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### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5rr8f6j8>

### Journal

AMERICAN MUSIC, 39(3)

### ISSN

0734-4392

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### Publication Date

2021

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Peer reviewed

Race and the Legacy of the World's Columbian Exposition in American Popular Theater, from the Gilded Age to Show Boat (1927)

David C. Paul

The second act of the musical Show Boat begins on the bustling Midway Plaisance, storied entertainment district for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, hosted by Chicago (Figure 1). In the original production, which premiered at the National Theatre in Washington DC on November 25, 1927 and made its Broadway debut on December 27 of that same year, the Exposition visitors were played by members of an all-white chorus. A second chorus, constituted of black singers, did not appear onstage until near the end of the scene. Dressed as Dahomians, they sallied forth from the entrance to their "Village," stage right on Joseph Urban's set (Figure 2). Jerome Kern, the musical's composer, heralded their arrival with primitivist fare: a rhythmic ostinato played in unison by the orchestra, joined by an ominous melody in the lower brass. The men in the black chorus sing first, laying into an aggressive motive. Eight measures after their entry the whole complex shifts up a half a step, and the intervallic content is amplified, the prominent perfect fourth replaced by a minor sixth. At this juncture the women enter and engage in antiphonal exchanges with the men. The section culminates with the black chorus--men and women--singing together, emphatically landing on a F-sharp dominant seventh chord. The lyrics, penned by Oscar Hammerstein II, are the chanted nonsense syllables of a stereotypical "primitive" language (Figure 3a). The white chorus responds in horror, spilling a cascade of couplets: "Don't let us stay here, For though they may play here, they are acting vicious, they might get malicious/And though I'm not fearful, I'll not be a spearful, so you'd better show me, the way from Dahomey!" They quit the stage, and the black chorus announces, "we're glad to see those white folks go," continuing on for a moment in primitivist mode. But abruptly the

music shifts to a full-blown rag, and the masks come down as the “Dahomians” reveal themselves to be New Yorkers pining after multiethnic Avenue A and its culinary delights (Figure 3b).

<FIG. 1 ABOUT HERE>

<FIG. 2 ABOUT HERE>

<FIG. 3A ABOUT HERE>

<FIG. 3B ABOUT HERE>

What to make of this moment? It seems little more than an echo of the message of the celebrated first act. There the travesty of Southern miscegenation laws is exposed by the impact they have on Julie La Verne, an octoroon passing as white, whose discovery marks the beginning of her decline. But whereas the stakes are personal in the case of Julie, this is not so for the “Dahomians,” with whom the audience never becomes acquainted. Although their lives are as constrained by racist stereotypes as Julie’s is, the humor and spectacle of the scene outweigh social criticism. And over the decades since the debut of Show Boat it has become clear that when the New Yorkers drop their primitivist blackface, there is another burnt cork mask underneath.

Given our evolving notions about identities and the fraught politics that support them, the scene is probably not fit for inclusion in modern productions. However in terms of Show Boat’s place in the history of black representation, there is something to be gained by considering this scene in relation to earlier theatrical representations of the Midway Plaisance. For in choosing this setting, the creators of Show Boat reinvigorated a performance tradition that had flourished briefly in the 1890s. The middle of that decade witnessed a handful of successful productions that set scenes on the Midway. Dwarfing them were dozens of amateur Midway Plaisance re-

creations, a national vogue for which was part of the phenomenon of themed fund-raising fairs. Whether Kern, Hammerstein, and their producer, Florenz Ziegfeld Jr., were aware of these precedents, taking them into account adds critical heft to a scene that otherwise could be dismissed for engaging superficially with the politics of race and representation.

Show Boat scholars have already developed a rich picture of the immediate theatrical and cultural context for the musical. Most notably, musicologists Katherine Axtell and Todd Decker have separately developed “thick descriptions” of Show Boat informed by the complex landscape of genre and performance styles of the late twenties.<sup>1</sup> What I attempt in the following pages is something similar, but with a different temporal orientation. I connect the opening scene of the Second Act with an earlier configuration of genres from the 1890s, when the performance of race, so central to the narrative of Show Boat, was the lifeblood of American entertainment culture. The Midway Plaisance was at once a characteristic product of that culture and a spur to further explorations of racial categories, both in the context of professional theatrical productions and entertainments staged by amateur performers. Such was the sanction extended by the Midway in the imagination of Gilded Age Americans that it even licensed explorations of gender. Cross-dressing was a central part of Midway-themed fund-raising fairs that dominated the social seasons immediately following the Columbian Exposition.

But even as Midway burlesques freed performers from conventions of race and gender that restricted their day-to-day lives, they reinforced the constraints that fettered people of color. For the freedom afforded in the context of staged Midway recreations were available only to white performers and stood in marked contrast to the restrictions faced by black theater professionals. It is precisely this limitation of Gilded Age culture that manifests in Show Boat when the Dahomians unmask.

From Minstrelsy to Colonial Villages: Race in Gilded Age Entertainment Culture

For Americans at the turn of the century the fraught relationship between race and national identity was seamed into the cultural fabric of everyday existence. Some thirty years after the Civil War, veterans of the confrontation who had sustained grievous injuries--lost limbs and other disfigurements--were a visual reminder of the rift over slavery that had nearly destroyed the Union. Post-reconstruction narratives about the war tended to paper over the issue of race with an anodyne patriotism that stressed grey and blue sacrifice, but there were other factors that kept race on the minds of Americans. The flow of immigrants into the United States, the incipient moments of the Great Migration, and the first colonial ventures of the country (not to mention its longstanding genocidal mismanagement of native groups, still generating headlines in the 1890s), meant a diversifying populace increasingly attuned to racial and cultural difference. What did it mean to be American when so many different peoples lived in the United States? This question was never far from the surface, whether one was attempting to manage feelings of dislocation and lost community attendant upon a move to the city (a common experience at the time) or to descry the place the United States might come to occupy on the world stage. Given the broader context, it is hardly surprising then that the preoccupation with race was one of the hallmarks of Gilded Age entertainment.

Minstrelsy, the dominant form of popular theater in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, remained an important factor, its suite of derogatory stereotypes having sunk deep into the mindset of several generations of Americans. The compass of those stereotypes was wide, for while depictions of blacks were its beating racist heart, the black-faced performers also engaged in other ethnic caricatures.<sup>2</sup> By the end of the century minstrelsy persisted, but it was outstripped

by Vaudeville, which absorbed blackface acts into its panoply and made ethnic humor a staple. Alongside Vaudeville, more extended musical comedies thematized race and ethnicity, the collaborations of Harrigan and Hart in the 1870s and 1880s (which evolved out of variety show sketches) being one of the most notable examples. But even outside productions that were sustained by stereotypical portrayals of Germans, Italians, Jews, Asians, and Blacks (roughly in increasing order of maliciousness), race was a factor. In the scenery-and-effects driven genre of extravaganza, comic-turns that relied on racial humor were often a feature, despite fantasy settings that were at far remove from the urban locales preferred by Harrigan and Hart. And even in the decidedly non-narrative genre of spectacle, constituted of elaborate dance, pantomime, and processional numbers, performers representing racial archetypes often appeared on the crowded stage.

Within American entertainment culture the performance of race was not, however, the sole province of the theater professional. World's Fairs, which flourished in the Gilded Age, offered visitors an array of exhibits that included displays of foreign peoples, who were hired not as actors performing a role (though, in some instances, they were in fact that), but as exemplars of exotic others. Beginning with the Columbian Exposition of 1893, exhibitors manufactured elaborate colonial villages purporting to show the in situ lives of exotic peoples. The daily activities and rituals of the denizens of such villages thus became performances of race--as much as the demonstrations of theater, music, and dance traditions that also took place in these same spaces and were more clearly demarked as "performance."<sup>3</sup> The villages were instrumental in sustaining a sense of racial hierarchy that was the philosophical foundation for colonialism, ranging the world's people along an axis from barbarism to civilization.<sup>4</sup> In some of the World's

Fairs that axis was made physically manifest in the layout of the entertainment district to which the villages were often confined.

The Midway Plaisance of the Columbian Exposition, where most of the village displays were located, set the precedent. A visitor entering the Exposition from its Western-most entrance and proceeding eastward along the titular boulevard, the Midway Plaisance, would first pass American Indian and Dahomey Villages, followed by the Chinese Village and Theater, a complex of displays from the Near East, including the Street in Cairo, and finally a Japanese Bazaar. From there it was a matter of passing under a railroad bridge to enter the main grounds of the Exposition, where an array of monumental buildings, uniformly designed in the Beaux Arts style and collectively known as the White City, contained displays of Western technology, commercial products, and artwork. The ascent to Western Civilization along the Midway Plaisance was blurred partially by German and Austrian villages, one on either side of the Near East exhibits, and an Irish Village adjacent to the Japanese bazaar--not to mention the various amusement attractions like the Ferris Wheel, Hagenbeck's Animal Show, and the World's Congress of Beauty (purportedly featuring 40 women from 40 nations) that were liberally distributed along the street. Moreover the White City contained a number of ethnographic exhibits, though the organizers of the Exposition viewed these as educational and distinguished them from the villages along the Midway, which were run first and foremost as commercial ventures.<sup>5</sup> If blurred at the edges, the image was clear enough: non-Western, non-white peoples and their cultural accomplishments inhabited a lesser plane.

As attested to by the scene with which the second act of Show Boat begins, two of the Midway Plaisance concessions that lingered longest in the cultural memory of Americans were the Dahomey Village and the Street in Cairo. The latter is depicted opposite the Dahomey village

in Joseph Urban's set, and the audience's attention is drawn to it at the beginning of the Act through the person of the belly dancer La Belle Fatima. She offers a sample of her performance accompanied to the melody that had become, by the twenties, a musical cliché for risqué Middle Eastern dance.<sup>6</sup> The actual Street in Cairo exhibit did include a theater where belly-dancing took place, although it was only one of several venues among the Near East exhibits that featured species of what was then called the *danse-du-ventre*. At least one contemporary description of the Midway Plaisance also mentioned a dancer named "Fatima"; however she performed in the Persian Palace of Eros, which was a separate exhibit. Fatima and the other entertainers at the Persian Palace may have been Middle Eastern, but they came to Chicago by way of Paris and its cabarets, and they catered specifically to the tastes of a male audience. It was likely the programs at the Palace of Eros that provoked the moral outrage expressed by some commentators and resulted in the brief suspension of *danse-du-ventre* performances in the Near East exhibits.<sup>7</sup> The controversy proved good publicity, and when the performances resumed, they were even more popular, ensuring that the *danse-du-venture* remained the most-discussed aspect of the exhibits and, indeed, of the Midway Plaisance in its entirety.

