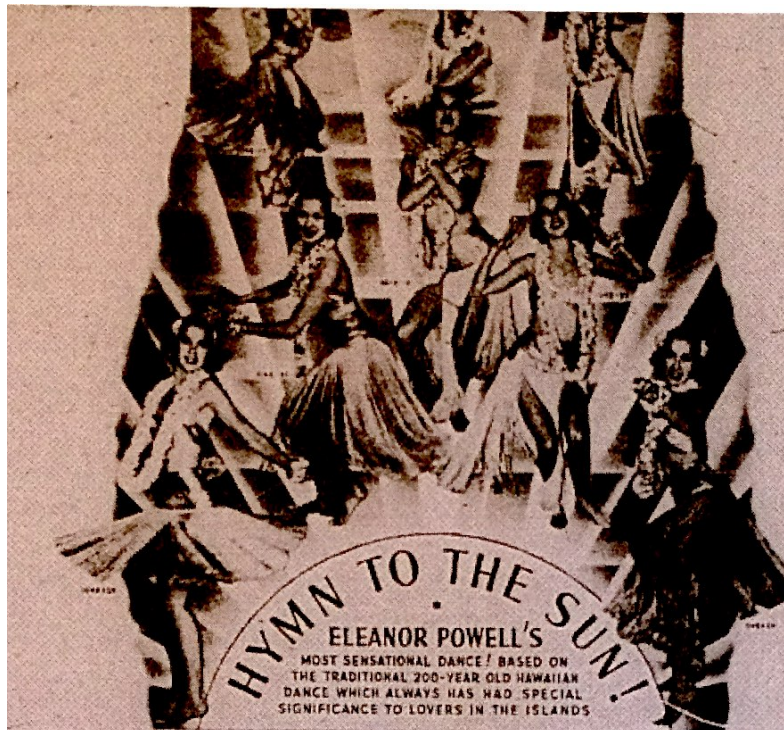
Bon Voyage Gift Tie-Ups

If your theatre is located in a coast town, on an inland waterway or where there are important travel agency or steamship lines it might be feasible to extend this form of cooperation to stores desiring to advertise Bon Voyage baskets of fruits, flowers and gifts. "Honolulu" is a good title for such promotion.

Erupting Volcanic Effects — Thatched Huts, Etc.

On tropical pictures many theatres like to use imitation thatched huts, plants and floral decorations. Just inside the doorway of one of these lobby thatched huts or shadow-boxes you can display a hula dancing figure of Powell, animated or otherwise. Erupting volcanoes are also associated with pictures like "Honolulu" and this suggests other mechanical or painted effects for striking art or background decoration.

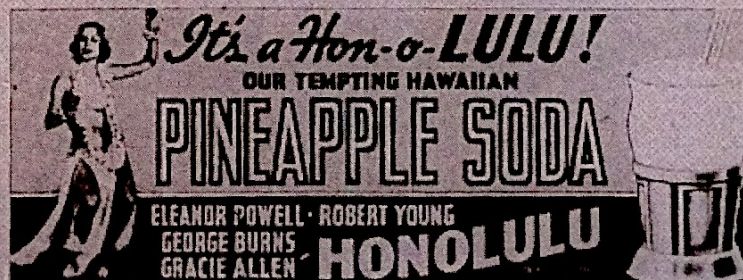
Courtesy of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts



Fine Chance to Create an Impressive Lobby Display—Or Colorful Publicity Layout

WITH a little patience and creative ability you can construct a lobby display on "Honolulu" which will be a positive knockout! "Hymn to the Sun" is a spectacular Hula number performed by Eleanor Powell and a group of "native" girls against a background of tropical richness and splendor. It is the oldest of Hawaiian dances with its inception going back several hundred years. "Hymn to the Sun" has come down through the years as having special significance to lovers of the Islands. Working with the 8 x 10 photos shown here, your artist can fashion a big standee design or lobby sidewall effect of colorful beauty and imaginative appeal! Use plenty of atmospheric backgrounds like a tropical sun, with rays striking through the dancing figures, palm trees, ornamental native decorations, etc. Also show these dancing figures to daily, Sunday and roto editors of newspapers.

ORDER THE 8 x 10 PHOTOS FROM YOUR EXCHANGE—NOS. 1048x8, 1048-17, 1048x21, 1048-41, 1048-19, 1048-23, 1048x20, 1048-45.