Here notions of race and gender were deeply entangled, as Americans who visited the Near East exhibits, primed by the longstanding orientalist trope of the sultry harem girl, assessed their experience of "the real thing"--usually to the detriment of the performers whose femininity they ridiculed and morals they decried. Rendering the situation even more complicated was the presence of cross-dressed men among the entertainers in the exhibits. Some of the *danse-du-ventre* performers may have been male, and one of the other much-commented upon attractions of the Cairo Street, the daily Wedding Procession, featured a "bride" who was in fact a boy.<sup>8</sup>

As for the Dahomian Village, it played into a longstanding fascination that Western audiences had for a region of Africa that was legendary for its bloody history. That history was bound up in the slave trade, which had been central to the prosperity of Dahomey and fueled the expansionist aspirations of the monarchy ruling the region (nineteenth-century Dahomey consisted of a swath of land that lies at the southern tip of modern-day Benin). To defend and expand its territory, Dahomey maintained a standing army. It notably included a corps of women soldiers, a perennial source of commentary for the Europeans who explored and wrote about the region, Sir Richard Burton notable among them. The element of human sacrifice figuring in the regional religious practices was further grist for the mill, making Dahomey a byword for barbarism in the Western world and ensuring that any showman who could mount a display of Dahomians would find it a lucrative endeavor.<sup>9</sup> Such was the case for the eccentric Captain Pené, who assembled the group of 69 Dahomians displayed on the Midway Plaisance and presided over them as an enthusiastic proxy for the King of Dahomey. Contemporary descriptions of the people in the exhibit were derogatory, and, again, as in the case of the Street in Cairo, gender, not just race, was an important factor. Frequently visitors to the Dahomey village observed that the stature of the women matched that of the men, which made them suitable for military service.<sup>10</sup> That observation reaffirmed how far removed the Dahomians as a race stood from Western peoples. The clear differentiation of gender, both in terms of physical appearance and disposition, was presumed to be a hallmark of civilization, with men and women equipped for the different roles that they were meant to carry out.

The same stereotypes that shaped the way in which foreign peoples were displayed and perceived in their villages were also deployed in contemporary commentary about fair patrons, who hailed from all parts of the globe.<sup>11</sup> Thus, even though the performance spaces of a

Dahomey Village or Street in Cairo were clearly demarked and access to them was often controlled by the requirement that patrons purchase an additional ticket, the categories of audience and entertainer were blurred at World's Fairs. All of it was a spectacle, and the parsing of racial characteristics, often in conjunction with gender, was the means upon which commentators relied to impose cognitive coherence. The legacy for the Midway Plaisance, as it was absorbed into subsequent entertainments as a picturesque locale, was a reputation as a place where race and gender could be explored with unusual freedom.

#### Extravaganzas, Burlesques, and Spectacles: Professional Stagings of the Midway Plaisance

Before Show Boat evocations of the World's Columbian Exposition in American commercial theater were limited to productions contemporaneous with the Exposition itself. The traces are scant: a few topical references, mostly in the context of interpolated songs, and a mere handful of scenes that take advantage of the many attractive settings the Exposition afforded. In all likelihood, there were more, since the surviving materials--programs, reviews, published songs, promptbooks, and libretto typescripts--provide only snapshot glimpses of shows that were always in flux and for which a substantial amount of their content was never written down. Producers were constantly revising and updating in response to shifts in public interest and taste. They were enabled by loose storylines designed to accommodate the flood of material from popular song publishers and a shifting array of "specialties" provided by the vast corps of peripatetic entertainers who moved nimbly between vaudeville and narrative theatrical forms. The restless nature of turn-of-the-century theater though, also ensured that the Exposition would

figure fleetingly. As its topicality ebbed in newspapers, magazines, and books, so too did its presence in theaters. Within two years of the Exposition turnstiles making their last revolution in October 1893, public discourse had moved on to other things and so too had American theater.

Before any scriptwriter used it as a setting for a scene, the Exposition served as the subject of topical humor and songs. Examples can be found in the Middle-Eastern themed extravaganzas Ali Baba Jr. and Sinbad, both Chicago endeavors that were part of a string of hits produced by librettist Harry B. Smith in collaboration with impresario David B. Henderson.<sup>12</sup> Smith and Henderson's productions were typical of those to which the term "extravaganza" was applied, featuring exotic settings as a pretext for elaborate costumes, stage effects, and dances. They were just as much about comedy as they were spectacle, supplying a steady stream of jokes, puns, implausible misunderstandings, and even more implausible characters.<sup>13</sup> The Exposition-themed songs interpolated into Ali Baba and Sinbad, entitled "Midway Plaisance" and "The Sights I saw from the Big Ferris Wheel" respectively, survive as commercially published sheet music, and neither song figures in the extant scripts associated with either show. It is only by virtue of the sheet music covers, which declare the songs to have been sung by specific performers in each extravaganza, that one can establish the connection (Figure 4). Both songs portray the Midway as a place where illusion and artifice reign, reveling in the duplicity of its concessionaires and the inauthenticity of its performers.<sup>14</sup>

<FIG. 4.1 AND 4.2 SIDE BY SIDE ABOUT HERE>

Scenes set on the Exposition grounds, and so actual antecedents to Show Boat, are much rarer than topical evocations of the sort exemplified by the Smith and Henderson extravaganzas. I have found only three, two of them being additions to pre-existing shows that sought to capitalize on the fascination the American public had for the Exposition in and around the

summer months of 1893. One of these shows was a spectacle entitled America, which, like Sinbad and Ali Baba, was a Chicago production that ran concurrently with the Exposition. The second show was Henrik Hudson; or the Discovery of Columbus, a burlesque that had undergone several revisions since premiering in the late 1880s. Another burlesque, Little Christopher Columbus, is unique in having been conceived by its originators with the Exposition as an integral part of the book, and accordingly I turn to it first.

Although it debuted in England in 1893 and was the work of London stage professionals, librettists George R. Sims and Cecil Raleigh and composer Ivan Caryll, Little Christopher enjoyed a long run in the United States. The burlesque's American premiere took place in 1894 at the Garden Theater in New York, and after a successful stint there it toured extensively.<sup>15</sup> As per the conventions of the genre the principal role was played by a woman. In the United States, the show became a vehicle for Bessie Bonehill, who had already made a name for herself on either side of the Atlantic as a male impersonator.<sup>16</sup>

The plot hinges almost entirely on mistaken identity, disguise, and a good deal of cross-dressing on the part of the main character--a boy played by a woman, who at times must also pretend to be a woman, thereby allowing the actor to play her own gender. Christopher, who is a lineal descendant of Christopher Columbus and as such a member of the nobility, has fallen in love with a Chicago heiress named Guinevere. The match would seem ideal since Guinevere and her mother have come to the Spanish port city of Cadiz, where the first act unfolds, in order to secure a European nobleman as a husband. Unfortunately Christopher is disguised as a commoner, for, desirous of seeing the World's Fair (and evidently impoverished) he has taken a job as cabin boy for Captain Slammer, whose ship will be transporting a statue of Columbus (the much elder) as part of the Spanish contribution to the Exposition. Slammer has discovered

Christopher's identity and wishes to marry off one of his daughters to Christopher. Meanwhile Guinevere's mother has hired a detective in order to keep her daughter away from commoners, which is what she believes Christopher to be. The subsequent shenanigans, which involve Christopher disguising himself as the dancing girl Peppita, are too convoluted to recount. Suffice it to say that Christopher and company ultimately do end up at the Midway Plaisance in the third act, having spent the second act captive to the Bey of Baratraria, the ruler of a made-up island kingdom somewhere in the Atlantic that is a composite of orientalist clichés.<sup>17</sup>

Burlesque on the scale of Little Christopher is indistinguishable from extravaganzas like Sinbad and Ali Baba: spectacle and comedy are the principal goals. Indeed the second and third acts are largely there to provide an excuse for the inclusion of various specialty numbers, which could be conveniently altered to keep the show fresh and encourage repeat attendance. In Act 2 the specialties appeared in the context of a vaudeville show embedded in the narrative frame; in the final act they served as stand-ins for Midway attractions.<sup>18</sup>

Surviving materials for Little Christopher--Caryll's published score for the London production and several promptbooks for American productions--provide a general sketch of the Midway portions, though the changing nature of the show precludes the possibility of reconstructing what audiences saw on any given evening. Two chorus numbers are intrinsic to setting the scene of the Midway, both of which feature chorus members playing Exposition visitors of various nationalities. The first number occurs immediately after the curtain rises on the Midway. The chorus members sing about the difficulty of using English and then sunnily declare, "But what does it matter so long as we're gay, that we don't understand what Americans say, they know what we mean when we offer to pay, and our money they are ready to collar." Jaunty music-hall fare, the number features an oomp-pah accompaniment that is occasionally

interrupted by quotations of national anthems, the musical equivalent to the costumes that the members of the chorus were undoubtedly wearing.<sup>19</sup> The second number, which is not mentioned in any of the surviving American promptbooks, though it may still have been included at some point, divides the chorus in half: a group of Germans and a group of Turks. Here Caryll falls back on stereotypes as each group announces its nationality. The Germans sing in four-part harmony, while the Turks manage only unison singing, with occasional tentative arabesque-like imitations. Caryll outfits the latter group with a typical orientalist accompaniment: an open fifth with a chromatic lower neighbor accentuating the upper note of the dyad. And as for the lyrics, the Turks sing nonsense syllables, punctuated occasionally by invocations of “Allah.”<sup>20</sup>

The exoticist features that the “Chorus of Turks and Germans” share with Show Boat’s “Dahomey” are a consequence of the composers drawing on common tropes and do not constitute evidence for direct connection. What separates them is that Little Christopher takes its Midway denizens at face value: the Germans and Turks are exactly that. By contrast in American stage and song representations, Midway personnel almost always turn out to be Americans in disguise (as they do in Show Boat)--or on occasion rather prosaic Europeans dressed as peoples of ethnicities that the orientalist precepts of the time period construed as exotic.<sup>21</sup>

The cross-dressing of the actual Midway, where performances of race and gender were intermixed, is ideally suited for the genre of burlesque, but Little Christopher only capitalizes on the possibilities briefly and forgoes the most obvious one. Christopher does arrive on the Midway as Peppita, but s/he never dances there in that disguise, and there is no reference to the Near East theaters that featured displays of the danse-du-ventre. In any case Christopher/Peppita is a Spaniard--and so only faintly exotic. In at least some versions of the show Christopher does temporarily assume the guise of a black man. To escape discovery, he slips into “the negro

plantation” exhibit, and, as he explains to Guinivere, “it was washing day, so I snatched these clothes from the line--got into Uncle Tom’s Cabin and put them on.”<sup>22</sup> This new disguise allows him to launch into a minstrel number, “Honey, my Honey,” about a nighttime tryst on a plantation in the South. The moment hints at the possibilities that other sectors of American entertainment culture would explore more thoroughly: the Midway as a place where a white performer could readily move across boundaries of race and gender, where a woman playing a boy, cross-dressed as a girl, could dawn another mask and become a lovestruck black plantation hand.

Another explorer-themed burlesque, Henrik Hudson; or The Discovery of Columbus, which toured concurrently with Little Christopher, also included scenes at the Midway Plaisance. This show had a more local pedigree, William B. Gill, its author, having penned an earlier version for Tony Pastor’s Music Hall in 1888. That previous incarnation was a comedic look at Hudson’s explorations in the New World, and the setting is confined to the seventeenth century. Gill expanded the show in 1890, adding a subplot about the search for the lost Christopher Columbus, and then updated it again when the Columbian Exposition was in full swing.<sup>23</sup> The device of the fountain of life conveniently allowed both explorers to live until the nineteenth century and thus make their way to the Exposition. Although I have been unable to locate any surviving materials for the show, contemporary reports indicate that the Midway Plaisance, as in Little Christopher, furnished the opportunity for vaudeville specialties.<sup>24</sup>

The remaining 1890s production to feature scenes at the Exposition was America, a so-called “spectacle” produced and directed by Imre Kiralfy. As a genre, spectacles shared traits with extravaganzas like Ali Baba and Sinbad--enormous casts, elaborate costumes and effects, and prominent dance numbers--though everything a magnitude larger. What separates the two

genres is the reliance of spectacles on pantomime and dance to advance their narrative, thereby removing the topical humor that was an essential ingredient for extravaganzas.<sup>25</sup> America was an expansion of a “processional spectacle” that Kiralfy had created as the opening act for the Barnum and Bailey circus troupe.<sup>26</sup> Typical of his productions, it shared the allegorical imagery used in contemporaneous community pageants, which surveyed the history of the towns in which they were staged, and looked ahead to a bright future.<sup>27</sup> The subject though was nothing less than the history of America, from Columbus’s portentous journey to the triumph of the World’s Columbian Exposition. The final act included two scenes set in the Exposition, the last featuring a “Congregation of Nations and Grand Cortege of the States and Territories of the Union.” Here the procession of the world’s people is organized according to the principles that also undergirded the displays of the Midway.<sup>28</sup> Beginning with an Asian Queen on an Elephant and an African Queen on a camel, different nations, purportedly representing stages of evolutionary development, passed by in procession, culminating with the thirteen original states, who “gather around Progress, Liberty, Invention, Genius, and Uncle Sam,” and then advance downstage to the Goddess of Chicago.<sup>29</sup> The message was clear: Westward the course of civilization takes its way (to borrow a catchphrase associated with the doctrine of Manifest Destiny). But the representation of the Exposition was muddled since parades of all nations took place on the Midway Plaisance, not, as Kiralfy has it, in front of the Administration Building on the main Exposition grounds.<sup>30</sup>

If there were other professional productions that featured the Exposition before Show Boat, I have found no record of them. And although the three shows I have discussed here were successful, they do not seem sufficient to establish a tradition of theatrical representations that was robust enough to have influenced the makers of Show Boat thirty years later. Broadly

speaking these shows do illustrate the range of roles open to white performers, a contrast with the much narrower band of opportunity for black performers. Beyond the footlights of the commercial stage, amidst the vibrant turn-of-the-century culture of amateur performance, the imaginative potential of the Midway achieved its fullest realization as a place where the boundaries of race and gender were fluid.

### Ethnological Fantasies: Amateur Recreations of the Midway Plaisance

On the evening of March 26, 1894 several thousand Bostonians made their way to the South Armory on Irvington Street to experience an elaborate recreation of the Midway Plaisance from the recently-concluded World's Columbian Exposition. Held under the auspices of the First Regiment of the Massachusetts Volunteer Militia, the recreation was a charity event, the proceeds of which would go to support veterans and their families. The Armory was filled with exhibits reproducing those of the original Midway: the Dahomey Village, the Turkish Theater, the Irish Village, Old Vienna, the Street in Cairo, Hagenbeck's circus--"Everything," as the Boston Sunday Globe put it, "to make a cosmopolitan feel at home." Each exhibit was attended to by militia members and other community volunteers in appropriate costume. For an added touch of verisimilitude the organizers contracted with a professional company that had staged a successful Midway recreation at Madison Square Gardens in New York. Thus, augmenting the amateur militia performers were a group of professional entertainers, including "Hirata's Celebrated Japanese Troupe," Turkish dancers, Eskimos, and possibly "Hindoo Jugglers." Though it was a Monday, opening night was a big affair. Governor Frederic T. Greenhalge and a

retinue of city and state officials were on hand to mark the occasion, and the attendees included a wide array of military personnel dressed in full uniform.<sup>31</sup>

Ethnological authenticity stood a distant second place behind entertainment as the goal of the Midway burlesquers. In the Dahomey Village one could watch a scenario unfold in which fearsome natives (militia men in blackface) captured a missionary, roasted him, and then served up missionary soup. The Street in Cairo offered a host of orientalist stereotypes, as listed by a reporter who visited it: “lounging nomads, dusty with their last trip across the desert, dancing dervishes and fakirs and women with their faces veiled from the gaze of intruders.”<sup>32</sup> But what would prove most popular of all was the Congress of Beauties, which featured several men of the regiment cross-dressed in the garb of women from around the world (Figure 5).

<FIG. 5 ABOUT HERE>

The Boston Midway burlesque and the Madison Square Garden one from which it hired personnel were but two manifestations of a widespread phenomenon. Perusing American newspapers from the two years after the closing of the actual Exposition reveals dozens and dozens of Midway Burlesques. Some of them, like the one in Boston, were large recreations staged under the auspices of military organizations, which had ready access to city armories that were sizable enough to accommodate mock villages and animal shows. In more than a few instances a miniature version of the Ferris wheel was included, as was the case with a massive recreation in Chicago that took place in November 1894 (Figure 6).<sup>33</sup>

<FIG. 6 ABOUT HERE>

But Midway Plaisance recreations were not always so elaborate and they seem to have run the full gamut of American social entertainments typical of the mid-nineties. At the modest end of the spectrum was a Midway-themed New Year’s reception at the home of a well-to-do

family in Holton, Kansas, marking the beginning of 1894.<sup>34</sup> In January of the New Year the Nashville Athletic Club confected a Midway Plaisance of larger scope that served as the fanciful setting for gymnastic displays of club members.<sup>35</sup> Another recreation, organized by the ladies of the Congregational Church in Waterloo, Iowa from January 31-February 4, 1894, was large enough to accommodate a small-scale Ferris-wheel. As in Boston it was the Congress of Beauties that attracted most commentary, though this one did not involve cross-dressing.<sup>36</sup> Many of the recreations were the work of women's groups, like the one in Waterloo. To take just one more example, in Lima, Ohio, the Ladies Auxiliary of the YMCA mounted a re-creation of the Midway Plaisance in June 1894 that was such a major social event that local businesses closed so that their employees and customers could attend.<sup>37</sup>

In the twenty-first century it is hard to imagine a charity event featuring stagy amateur entertainment galvanizing communities in the way that Midway recreations did. The closest lineal descendant of the recreations, the church bazaar and bake sale, are modest affairs unlikely to attract reporters and prominent politicians. As cultural historian Beverly Gordon has demonstrated however, the 1890s were the high watermark of the fund-raising fair, when elaborate themed spectacles were staged to raise money for a host of charitable causes, from supporting impoverished veterans to funding the construction of new churches, masonic lodges, and armories. The phenomenon was part of the explosion of benevolent societies after the Civil War, when fraternal orders, ladies' auxiliaries, veteran's organizations, and ethnic clubs proliferated, answering a need for practical and material support at a time when government safety nets were few, as well as fulfilling longings for community identity amidst rapid social change. While much of the work of a fund-raising fair was undertaken by local volunteers, the organizers often contracted with entertainment professionals to provide additional attractions, as

was the case in Boston. Large fund-raising fairs also attracted high-level dignitaries like governors and city mayors, keen to be associated with endeavors that drew in a broad constituency of customers. The fairs, as Gordon points out, were mass entertainment before the advent of radio, film, and television, and, gaining admittance was no more expensive than a ticket to a vaudeville show.<sup>38</sup>

Although the Midway Plaisance theme drew its specific inspiration from the Columbian Exposition, the idea of a fund-raising fair featuring an international theme dates back to the Sanitary Fairs of the Civil War period, when organizers first began to experiment with ways of unifying the booths of charitable bazaars. “Costume or ‘dress-up,’” Gordon explains, “was perhaps the key element in these . . . fairs. It helped fairgivers appropriate the other--when one dressed as a Spanish peasant, Spain was in effect reduced to a play, or turned into an amusement.”<sup>39</sup> What makes the Midway Plaisance re-creations stand out among the “international” themed fund-raising fairs is the range of the roles they permitted to participants. For not only were there no constraints on the “nationality” one could assume, they also provided sanction for gender cross-dressing. Indeed, the transvestism featured in Congress of Beauty exhibits of many of the larger recreations seems to have been almost unique for the genre of fundraising fairs.<sup>40</sup>

These recreations suggest the unusual place that the Midway Plaisance had come to occupy in the popular imagination of Americans. The resonance of the Midway went beyond the general appeal of exotic spectacle, which in any case found an outlet in many other cultural contexts, the displays of major department stores and the ritual and regalia of fraternal orders among them.<sup>41</sup> Rather for the largely middle class amateurs who mounted the burlesques, the

Midway was a staging ground for the imagination, unfettered by the constraints of race and gender that otherwise governed late Victorian quotidian life.

The license provided by the Midway Plaisance re-creation was not universally accepted. There were occasional complaints against such entertainments that partake of the larger criticisms that were leveled against the fund-raising fair.<sup>42</sup> When a church in Black River Falls, Wisconsin staged a two-night Midway Plaisance in December 1894, several members of the congregation refused to have anything to do with the endeavor. They pronounced the entertainment “unorthodox” and condemned it for being a “worldly” way of raising money for the church.<sup>43</sup> The disgruntled congregants were wrong on the first count given the large number of church-sponsored Midway Plaisance re-creations, not to mention fund-raising fairs on other themes. Such events were vital to the financial health of any charitable organization, whether church affiliated or not. But their accusations about the worldly nature of fund-raising fairs were undeniable, and they were not the only people to make them. That same month in Greencastle Indiana, the pastor of the local Presbyterian church protested when the congregation proposed a fair based on a Midway Plaisance theme. The fair went ahead anyway, and the pastor tendered his resignation, leaving (somewhat ironically) for Chicago.<sup>44</sup>

In late 1894 William B. Hale, a prominent young Episcopal priest, launched a series of public attacks on the phenomenon of church entertainment, including the fund-raising fair.<sup>45</sup> Hale seems to have viewed the dissipation of the church with gruesome fascination, for he was in the midst of a year-long investigation (from June 1894 to June 1895) in which he amassed reports of some 200 offending entertainments.<sup>46</sup> While Hale condemned all such entertainments, he did express his relief that “there has not come to my notice a single congress of beauty . . . [and] No Midway Plaisance.”<sup>47</sup> For Hale, evidently, Midway Plaisance re-creations inhabited an especially

dubious space in the already morally questionable realm of church fund-raising endeavors. Unfortunately, he did not specify why he objected so strongly to Midway Plaisance re-creations and their most popular exhibit, the Congress of Beauty. But the squeamishness he expressed about bodily display in censuring “Trilby Socials” (in which men bid for dates with young female congregants based on displays of their feet) was no doubt in play. And, it seems likely the element of men cross-dressing as women was also a provocation.

As it turns out the New England centrality of Hale’s survey of church fairs led him to overlook a large number of Midway Plaisance entertainments. The phenomenon had passed in the Northeast, but it did persist elsewhere, albeit with much less frequency. Not surprisingly the high watermark for Midway Plaisance recreations (not just those associated with churches) was the social season of 1893-94, which witnessed the closure of the Exposition itself in October 1893. By the following year the number of such entertainments declined noticeably, and by early 1896, they had mostly disappeared.