You Can Buy These Larger Colored Strips Supplied with Theatre Imprinting

FRIDAY, JANUARY 27, 1939

Eleanor Powell, Gracie Allen Entertaining in 'Honolulu'

FEATURING ELEANOR POWELL'S dancing and Gracie Allen's mad comedy, "Honolulu," an M-G-M film musical, was pre-viewed last night at the West-wood Village Theater to an appreciative audience which found it first rate entertainment despite an overabundance of hokum.

Miss Powell continued her reign as the screen's No. 1 feminine dancer with a series of intricate numbers climaxed by an amazing hula-tap routine. Although they both appear in the film, George Burns and Gracie Allen are separated on the screen for the first time and meet only at the end of the picture. And Gracie all but steals the show.

Robert Young, cast in the dual role of Brooks Mason, a movie star, and George Smith, a pineapple planter, does an outstanding bit of acting and is especially good in the film's humorous moments.

The plot centers about Young's mistaken identity and moves at a swift pace through a series of hilarious situations. Outstanding in the supporting cast are Rita Johnson, as the girl Young almost marries, and Clarence Kolb, her father.

Eddie Buzzell directed the pic-

ture, for which Harry Warren and Gus Kahn wrote the music. Bobby Connelly and Sammy Lee collaborated on the dance direction—E. J.

(Above) Clipping from the *Examiner*, January 27, 1939

Courtesy of the Margaret Herrick Library, Jack Cummings Collection F. (12)

Excerpt from the *Denver Tribune*, published May 14, 1912

A Newspaper article from 1912 reads: "Two 'colored gentleman' bearing the names of George W. Cooper and William Robinson are the best thing at the Orpheum this week. The men, who are honest to goodness Ethiopians, not burnt cork 'make-believers,' have that provoking flavor of real down South 'darky' about them which with homemade maple syrup is fast becoming a thing of the past. Cheap imitations have spoiled both. Both Cooper and Robinson are the genuine article and their chuckling guffaws, pigeon wing steps and cachinnating songs are real vaudeville entertainment" (Denver Tribune; qtd in Haskins 86-87). I place emphasis on this announcement because the fact that Cooper and Robinson were playing these white circuits (i.e.

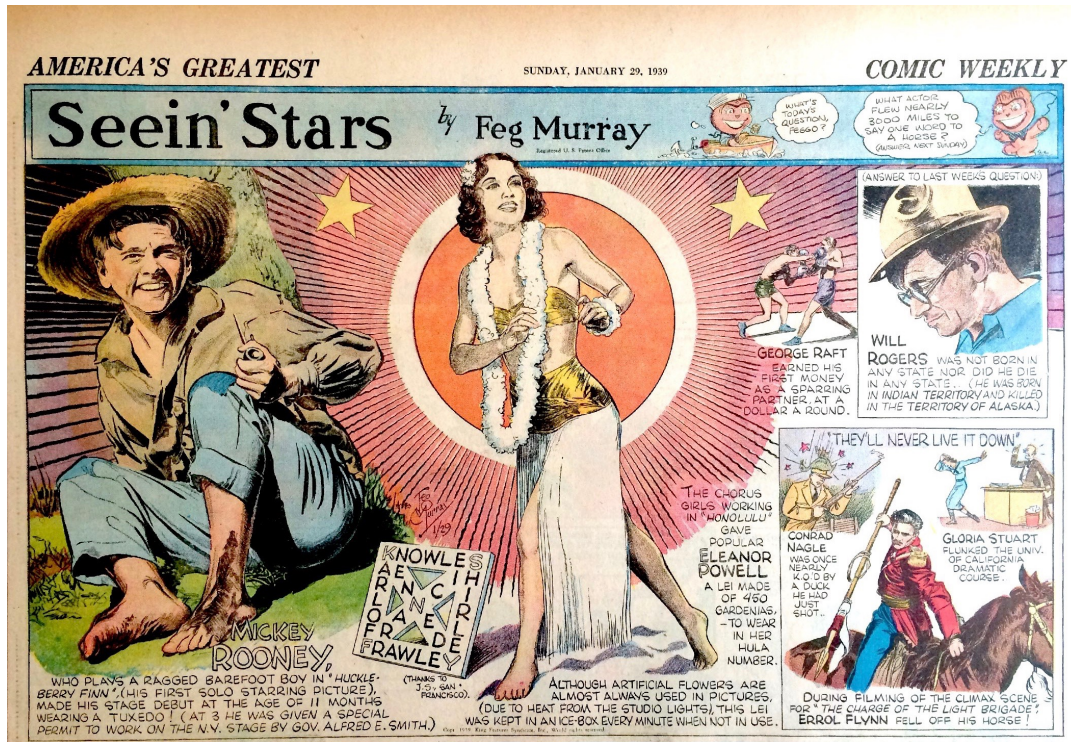
Keith and Orpheum) was no small deal in 1912.

Miscellaneous Newspaper Excerpts Regarding the Roll of the Black Body c. 1921

Despite certain limitations Bill Robinson managed to elide on the vaudeville stage, he still experienced a great deal of racism. Haskins writes, "...Americans could still hang signs outside their boardinghouses and hotels that read, 'No Negroes, Jews, or Dogs Allowed,'..." (Haskins 129). Furthermore, white journalists did not know how to review Robinson's performances. One example from the *Pittsburgh Sun* reads: "Bill Robinson, not as black as the ace of spades, but a gentleman of color nevertheless" (*Pittsburgh Sun* October 18, 1921). Another example can be seen in *The Rockford (Illinois) Republic* which reads: Bill Robinson does as many monkey shines as any colored performer" (*Republic* November 29, 1921). Other papers tended to call him a "black dancing fool" or a "dark cloud of joy" (Haskins 130). Thus despite the absence of burnt cork in Robinson's performances, the media painted an equally fabricated picture of the black body. Perhaps the best of example of the way in which journalists turned Robinson's liberating act into an instance of covert minstrelsy can be seen in a review written for the *Seattle Daily Times*: "Bill Robinson, a darky who doesn't need any burnt cork to provide a background for his flashing teeth and rolling eyes" (*Seattle Daily Times* February 13, 1922). These excerpts have been taken from Jim Haskins' *Mr. Bojangles*. For more examples of the ways in which the paper trail deviated from reality, see Haskins "Below the Headlines" pp. 129-132.

APPENDIX C: PHOTOGRAPHS AND OTHER IMAGES

CHAPTER TWO



Eleanor Powell in Feg Murray's "Seein' Stars," 29 January 1939.



Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in Feg Murray's "Seein' Stars," 19 April 1937

CHAPTER THREE



Disney Propaganda from 1942



From Tex Avery's *Uncle Tom's Cabana* (1947)



From "Sambo and his Funny Noises" (1911)



From MGM's *Romeo in Rhythm* (1940)



From Paul Terry's *Chop Suey* (1930)



“What Makes the Red Man Red” from Disney’s *Peter Pan* (1953)



Tommy Hawk from Walter Lantz’s *Boogie Woogie Sioux* (1942)



The “black feet” from Famous Studios’ *Heap Hep Injuns* (1949)



“Any Bonds Today” from *Leon Schlesinger Presents Bugs Bunny* (1942)



From Walter Lantz's *Scrub Me Mama with a Boogie Beat* (1941)

APPENDIX D: SCRIPTS, CHARTS, AND SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

CHAPTER TWO

Excerpt from Hitler's "The Jewish Question," Speech:

"Today I will once more be a prophet. If the international Jewish financiers in and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the bolshevization of the earth, and this the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe! For the time when the non-Jewish nations had no propaganda is at an end. National Socialist Germany and fascist Italy have institutions that enable them when necessary to enlighten the world about the nature of a question of which many nations are instinctively conscious, but which they have not yet clearly thought out. At the moment Jews in certain countries may be fomenting hatred under the protection of a press, of the film, of wireless propaganda, of the theater, of literature, etc., all of which they control. [...]"