#### Performing Gender and Race, On and Off the Stage

Amidst his tirade against church entertainments, Hale referenced with distaste a “prosperous-looking magazine, called the Monthly Social . . . [wherein directions are provided] by which the reverend clergy may give a Congress of Beauty, a Coxey “Social,” or a Midway Plaisance.”<sup>48</sup> Unfortunately I have not located a copy of this magazine, but I have found a Midway Plaisance advice manual published in 1894. Likely written in conjunction with the enormous Chicago recreation, it purports to provide “full directions for producing and conducting [a Midway Burlesque] upon the most extensive plan or on a limited scale.”<sup>49</sup> Much of

the text is devoted to descriptions of the exhibits, and here the entangled performance of gender and race is often in the foreground.

Two of the exhibit descriptions in the manual call explicitly for cross-dressing. The one for the Congress of Beauty stipulates that performers “may be ladies or gentlemen as may be most convenient. If ladies, they should be disguised in as ridiculous a manner as possible. If gentlemen are selected, the burlesque will be greatly heightened.” Subsequently the manual remarks, “Every one will recognize the show as a huge joke and the place will always possess a peculiar fascination just as it did on the original Midway.”<sup>50</sup> Gender-bending is convolved here with transcultural cross-dressing, since many of the men would have been dressed as non-white women. This is also the case in the manual’s recommendations for a Samoan Village exhibit: “The men and women (who should really all be represented by gentlemen) should all be large, wear brown colored tights reaching the neck, wrists and ankles, and have their faces and hands colored with brown grease paints.”<sup>51</sup> Thus, again the humor for attendees resided in the grotesquerie of men performing obvious distortions of race and gender.

The manual’s prescriptions for the Congress of Beauty and Samoan Village encourage amateur burlesquers to partake of a vibrant and varied tradition of professional cross-dressing that existed in American theaters at the end of the nineteenth century--even though it was a comparative rarity in the context of amateur fund-raising entertainments. Minstrelsy had relied on the practice of men travestied as black women since the 1850s. That decade marked the emergence of the wench role, typically portrayed, as historian Annemarie Bean puts it, as a “mulatta coquette” serving as the object of rivalry between two darker skinned men. Also figuring in the form was a second cross-dressed role: the “funny old gal,” who was usually delineated by a performer of more substantial proportions in grotesque drag. From the chrysalis

of the “wench” role emerged “the prima donna” of the 1860s, when, Bean writes, “female impersonators of the minstrel stage eclipsed the minstrel companies with which they were associated.”<sup>52</sup> The most famous of the prima donnas, Francis Leon, who went by the stage name of the “Real Leon,” was the highest paid minstrel performer in the early 1880s.<sup>53</sup>

But cross-dressing also flourished in other theatrical contexts. Little Christopher and Ali Baba are examples of the many burlesques and extravaganzas that featured young women in heroic male roles, perpetuating the “best boy” role of the British pantomime tradition. That same tradition also featured the “comic dame,” an older man cross-dressed as an older woman.<sup>54</sup> As Bean notes the “best boy” and “comic dame” roles parallel, and are undoubtedly entangled with the minstrelsy “wench” and “funny old gal.”<sup>55</sup> By the 1890s, when variety had eclipsed minstrelsy as the preferred form of entertainment, cross-dressing men and women were a relatively common phenomenon, even in the context of family-oriented vaudeville. The heyday for female impersonation was more than a decade in the future: the 1910s were when Bert Savoy, known for his campy performances as a “gigantic red-haired harlot,” would rival Julian Eltinge, whose preference was for realistic impersonations that attracted a large constituency of female fans who admired his fashion sensibilities.<sup>56</sup> But Savoy and Eltinge, whose characters echo the early pairings “comic dame”/“best boy” and “funny old gal”/“wench,” had many predecessors in the nineties. As far as the Midway burlesquers are concerned, the advice manual locates its cross-dressed beauties on the comic dame end of the spectrum. In practice, though, sometimes the congress of beauties provoked Eltinge-like confusion, as attested to by a humorous report about the bewildered response of a young patron to the Boston Midway.<sup>57</sup> It bears mentioning that male impersonation was also popular in American entertainment culture-- and had been since Annie Hindle debuted on the American stage in the late 1860s, billing herself

as “the great serio-comic and impersonator of male characters.”<sup>58</sup> I have already had occasion to introduce one of the most successful male impersonators of the period, Bessie Bonehill, who took the title role in the American production of Little Christopher.

Cross-dressing was not limited to the stage. In the late nineteenth century there was a wide-range of factors motivating those who engaged in the practice. In the working-class culture associated with New York’s Bowery neighborhood, cross-dressing and assumed “female” mannerisms were a hallmark of the so-called “fairy,” one constituency of men in the complex turn-of-the-century “gay world.”<sup>59</sup> Women cross-dressed for numerous reasons: feminist reformers asserted their politics by dressing as men, female stowaways or workers disguised themselves as men to survive in a masculine milieu, female prostitutes advertised their profession by cross-dressing, and wealthy female tourists dressed as men in order to facilitate tours of city slums.<sup>60</sup> And there were undoubtedly people who dressed as members of the opposite sex because of convictions about their own identity (to use the term “transsexual” would be anachronistic).

These practices prompted and responded to a growing legal apparatus to control cross-dressing in American cities. In her monograph about turn-of-the-century cross-dressing practices sociologist Clare Sears notes that in the second half of the nineteenth century, 34 cities and 21 states added prohibitions against cross-dressing to their laws, typically as part of a broader project of policing “public indecency.”<sup>61</sup> As those laws coalesced, the stage remained (as it often does) a place where normalized codes of gender could be suspended. Even there, though, performers had to be mindful of those codes. Gender impersonators were among the highest paid acts on the vaudeville stage, but they were dogged by a persistent strain of criticism that fretted about their implications for the moral health of the country. Eltinge, for example, was acutely

aware of the fraught terrain he inhabited and went to considerable lengths to demonstrate his own manhood, distance himself from other impersonators, and stress the tremendous labor it took to perform as a woman (something he claimed he only continued to do reluctantly because the public demanded it of him).<sup>62</sup> The Midway burlesquers benefited from the license of the stage, and possibly their amateurism provided additional cover from charges of being an “invert” (the preferred term of contemporary sexologists). For, unlike Eltinge, their experiment in cross-dressing was short-lived and avocational.

The appearance of cross-dressing in a text, as Marjorie Garber argues, often connects disruption of the male-female dualism to other binary constructions. The transvestite, Garber writes, “indicates a category crisis elsewhere, an irresolvable conflict of epistemological crux that destabilizes comfortable binarity, and displaces the resulting discomfort onto a figure that already inhabits, indeed incarnates, the margin.”<sup>63</sup> This is certainly the case for the gender impersonators of American vaudeville in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when the issue of race, the binarity of white versus other (“other” often being “black”) was under near-continuous (and often violent) reconstitution. Cultural historian Kathleen B. Casey demonstrates that Julian Eltinge “promoted hyper-white Victorian grace and femininity, ideals to which white women could aspire and white men could admire. In doing so he exaggerated conventional perceptions of the nature of manliness and femininity and reinforced existing gender and racial norms more than he undermined them.”<sup>64</sup> Eltinge even did roaring trade with his own brand of whitening cream for women.<sup>65</sup>

Race is explicitly part of the performance in all cross-dressing in the Midway burlesques. Moreover it was the organizing principle for such entertainments, relying as they did on a sense of anthropological and national differentiation that governed the organization of World’s Fairs.

How amateur performers were to play people of different races is an abiding concern of the Midway burlesque advice manual, something I pointed out in the passages quoted above. The instructions for the performers of the Dahomey Village are especially detailed: “These distinguished foreigners should be impersonated by quick witted young men, dressed in black tights, with blackened faces and fantastic wooly wigs. The wildest decoration in the way of ballet skirts, feathers, flowers and colored paint to be indulged in.” The exhibit was to be a veritable cavalcade of racist stereotypes, for the Dahomians are advised to perform “wild war dances, songs and cake-walks.”<sup>66</sup>

Evident here as influences on the amateur Midway burlesque are two of the principal theatrical forms in which blackness was staged in the United States during the nineteenth century: the minstrel show and the ethnological show. Cakewalks were the kind of number with which minstrel shows often concluded. If the would-be Dahomians needed further advice about how to stage such a number, they could make recourse to the many manuals published in the 1890s that provided instructions for amateur minstrel shows.<sup>67</sup> In those manuals though they would not likely find directions for staging a “Wild war dance” as stipulated for inclusion by the Midway handbook. Some of the characters of the American minstrel stage were inclined to violence, especially the swaggering, razor-toting figure of the so-called “coon song.” But a war dance enacts and anticipates coordinated violent action, something that stands wholly outside of the tradition of minstrelsy, which ultimately trucked in stereotypes that rendered black Americans anodyne.<sup>68</sup> Instead the reference to war dances points to a kind of show that is somewhat less familiar than the minstrel show, and although its history is entangled with minstrelsy, it is worth sketching out, not least because it involves the actual Dahomey Village of the actual Midway Plaisance.

Ethnological shows have a lineage that extends at least as far back as the 1500s in Western culture. During the nineteenth century, as the colonial period reached its high noon, such shows flourished, some of them (including the Dahomey Village) acquiring a degree of notoriety that left impressions that lingered long in public memory. The sensation caused by a Khoikhoi woman named Sara Baartmann, who was displayed in London and Paris beginning in 1810, inaugurated a period of intense popular interest in the peoples of the African continent. Baartman was likely chosen by her exhibitors because of the extent to which she could be made to fit the stereotypes that Europeans had already developed vis-à-vis the so-called “Hottentot” people.<sup>69</sup> So it was for the exhibition of thirteen Zulus who took London by storm in the 1850s, and again a couple of decades later, when the Great Farini, an impresario celebrated for cultivating and performing acts of daring-do, included several Zulu warriors in his show. Farini’s spectacles portrayed the Zulus as fearsome warriors, responding to the public’s gruesome fascination with a people who killed 800 British soldiers in an infamous battle during the Anglo-Zulu war of 1879. Later that same year Farini, at the urging of P. T. Barnum, crossed the Atlantic and for two seasons, from 1880-1882, Farini’s “Genuine Zulus” were among the acts featured in The Greatest Show on Earth.<sup>70</sup> Inevitably the transatlantic tradition of ethnological entertainment became a part of the World’s Fair phenomenon, in which longstanding forms of popular entertainment that mixed educational patter and the promise of thrills previously unseen reached their ne plus ultra. The precedent was set by the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1889, which included a collection of colonial villages. In 1893 Chicago followed suit, and thereafter most of the major American fairs included displays of exotic peoples, and specifically of Africans in settings that supposedly mimicked those of their home.

The Great Farini went to great lengths to demonstrate that his “Genuine Zulus” were in fact that, and other exhibitors also proclaimed the authenticity of the peoples they displayed. But sometimes the “Africans” on exhibit were in fact African-Americans. Among the more notorious examples is that of Joseph Howard Lee, a native of Baltimore, who devised an elaborate story about his life as Bata Kindai Amgoza LoBagola, an orphan from the Sahelian region of West Africa.<sup>71</sup> There was even overlap between the performers who worked ethnological and minstrel shows. Early in their careers Bert Williams and George Walker, who became vaudeville celebrities for the re-purposed brand of minstrelsy that they purveyed, played Dahomians in the San Francisco Mid-Winter Fair of 1894. The ship carrying the actual West Africans who were supposed to be part of the exhibit was delayed en route to San Francisco, and so as not to disappoint a public that had had its appetite whetted by the Dahomey Village at the Chicago Exposition, the organizers of the Mid-Winter Fair recruited Williams, Walker, and others to play the part until the arrival of the genuine article.<sup>72</sup> Dahomians, as I noted earlier, were in high demand because of their storied violent past and the corps of gender-confounding female warriors in the ranks of their army.

The principal point I want to make by invoking the two forms of nineteenth-century professional theatrical entertainment featuring black performers is that in order to make a living, those performers had to cater to the stereotypes of white audiences. Or to put it differently, they were forced to perform prescribed forms of blackness. This is not a new observation. As Robert C. Toll demonstrates in his seminal history of minstrelsy, what propelled the success of black minstrel performers was that they could make an authenticity claim that their white counterparts could not: they were themselves blacks. Black performers did develop ways of subverting the tropes of minstrelsy, targeting jokes at black sections of segregated theaters, reworking character

archetypes, playing up the ironies of their own position, and even, in one notable instance, donning white face and thus creating a mirror inversion of the form.<sup>73</sup> But their performances of blackness hinged on the “authenticity” of what minstrel audiences expected, on the images that white performers had created of southern black plantation life.<sup>74</sup>

Though the point may not be new, reiterating it here brings out a critical facet of the fund-raising fair that was implicit in my earlier discussion of the phenomenon. The fund-raising fair, and especially Midway Plaisance burlesques, afforded amateur performers the opportunity to roam across a broad spectrum of national, racial, and gender identities. But those performers were largely white. Their a la carte mobility stands in marked contrast to the constrained sphere in which black performers operated, hemmed in by the pervading stereotypes of white culture.<sup>75</sup> The professional performers who were sometimes hired to flesh out the Midway Plaisance recreations clinch the point. Turkish dancers were hired to be Turkish dancers; Hindoo Jugglers were hired to be Hindoo Jugglers; Eskimos were hired to be Eskimos. While it is possible that some of these professionals were whites working in brown face, yellow face, or black face, they were often the former personnel of the ethnological shows that constituted the original Midway Plaisance and its successors. Real or not, they were hired for their ability to inhabit a mask successfully and to sustain it for the duration of their contract. They were not hired to change masks as they saw fit, or drop them altogether, as was the pleasure of the amateur performers who staged what were in effect colonialist fêtes galantes.

#### “Dahomey” Reconsidered: Double Consciousness and The White Gaze

Once one is aware of the stage history of the Midway Plaisance and the broader context of late nineteenth-century theatrical entertainment, the beginning of the Second Act of Show

Boat is cast in a different light. As professional antecedents, the burlesques Little Christopher and Henrik Hudson swapped one kind of entertainment--an ethnological show--for another--vaudeville.

In so doing they dispensed with the language of authenticity, critical to the ethnological show, and licensed the fluid exploration of gender and race that was characteristic of vaudeville.<sup>76</sup>

White amateur Midway burlesquers capitalized on this license, going further than their professional counterparts. Instead of substituting one kind of entertainment for another, they remade the ethnological show as vaudeville. Under the curation of the volunteer militias, ladies auxiliaries, and athletic club members, the Midway Plaisance became a place of carnivalesque inversion, where whites could engage in identity exploration, blurring race and gender categories with impunity. The “Dahomey” number of Show Boat inverts this legacy for black Americans. The freedom of white burlesquers was out of reach for a people constrained by the inherent racism of the ethnological show, minstrelsy, and, it should be noted, ragtime, which, with its happy-go-lucky urbanity, was the new stereotypical sound of blackness by the end of the 1890s. The connotations of the Midway make this number a stark dramatization of what W. E. B. Du Bois dubbed “double consciousness,” the sense “of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others.”<sup>77</sup>

When Du Bois authored The Souls of Black Folk (1903) he conceived of the concept of “double consciousness” in relation to the experiences of the “talented tenth.”<sup>78</sup> This was the cohort of African-Americans who had managed to secure middle-class status, and who, by virtue of their professions, interacted with whites more frequently than those who earned their living from physical labor. Included in that cohort were the first generation of successful black entertainers--Bert Williams, George W. Walker, Aida Overton Walker, Bob Cole, J. Rosamond

Johnson, Will Marion Cook, and Ernest Hogan notable among them.<sup>79</sup> These artists birthed a vibrant black American theatrical tradition at the turn-of-the-century, adopting, repurposing, and sometimes shucking the racist tropes of minstrelsy.

The predicament of black performers, as historian David Krasner demonstrates, found its way into their productions, including instances in which the psychology of “double consciousness” manifests. A number of Krasner’s examples are drawn from In Dahomey (1903), a vehicle for Bert Williams and George Walker that was the first all-black production to premiere on Broadway.<sup>80</sup> Krasner singles out the song “Swing Along,” with text and music by Will Marion Cook. Appearing at the beginning of the first act, it invokes the “white gaze,” as it enjoins “the chillun” to swing along:

Come along Mandy, come along Sue  
 White fo’ks a-watchin’ an’ seein’ what you do,  
 White fo’ks jealous when you’se walkin’ two by two,  
 So swing along chillun, swing along.

The lyrics, Krasner argues, acknowledge that the white gaze excludes “self-representation, replaced by objectification that is inextricably bound up with sexuality, exoticism, and corporeality.”<sup>81</sup> He suggests that explicit acknowledgment of the double consciousness in the context of a show like In Dahomey, which played to large segregated audiences, was one way in which Walker, Williams, and other black entertainers drew attention to and resisted the racist legacies of American theater that bound them.

The white gaze is similarly thematized in Show Boat’s Dahomey number, though here, rather than being enjoined to perform to white expectations, the “Dahomians” express their collective relief at being able to drop the performance once they have scared away the audience.

One could push further and interpret the Dahomey number as an allegory for the paradoxical trajectory of black theater in the United States: that black performers would win a path to self-expression by first successfully inhabiting the roles prescribed for them. Such an interpretation probably freights the scene with unwarranted semantic baggage because it reverses the message that the creators of Show Boat more obviously telegraph across the breadth of the musical: the indebtedness of American popular music to black culture. Sticking with the more modest claim then: the Show Boat scene echoes the double consciousness that had resounded through African-American Theater in its earliest days. And, as I have argued, the moment of double consciousness is rendered all the more potent by the fact that it transpires on the Midway Plaisance, a place that was associated with the freedom of white amateurs to explore multiple identities.

A quarter of a century elapsed between the first florescence of black theater, In Dahomey being the highwater mark, and the premiere of Show Boat. But time is not the most critical distinguishing factor. Rather, it is that the creators of Show Boat, in contrast to those of In Dahomey, were white, and could not claim firsthand knowledge of the objectifying experience of the white gaze. Which begs the question: were Kern, Hammerstein, and Ziegfeld conscious of the subtext they were introducing when they included the Midway scene and “Dahomey” number in their musical? Did they purposely make recourse to a space that had particular resonances of freedom in order to reiterate a message that was first articulated by black theater professionals? Though not conclusive, the evidence points in the direction of Ziegfeld as the impetus for the Midway Plaisance scene, and, moreover, it suggests that he may well have been aware of the connotations of the place.

Ziegfeld and the Way to “Dahomey”

The mid-1890s were formative for Ziegfeld, witnessing him begin his ascent from smalltime Chicago booking agent to the clearest claimant to P. T. Barnum’s erstwhile title: Greatest American Showman. Born in 1885 and 1895 respectively, Kern and Hammerstein were too young to have felt the immediate impact of the Columbian Exposition on American entertainment culture. For Ziegfeld, however, the Exposition was the catalyst that set his career in motion, offering as it did the prospect of droves of visitors to Chicago, hungry for entertainment.

That hunger was something Ziegfeld’s father sought first to address through a series of concerts conceived as an alternative to the official musical offerings at the Exposition. Ziegfeld Sr. bestowed on his series the title “International Temple of Music,” and he intended for them to be a cosmopolitan representation of the “best music” of the Western world at popular prices.<sup>82</sup> The programs emulated those offered at the Palais du Trocadéro during past Parisian Expositions, and accordingly Ziegfeld Sr. dubbed the performance space in which his concerts took place the “Trocadero.”<sup>83</sup> Initially the Trocadero was located in the First Regiment Armory of the Illinois National Guard (Ziegfeld Sr. had previously managed the First Regiment band), but after a fire in the spring of 1893, it moved to the Second Regiment’s Battery D on Michigan Avenue. This was the same space that the enormous Midway Plaisance recreation would occupy in November of 1894. By that time, however, “Trocadero” no longer referred to a place, but instead to a touring ensemble that presented programs that were vastly different from the concerts that had occurred under the rubric “International Temple of Music.”

The agent of change was Ziegfeld Jr., who replaced the concerts with a variety bill, headed by strongman Eugene Sandow, after his father’s original scheme proved unprofitable.

These early years of Ziegfeld's career leave an imprint on Show Boat in the name of the night club where the heroine, Magnolia Ravenal (née Hawkes), gets her first break as a singer: The Trocadero. Plausibly Ziegfeld's sense of this period, and thus its representation in Show Boat, was also impacted by the fashionability of the Columbian Exposition. He may have attended performances of the professional shows that situated some of the action on the Exposition grounds. The aesthetic cultivated by Imre Kiralfy, with its signature battalions of scantily clad women and spectacular stage effects, were certainly influential for Ziegfeld, and he was in Chicago during America's successful run there. More to the point it would be surprising if, as he toured the country with the Trocadero Vaudevilles, learning to respond and manipulate the desires of the public, he had not become aware of the phenomenon of amateur Midway burlesques.

In the teens and twenties Ziegfeld was almost without rival in shaping the archetype of white femininity, and he even dispensed bonuses to Ziegfeld girls who avoided the sun during the summer.<sup>84</sup> Nonetheless there are biographical reasons to suggest that the impresario was sensitive to the plight of black entertainers. His father had already set a precedent in publicly voicing his support of Will Marion Cook's proposal that the musical programs of the Columbian Exposition include operas by "Italian, English, and Negro" composers featuring black performers.<sup>85</sup> The cultural affinities of the father were different from those of his son, but Ziegfeld would also prove to be a supporter of Cook. The composer supplied a number of popular songs for the Follies, among them "Lovie Joe," which Fanny Brice sang in her Follies debut. More significant though is Ziegfeld's promotion of another figure from Cook's milieu of successful turn-of-the-century black entertainers.