"Don'ts and Be Carefuls"

(From *Hollywood v. Hard Core: How the Struggle Over Censorship Created the Modern Film Industry* p. 301)

Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, "The Don'ts and Be Carefuls" (1927)

Resolved, That those things which are included in the following list shall not appear in pictures produced by the members of this Association, irrespective of the manner in which they are treated:

1. Pointed profanity-by either title or lip-this includes the words "God," "Lord," "Jesus," "Christ" (unless they be used reverently in connection with proper religious ceremonies), "hell," "damn," "Gawd," and every other profane and vulgar expression however it may be spelled;
2. Any licentious or suggestive nudity-in fact or in silhouette; and any lecherous or licentious notice thereof by other characters in the picture;
3. The illegal traffic in drugs;
4. Any inference of sex perversion;
5. White slavery;
6. Miscegenation (sex relationships between the white and black races);
7. Sex hygiene and venereal diseases;
8. Scenes of actual childbirth-in fact or in silhouette;
9. Children's sex organs;
10. Ridicule of the clergy;
11. Willful offense to any nation, race or creed;

And be it further resolved, That special care be exercised in the manner in which the following subjects are treated, to the end that vulgarity and suggestiveness may be eliminated and that good taste may be emphasized:

1. The use of the flag;

2. International relations (avoiding picturing in an unfavorable light another country's religion, history, institutions, prominent people, and citizenry);
 3. Arson;
 4. The use of firearms;
5. Theft, robbery, safe-cracking, and dynamiting of trains, mines, buildings, etc. (having in mind the effect which a too-detailed description of these may have upon the moron);
 6. Brutality and possible gruesomeness;
 7. Technique of committing murder by whatever method;
 8. Methods of smuggling;
 9. Third-degree methods;
10. Actual hangings or electrocutions as legal punishment for crime;
 11. Sympathy for criminals;
 12. Attitude toward public characters and institutions;
 13. Sedition;
 14. Apparent cruelty to children and animals;
 15. Branding of people or animals;
16. The sale of women, or of a woman selling her virtue;
 17. Rape or attempted rape;
 18. First-night scenes;
 19. Man and woman in bed together;
 20. Deliberate seduction of girls;
 21. The institution of marriage;
 22. Surgical operations;
 23. The use of drugs;
24. Titles or scenes having to do with law enforcement or law-enforcing officers;
25. Excessive or lustful kissing, particularly when one character or the other is a "heavy."

CHAPTER THREE

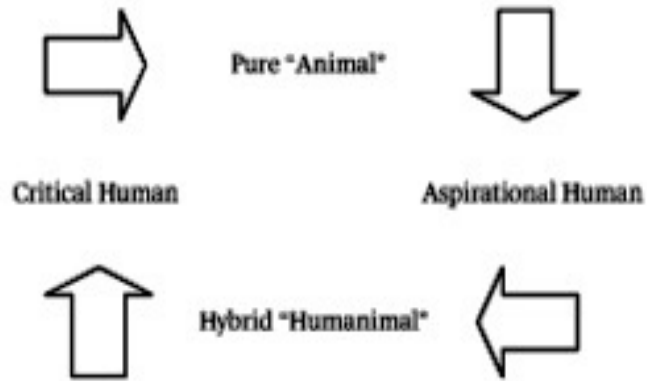
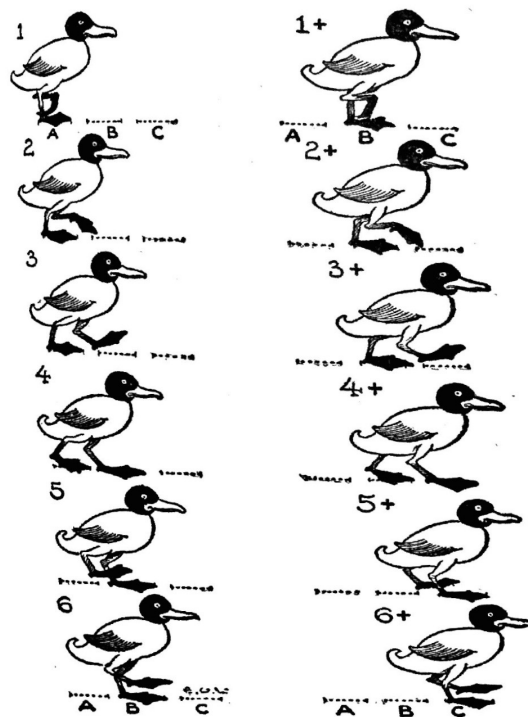


FIGURE 1.2. The Bestial Ambivalence Model

Image taken from *The Animated Bestiary* by Paul Wells p.51



COMIC WALK OF A DUCK.
Series of drawings required to move the bird from A to C.
143

Image taken from *Animated Cartoons*

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