In 1910 Ziegfeld hired Bert Williams to be a part of the Follies. The inclusion of Williams in a show that was otherwise comprised of white performers was not breaking new ground. Ziegfeld did, however, demonstrate a measure of progressive fortitude when he refused to countenance the protests of other Follies cast members who expressed their unwillingness to perform alongside Williams. A much-circulated anecdote has the impresario declaring to actors who threatened to resign rather than to work with Williams, “Go if you want to. I can replace every one of you, except the man you want me to fire.”<sup>86</sup> There is no documentary evidence to substantiate the authenticity of this quip, and it is notably lacking from Williams account of the episode.<sup>87</sup> Still, Ziegfeld’s advocacy for Williams proved to be long-lived, the actor remaining one of the stars in the Follies firmament throughout the teens. For his part, Williams was grateful that Ziegfeld “stuck to his guns,” and explained in 1918 that it was “one reason why I am with him now, although I could make twice the salary in vaudeville.”<sup>88</sup> The extent to which Ziegfeld and Williams interacted beyond their professional relationship is not clear, but plausibly (again) in the course of whatever exchanges they had, Ziegfeld might have learned something of the predicament of black entertainers in the nineties--possibly even, he heard the anecdote about Walker and Williams playing Dahomians in the San Francisco Mid-Winter Fair of 1894.<sup>89</sup>

Ziegfeld associates included other artists who could claim membership in the vanguard of turn-of-the-century black entertainers. Indeed the production of Show Boat brought together one of the remaining members of that milieu and a younger generation of black theater professionals. As Todd Decker has documented, Alex C. Rogers and his songwriter collaborator C. “Lucky” Roberts were employed to recruit the members of Show Boat’s black chorus, the pair then being at the nexus of black show business in New York.<sup>90</sup> Rogers was a lyricist who had worked extensively with Williams, supplied lyrics for the Follies, and performed in In Dahomey. Roberts

was about ten years younger, and had earned his spurs as a Harlem pianist in the teens, when jazz was first emerging as a coherent style. The pair's efforts, Decker deduces, were undertaken on behalf of another African-American entertainer, Will Vodery, who was a regular Ziegfeld employee and of the same generation as Roberts. Vodery would lead the black chorus in Show Boat and may have been involved in the orchestration and arrangement of Kern's score.

Surviving documentary evidence about the genesis of the musical suggests Ziegfeld played an important role in shaping the Midway scene.<sup>91</sup> Kern and Hammerstein had a continuity draft for much of Act I to present to Ziegfeld in November of 1926, when they met with him about the prospects for a production, having secured theatrical rights from Ferber.<sup>92</sup> Undoubtedly they discussed their vision of the second act at the meeting, but whether the Exposition came up as a specific locale is impossible to know. Strictly based on the source material, setting the opening scene on the Midway Plaisance was an arbitrary choice, for the novel contains only a passing reference to the place. The Exposition figures as the last item in a list of the various experiences that serve as Magnolia's initiation to the worldliness of Chicago--donning a dress with décolleté, tasting champagne, and viewing performances from a box at Hooley's theater. The relevant passage reads, "[Magnolia] was horrified at witnessing the hootchie-kootchie dance on the Midway Plaisance at the World's Fair."<sup>93</sup> Ferber does not mention Dahomians at all. What is clear is that the earliest versions of the second act, with the first scene set at the Exposition, emerged after Ziegfeld was involved in the project.<sup>94</sup> Parenthetically it is apropos to cite director Hal Prince, who, whilst preparing a 1994 Show Boat revival, justified excluding the scene because it was Ziegfeld's idea (and thus not that of either Hammerstein or Kern) to "fill the stage with semi naked girls."<sup>95</sup> The source of his information was probably William Hammerstein, son of the librettist, with whom Prince was consulting.

Ziegfeld's impact on the scene is more clearly documented in connection with the next stage of the development of Show Boat, as Hammerstein worked on the libretto. The two earliest extant full versions of the libretto, one preserved in the Florenz Ziegfeld-Billie Burke Papers at the New York Public Library and the other submitted for copyright registration to the Library of Congress, are similar, and both present essentially the same version of the Exposition scene, which differs substantially from its final form. These materials date from no later than August 3, 1927, which is when the copyright registration was officially recognized, and possibly a good deal earlier (Decker proposes January 1927 as the date for the libretto in the Ziegfeld-Burke collection based on the casting notes it includes).<sup>96</sup>

The version of the Exposition scene in this early incarnation is framed by spectacles of female pulchritude--exactly the sort of thing that Prince dismissed with distaste. It begins with Midway exhibitors inveigling patrons of the fair to visit their attractions. The standout among those attractions proves to be the Belle Fatima, the "hootchie-kootchie" dancer. Stage directions describe a scramble among the men to follow her into the "The Streets of Cairo" Building, where she will dance. As the scene progresses, stage lights gradually dim and the electric lights on the attractions come on, the closing spectacle being a flood of color, the play of fountains, and the revolving Ferris wheel--the Exposition at night time. The curtain comes down, and, to bridge scenes, a chorus of "Forty Beauties From Forty Nations" appear in front of the drop.<sup>97</sup>

With the exception of the Belle Fatima, nothing described here is pulled from Ferber's novel. Much about it suggests the influence of Ziegfeld, who was an old-hand at creating elaborate scenes in collaboration with Joseph Urban, the long-standing set-designer for the Follies. And the appearance of the Forty Beauties is entirely consistent with the bebies of beautiful women that were the sine qua non of a Ziegfeld show.

But as Ziegfeldian as the trappings for this scene were, the producer was dissatisfied with the narrative they enclosed, and more generally the tone of the second act.<sup>98</sup> Hammerstein set about revising the libretto, the World's Fair scene being one of several in the Second Act that was subject to considerable alteration. Nothing was done at this stage to change the framing device: Fatima danced at the beginning, the congress of beauty at the end. Instead the changes had to do with dialogue and songs of the principals. Hammerstein made Ravenal, Magnolia's husband, win rather than lose a bet (as a result his character exhibits bonhomie throughout the scene rather than melancholy); trimmed the dialogue involving Ravenal's gambling friends; and eliminated a song in which Magnolia and her father tried to make her mother Parthy smile.<sup>99</sup> Once the rehearsals were under way in October, the World's Fair scene was subject to additional changes, part of a broader transformation that capitalized on the talents of the chorus of African-Americans assembled for Show Boat.

Decker's thorough analysis of American theater culture at the time of Show Boat's premiere reveals that 1927 was a banner year for black performers along the "great white way" and beyond. That year witnessed the opening of DuBose and Dorothy Heyward's Porgy, black choruses appearing in a number of Broadway and touring productions, and, when Universal's new film version of Uncle Tom's Cabin opened, the Dixie Jubilee Singers providing an accompaniment of spirituals. The inclusion of a large black chorus in Show Boat," Decker writes "was completely within contemporary trends on Broadway . . . [But what was] deeply disruptive of Broadway norms and challenging from the perspective of large-scale form and production costs, was the juxtaposition of this group with a white chorus on the generous Ziegfeld model."<sup>100</sup> Decker demonstrates that as rehearsals proceeded, numbers for the white chorus were cut, while

numbers for the black chorus increased, several of those being “curtain numbers” that were critical for sustaining the interest of the audience as scenes changed.<sup>101</sup>

One of those numbers was “Dahomey.” Traces of it are found in the earliest drafts of the libretto where, mid-scene, a procession of Dahomians momentarily attracts the attention of the Hawkes family: Parthy dismisses them with a racist epithet, while Magnolia and her father express delight. In the course of the rehearsal process, the spectacle of the “Dahomians” became the culmination of the scene, and when the drop came down, their vigorous dancing replaced the Congress of Beauty that Hammerstein had previously envisioned as the conclusion.

As to who was responsible for the decisions that led to the expansion of the role of the Black chorus, it is not possible to determine. Axtell’s overview of the sources pertaining to Show Boat rehearsals demonstrates that the title “director,” in the modern sense, cannot be ascribed to any one individual.<sup>102</sup> Zeke Colvan, a veteran stage manager, received credit for the position, but it is clear that Hammerstein, Kern, Ziegfeld, as well as Vodery and dance director Sammy Lee all had a hand in shaping the production. The painting of the final rehearsal of Show Boat’s original production, made by Doris Lee for Life magazine and reproduced recently as the cover illustration for Decker’s monograph, features Ziegfeld standing prominently amidst the creative team. He points decisively towards stage left with one hand, and with the other grips the phone that presumably allows him to communicate with back-stage personnel. Colvan, who is also standing, is deferentially listening to Ziegfeld’s directions.

In short it is clear that Ziegfeld was creatively engaged in shaping Show Boat during three phases of its development: initial conversations with Kern and Hammerstein in late 1926, in response to the draft librettos Hammerstein produced from winter to summer of 1927, and then again in the rehearsal and try-out period, beginning in the fall of that same year. Barring the

emergence of any additional documentary evidence, however, the extent to which Ziegfeld was directly responsible for shaping the Midway Plaisance scene will have to remain conjecture. Still the cultural resonances of the Columbian Exposition in the 1890s, which Ziegfeld was uniquely positioned among the creators of Show Boat to understand, make the place a particularly apt and ironic choice in a musical that, at least from one vantage, is about the liberating power of the stage and the role black music traditions have played in shaping American performance spaces.

For decades now, historians and critics have treated the taut first act of Show Boat, where music amplifies the characters and drama, as a harbinger of the so-called “integrated” musical, defined by the mid-century oeuvre of Rodgers and Hammerstein. What is rarely pointed out, however, is that the narrative heart of the act, the miscegenation scene, is a cliché. On the American stage, going back at least as far as Dion Boucicault’s The Quadroons; or Life in Louisiana (1859), generations of heroines have been exposed as black, to the detriment of their lives and those of their white lovers. In the Reconstruction period the “tragic mulatto” was a fixture in novels and plays about the Antebellum South.<sup>103</sup> Julie, for all the sympathy she continues to garner from audiences, is the deft deployment of a long-standing American archetype, a distant, if still strong, echo of the melodrama tradition. It is the New Yorkers posing as Dahomians at the beginning of Act II who are decidedly unusual, marking an important first in American popular theater. The substantial presence of a black chorus in a Ziegfeld show was in itself historical. But what makes this specific scene significant is that it thematizes the limitations imposed on black entertainers in the Midway Plaisance, a space that for whites had stood for the plenitude of imaginary possibilities, where the fluid exploration of gender and race was vouchsafed by fairground fantasy.

As a codicil it is worth noting that after Ziegfeld died in 1932, the performance history of the opening scene of Act II swerved in a new direction, displacing (though not eliminating) the display of Du Boisian “double consciousness” with something more consistent with the intellectual currents of the Harlem Renaissance. In 1945 Hammerstein, in partnership with Richard Rodgers, set about producing a new version of Show Boat, which would premiere the following year. Desirous of incorporating the enhanced role dance played in more recent musicals, Rodgers and Hammerstein hired choreographer Helen Tamaris, who was part of the modern dance milieu that included Agnes de Mille, the choreographer for both Oklahoma! and Carousel. They also recruited Pearl Primus to lead a black dance ensemble, Primus having made a name for herself on the concert stage performing choreography inspired by African traditions. Together, Tamaris and Primus reshaped the first scene of the second act, even while little was altered musically. So integral to the scene was Primus that she was introduced as a new named character, the Dahomey Queen, with her own retinue: Ata, Mala, and Bora. “In Dahomey,” Decker shows, became a spotlight number in which actual African dance was used as a means of exploring and articulating the nature of black identity. He writes, “the 1946 revival marked the beginning of a twenty-year period when Show Boat played a role in the careers of black concert dancers, providing well-paying jobs in the commercial theater that could support even less stable (and less remunerative) work on the concert stage . . .”<sup>104</sup> The prominence of the black dance corps in the revival, as Decker also notes, was something that critics consistently remarked upon with admiration.

One of the most influential figures to emerge in the Harlem milieu of the 1920s was Alain Locke, whose essay “The New Negro” gave conceptual coherence to the energies of uptown Manhattan. Locke believed that the urban black culture emerging in American cities suggested a

new way forward for changing the prejudicial social hierarchies of the United States. Rather than challenging inequality directly (Locke did not preclude this possibility), African Americans would demonstrate excellence and uniqueness in their contributions to the arts and letters, thereby playing a vital role in the emergence of a “new democracy in American culture . . . a new social understanding.”<sup>105</sup> The incorporation of African-inflected choreography in the 1946 revival pushed Show Boat towards the framework developed by Locke. It opened up a window on the heritage of a community that existed because of diaspora--a heritage that offered much to the vital world of American modern dance.

As it turns out Locke’s contributory framework would become passé by the end of the sixties, when the American Left, once unified in the pursuit of civil rights splintered. “In Dahomey” would meet its final fate in this period. The exploration of African culture remained a touchstone for African-Americans, the extensive references to various tribal identities in the original production of The Wiz being an apropos example.<sup>106</sup> However, the spectacles of “African” primitivism that had been the rage during the twenties--Elington’s jungle music in the Cotton Club, or, on the other side of the Atlantic, Josephine Baker’s dancing--had come to be seen as another form of marginalization. Moreover the faux language and threatening mien of the Dahomians in the number have long since been recognized as inexcusably derogatory towards Africans, no matter that they are revealed to be the affectations of African-Americans in a different form of blackface. Few directors of recent Show Boat productions have been willing to navigate the complicated racial politics of the number, and so, for the most part, it has disappeared. That is probably as it ought to be.

<sup>1</sup>My thanks to Patrick McCray, the anonymous referees for American Music who reviewed this article, and the journal's editor Todd Decker, all of whom provided helpful feedback. An earlier version of this article was read at the Society for American Music Annual Conference in 2020.

Katherine Leigh Axtell, "Maiden Voyage: The Genesis and Reception of Show Boat 1926-1932" (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, 2009); Todd Decker, Show Boat: Performing Race in an American Musical (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). Other major studies of Show Boat include Geoffrey Block, "Show Boat: In the Beginning," in Enchanted Evenings: The Broadway Musical from Show Boat to Sondheim and Lloyd Weber, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 19-39; Miles Kreuger, Show Boat: The Story of a Classic American Musical (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); and Scott McMillen, "Paul Robeson, Will Vodery's 'Jubilee Singers', and the Earliest Script of the Kern-Hammerstein Show Boat," Theatre Survey 41, no. 2 (November 2000): 51-70. The concept "thick description" was developed by Clifford Geertz in Interpretations of Culture (1973; reprint, New York: Basic Books, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Robert C. Toll, Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 161-179.

<sup>3</sup> This point is made by both Gertrude M. Scott, "Village Performance: Villages at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition 1893," (Doctoral Diss., New York University, 1991), 17-18 and Burton Benedict, "Rituals of Representation: Ethnic Stereotypes and Colonized Peoples at World's Fairs," in Fair Representations: Worlds Fairs and the Modern World, eds. Robert W. Rydell and Nancy Gwinn, (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 194), 29-30.

<sup>4</sup> A concise exploration of this point can be found in Curtis M. Hinsley, "The World as Marketplace: Commodification of the Exotic at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893" in Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display, eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), 344-365.

<sup>5</sup> Scott stresses the importance of distinguishing between the commercial ventures of the Midway and the educational displays in her dissertation, which provides the most detailed scholarly assessment of the village displays. Scott, "Village Performance," 36.

<sup>6</sup> Sol Bloom, who served as concessionaire for and impresario of the Midway Plaisance, claimed authorship of the tune in his autobiography. Bloom, The Autobiography of Sol Bloom (New York: Putnam, 1948), 135. Possibly, though, the provenance of the tune is Algerian. James J. Fuld, The Book of World-Famous Music: Classical, Popular and Folk, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Dover Books, 1985), 276-277.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 195-213.

<sup>8</sup> Scott, "Village Performance," 171.

<sup>9</sup> Benedict, "Rituals of Representation," 37-39.

<sup>10</sup> Scott, "Village Performance," 389-303.

<sup>11</sup> Benedict, "Rituals of Representation," 50-52.

<sup>12</sup> The Smith-Henderson partnership is extensively documented in John Franceschina, Harry B. Smith: Dean of American Librettists (New York: Routledge, 2003). For a first-hand account of some of the productions, including Sinbad and Ali Baba, see Eddie Foy and Alvin F. Harlow, Clowning Through Life (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1928), 231-244.

<sup>13</sup> As John Ogaspian and N. Lee Orr have noted, commercial theater producers were relatively unconcerned with the niceties of genre boundaries (Music of the Gilded Age [Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2007], 100-103). The terms "extravaganza," "spectacle" and "burlesque" could be used interchangeably in advertisements for the same production. That said, it is possible to discern some general tendencies in contemporary usage, and it is those that I describe throughout this article.

<sup>14</sup> Larry Hamberlin explores the Exposition's legacy of the disguised belly dancer in "Visions of Salome: The Femme Fatale in American Popular Songs before 1920," Journal of the American Musicological Society 59, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 631-696. I discuss the broader tradition of popular song depicting the Midway Plaisance foreigners as charlatans in "Fairground Fantasies: Sheet Music, Dime Novels, and the World's Columbian Exposition" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Musicological Society, New Orleans, LA, November 2013).

<sup>15</sup> For the performance history of Little Christopher Columbus, see Kurt Gänzl, "Little Christopher Columbus," The Encyclopedia of the Musical Theater, vol.2 (New York: Schirmer Books, 1994), 871-872.

<sup>16</sup> For a brief overview of Bonehill and her place in the history of male impersonators, including her stint as little Christopher, see Gillian M. Rodger, Just One of the Boys: Female-to-Male Cross-Dressing on the American Stage (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2018), 148-149.

<sup>17</sup> The London production features only two acts, as evidenced by the published score. George R. Sims, Cecil Raleigh, and Ivan Caryll, Little Christopher Columbus (London: Hopwood & Crew, 1893). Extant American promptbooks feature three acts, the act in Barataria having been added. Promptbooks 1 and 2 for the American production of George R. Sims, Cecil Raleigh, and Ivan Caryll, Little Christopher Columbus, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Tams-Witmark Collection, Box 219A. Gilbert and Sullivan's The Gondoliers; or, The King of Barataria (1889), seems the likely source of the name for the

island kingdom.

<sup>18</sup> Newspaper coverage of Little Christopher singles out two specialties for praise: Vaudevillian John W. Wilson as “Weary Raggles,” a character he had introduced in other productions (“John W. Wilson: The Impersonator of Weary Raggles in ‘Little Christopher’,” The Dayton Herald, April 20, 1895) and “Prof. Macart’s performing dogs and baboons” (“Theatrical Gossip,” The New York Times, December 27, 1894).

<sup>19</sup> Sims et al., “No. 10 Chorus of Foreigners” in Little Christopher, 109-119.

<sup>20</sup> Sims et al., “No. 15 Chorus ‘Turkish and German’” in Ibid., 149-161.

<sup>21</sup> For a subset of this repertoire pertaining to the belly dancers of the Cairo Street exhibition, see Hamberlin, “Visions of Salome”: 645-50.

<sup>22</sup> Promptbook 2 for Little Christopher, 6. There was no “negro plantation” display at the Columbian Exposition. Copies of Uncle Tom’s Cabin were prominently featured as part of the Harriet Beacher Stowe display in the Women’s Building, but a model of the titular place did not appear in either the White City or Midway Plaisance. For more details about Stowe and her novel as depicted at the Exposition, see Barbara Hochman, “Uncle Tom’s Cabin at the World’s Columbian Exposition,” Libraries & Culture 41, no. 1 (Winter, 2006): 82-108.

<sup>23</sup> For the performance history of Henrik Hudson see Kurt Gänzl, William B. Gill from the Goldfields to Broadway (New York: Routledge, 2002), 133-134 and 235-237.

<sup>24</sup> Descriptions of the touring production can be found in numerous local newspapers, for example “Amusements,” Lebanon Daily News, October 1 1895; “Hendrick Hudson,” Harrisburg Daily Independent, October 2, 1895; “Henrik Hudson Opera,” The Wichita Daily Eagle, January 2, 1896.

<sup>25</sup> Dance historian Barbara Barker supplies an overview of the genre in “Imre Kralffy’s Patriotic Spectacles: Columbus, and the Discovery of America (1892-1893) and America (193),” Dance Chronicle 17, no. 2 (1994): 150.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>27</sup> On pageants, see David Glassberg, American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), esp. 9-12.

<sup>28</sup> For the classic account of American Expositions and the way in which they organized the world’s people, see Robert W. Rydell, All the World’s A Fair: Vision of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

<sup>29</sup> Barker, 171-3.

<sup>30</sup> Imre Kiralfy, America: Grand Historical Spectacle, libretto (n.p. 1893), 35.

<sup>31</sup> “Midway Plaisance,” The Boston Sunday Globe, March 25, 1894. Whereas newspaper coverage establishes the presence of the “Hindoo Jugglers” at the Madison Square Gardens recreation, it does not do so for the Boston one. Either the jugglers did not contract with the Bostonians or their act was sufficiently prosaic, amidst the broader spectacle, that reporters did not see fit to comment on it.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> A blog dedicated to the World’s Columbian Exposition features an entry on the Chicago recreation. <https://worldsfairchicago1893.com/2019/11/13/echoes-of-the-white-city-1/>. Accessed August 28, 2020.

<sup>34</sup> “New Years’ Receptions,” The Holton Recorder, January 4, 1894.

<sup>35</sup> “The Midway Plaisance,” The Tennessean, January 19, 1894.

<sup>36</sup> “Midway Plaisance,” The Courier, February 1, 1894.

<sup>37</sup> “Midway Plaisance,” The Lima News, June 16, 1894.

<sup>38</sup> Beverly Gordon, Bazaars and Fair Ladies: The History of the American Fundraising Fair (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998). Gordon’s analysis of fundraising fairs focuses on the issue of gender and the way in which the fairs provided women “a place where, working from their assigned cultural role and using their acknowledged skills, women could effect what they wanted, demonstrate their competence, and operate relatively independently from men” (Ibid., 9). The Midway re-creations seems to involve men as much as they do women, and thus that portion of Gordon’s analysis is less relevant here.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>40</sup> Gordon does not mention a single exhibit of this sort in her book. When I queried her directly, she responded that she had no recollection of discovering cross-dressing scenarios in the course of her research on fund-raising fairs. Email exchange with author, April 16, 2019.

<sup>41</sup> On American consumer culture and orientalism, see William Leach, “Fashion and the Indispensable Thing,” in Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 91-111. For fraternal orders and orientalism, see Oleg Grabar, “Roots and Others,” in Noble Dreams; Wicked Pleasures: Orientalism in America, 1870-1930, ed. Holly Edwards (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 8.

<sup>42</sup> Gordon notes that criticisms of fundraising fair were rooted in the gender politics of the time period. They “relate to the culture’s underlying assumptions or attitudes about women (they are sexual, alluring creatures) and about sensual goods or experiences (they are dangerous, frivolous, and overwhelming), which are in turn associated with them” (Gordon, Bazaars and Fair Ladies, 5).

<sup>43</sup> “Objections Were Raised,” The Watertown News, December 26, 1894.

<sup>44</sup> “Gives Up His Pastorate,” Logansport Daily Reporter, December 15, 1894.

<sup>45</sup> William B. Hale, “Address,” Papers, Addresses, and Discussions at the Sixteenth Church Congress in the United States (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1894), 35-38.

<sup>46</sup> William Bayard Hale, “A Study of Church Entertainments” The Forum 20 (January 1896): 570-577 and “Another Year of Church Entertainments,” The Forum 22 (December 1896): 396-405. Hale’s association with The Forum placed him in an influential milieu that included Woodrow Wilson, whose campaign biography Hale would later write.

<sup>47</sup> Hale, “Another Year of Church Entertainments”: 400.

<sup>48</sup> Hale, “Address,” 37.

<sup>49</sup> The Midway Burlesque Entertainment based on the Famous Midway Plaisance of the World’s Columbian Exposition (Chicago: The Dramatic Publishing Company, 1894). The advertising copy used in connection with the Chicago burlesque is almost identical to that suggested in the manual.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>52</sup> Annemarie Bean, “Transgressing the Gender Divide: The Female Impersonator in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy,” in Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy, eds. Annemarie Bean, James V. Hatch, and Brooks McNamara (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 247, 249.

<sup>53</sup> Toll, Blacking Up, 142.

<sup>54</sup> For an extensive discussion of the pantomime dame, see Roger Baker, “Enter Pursued by Laughter” and “Dames by the Dozen,” in Drag: A History of Female Impersonation in the Performing Arts (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 161-171 and 172-183.

<sup>55</sup> Bean, “Transgressing the Gender Divide,” 247.

<sup>56</sup> Edmund Wilson, “The Theatre,” The Dial 75, no. 2 (August 1923): 205. On Elltinge, see Katherine B. Casey, “‘Making a Woman of Himself’: Julian Elltinge and the Hyperwhite Lady, in The Prettiest Girl on Stage is a Man: Race and Gender Benders in American Vaudeville (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2015), 37-76.

<sup>57</sup> The Boston Sunday Globe reporter describes the appearance of the congress to a boy named Jimmie: “some of them looked so masculine, and showed such muscular limb that it was hard for him to believe they were girls. He was wavering a bit and undoubtedly would have departed to tell his friends of the good-looking women, when he detected one of them chewing tobacco, and another, the Highland lassie, displaying more of a Scottish plaid-stockings that was compatible with maiden modesty.” Jimmie concludes in the end that they are in fact men, “but they make up well.” The accompanying line illustration of the beauties shows the militiamen dressed in stereotypical “international” costumes, but nothing that is suggestive of Savoy-style outrageousness (Figure 5). “In Boston’s Midway,” The Boston Sunday Globe, April 1, 1894.

<sup>58</sup> Rodger, Just One of the Boys, 27. Rodger, who has undertaken the most detailed study of the phenomenon, indicates that male impersonator acts in the late nineteenth century tended not to be comedic, purveying instead sentimental songs about love and courtship, their costumes and demeanor accenting rather than belying their femininity (p. 145).

<sup>59</sup> George Chauncey, who has mapped out the topography of the gay world, provides more nuance: “Although fairies were known as ‘female impersonators,’ transvestism was not central to their self-representation. Relatively few men wore women’s clothes, and, given the laws against transvestism . . . even most men who wished to don woman’s full wardrobe dared to do so only in relatively secure settings, such as a few of the Bowery resorts. But dressing entirely as a woman was hardly necessary to indicate that one was a fairy. In the right context, appropriating even a single feminine--or at least unconventional--style or article of clothing might signify a man’s identity as a fairy” (Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. [New York: Basic Books, 2019], 51).” One of Chauncey’s major arguments is that a permissive working-class culture did not elide gender and sexuality in the way that modern (and middle class) conceptions of homosexuality tend to do.

<sup>60</sup> Clare Sears, Arresting Dress: Cross-Dressing, Law, and Fascination in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2015), 9.

<sup>61</sup> Sears writes, “cross-dressing laws were not an isolated or idiosyncratic act of government but one part of a broader legal matrix that was centrally concerned with the boundaries of sex, race, citizenship, and city space.” *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>62</sup> Casey, “Making a Woman of Himself,” 43-45.

<sup>63</sup> Marjorie Garber, Vested Interests: Cross-dressing & Cultural Anxiety (New York: Routledge, 1992), 17. Her italics.

<sup>64</sup> Casey, “Making a Woman of Himself,” 38.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-2.

<sup>66</sup> The Midway Burlesque Entertainment, 22-23.

<sup>67</sup> As was the case for fund-raising fair advice literature, the 1890s witnessed a proliferation of publications for amateur performers on staging a minstrel shows. See Annemarie Bean, "Black Minstrelsy and Double Inversion, Circa 1890," in African American Performance and Theater History: A Critical Reader, eds. Harry J. Elam Jr. and David Krasner (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001), 171-2. There is, as yet, a comprehensive history to be written about the practices of amateur performers in the late nineteenth century, ranging from minstrel shows and fund-raising fairs to community pageants. The proliferation of guidebooks about such practices is an indication of the extent to which acting was a central pastime for Americans, before the eras of radio and television.

<sup>68</sup> As Toll documents in his seminal study of minstrelsy, however, skits featuring incompetent military units were a part of the genre, and they often played upon the lack of soldierly coordination. Toll, Blackening Up, 119-125; 248-251.

<sup>69</sup> Z. S. Stother, "Display of the Body Hottentot," in Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business, ed. Bernth Lindfors (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 23.

<sup>70</sup> Shane Peacock, "Africa Meets the Great Farini," in Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business, ed. Bernth Lindfors (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 81-106.

<sup>71</sup> David Killingray and Willie Hendrenson, "Bata Kindai Amgoza ibn LoBagola and the Making of An African Savage's Own Story," in Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business, ed. Bernth Lindfors (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 228-265.

<sup>72</sup> George Walker, "The Real 'Coon' on the American Stage," The Theater 6. No. 66 (August, 1906): i.

<sup>73</sup> David Krasner, Resistance, Parody, and Double Consciousness in African American Theatre (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), specifically 29-33 for Bob Cole's performance in whiteface in the show A Trip to Coontown. Also relevant is Karen Sotiropoulos, Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century America (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), specifically 63-74, and Krystyn R. Moon, David Krasner, and Thomas L. Riis, "Forgotten Manuscripts: A Trip to Coontown," African American Review 44, no. 1-2 (Spring/Summer, 2011): 7-24.

<sup>74</sup> Toll, Blackening Up, 228. The point is developed extensively by both Krasner and Sotiropoulos throughout their respective monographs.

<sup>75</sup> Whether black amateurs were afforded the same license in the fund-raising entertainments they staged in their own communities is another question--and one for which the evidence I have surveyed suggests no answer.

<sup>76</sup> Swapping one kind of entertainment--an ethnological show--for another--vaudeville--was simply a matter of course for the producers of burlesque. It does bear mentioning that though they share genetic material, the ethnological show depicted "primitive" and typically rural others, while vaudeville was at heart, city entertainment for city people on city subjects. See, notably, Gunther Barth, "Vaudeville House," in City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth-Century America (Oxford: OUP, 1980), 192-227. Gunther writes, "In the vaudeville house, a distinctly urban form of popular theatrical entertainment drew the residents of the modern city together and gave them a glimpse of themselves" (193).

<sup>77</sup> W. E. B. DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1903), 3.

<sup>78</sup> Shamooin Zamir, Dark Voices: W. E. B. Du Bois and American Thought 1888-1903 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), 116. Krasner's Resistance, Parody, and Double Consciousness in African American Theater, 1895-1910 drew my attention to the specificity of the term and Zamir's scholarship that documents it. See especially Krasner 52-3.

<sup>79</sup> For a detailed account of this milieu, see Karen Sotiropoulos, "Vaudeville Stages and Black Bohemia," in Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century America (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), 42-80. Another pertinent study is Thomas L. Riis, Just before Jazz: Black Musical Theater in New York, 1890-1915 (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989).

<sup>80</sup> For timelines and descriptions of the materials that were a part of In Dahomey at one time or another, see Thomas L. Riis, "In Dahomey in Text and Performance," prefatory essay to The Music and Scripts of In Dahomey, ed. Thomas L. Riis (Madison: A-R Editions, Inc., 1996), xiii-xlvi.

<sup>81</sup> Krasner, Resistance, Parody, and Double-Consciousness, 70. For a similar analysis stressing double consciousness see Marva Griffin Carter, "Removing the 'Minstrel Mask' in the Musicals of Will Marion Cook," The Musical Quarterly 84, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 210-213. Other scholars have also drawn attention to this number with reference to the white gaze directed at black entertainers, including Sotiropoulos, 68.

<sup>82</sup> Historian Susan E. Hirsch suggests that the concert series represents Ziegfeld Sr.'s attempt to realize a prospectus of musical exhibitions he had pitched to Columbian Exposition organizers. They rejected the prospectus, hiring Theodore Thomas instead to serve as music director. As Hirsch argues, Ziegfeld's musical vision was more capacious than that of Thomas. Susan E. Hirsch, "Florenz Ziegfeld and the Creation of a Cosmopolitan Chicago," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 112, no. 3 (Fall 2019): 248.

<sup>83</sup> “Music for Visitors: Immense Temple for the World’s Fair Projected,” The Chicago Tribune, March 27, 1892; “Will Establish a Trocadero,” The Inter Ocean, March 31, 1892.

<sup>84</sup> Linda Mizejewski, Ziegfeld Girl: Image and Icon in Culture and Cinema (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1999), 100.

<sup>85</sup> Hirsch, “Florenz Ziegfeld,” 247.

<sup>86</sup> See, for example, Cynthia Brideson and Sara Brideson, Ziegfeld and His Follies (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 101. The Bridesons cite a DVD as their source, but there the trail goes cold.

<sup>87</sup> Bert Williams, “The Comic Side of Trouble,” American Magazine 85 (January 1918): 61.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>89</sup> Others have speculated about this connection, including Decker, Show Boat, 118.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 106-107. Ziegfeld had purchased the rights to a previous musical by Rogers and Roberts, entitled My Magnolia, in 1926, apparently hoping to forestall any charges of plagiarism given that the protagonist shared the same name with the heroine of Show Boat. Axtell, “Maiden Voyage,” 158.

<sup>91</sup> Axtell argues more broadly that Ziegfeld was central to the creative development of Show Boat, demonstrating that the musical explores “several prominent and deeply-rooted genetic traditions, including operetta, musical comedy, vaudeville, and revue” (11-12) that make it kin of other works that he produced.

<sup>92</sup> Kreuger, Show Boat, 20.

<sup>93</sup> Edna Ferber, Show Boat (New York: Doubleday, Page, and Company, 1926), 272.

<sup>94</sup> A copy of the first edition of Ferber’s novel does survive among Hammerstein’s papers, housed at the Library of Congress, and it may have been used to provide the basic scaffolding for what would become the first libretto. There are annotations throughout the book, with the first introduction of specific characters identified and major events bracketed. The annotations are not Hammerstein’s, however. The archivist who inventoried the collection attributes them to Leighton Brill, who served as Hammerstein’s assistant in the twenties and thirties. The short passage about the Midway Plaisance is bracketed, but unlike the other marked sections, it is further emphasized by the addition of an underscore. In the margins, the annotation “Act 2” has been added. (Library of Congress, Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, Box 129). It is plausible that these markings are the trace of first inspiration. But it is at least as likely that Brill was instructed to seek out references to the Exposition while examining the book, as a result of discussions Hammerstein and Kern had had with Ziegfeld. And the annotations may even date from later, when Brill was integral to the creation of various revisions of Show Boat for stage and screen.

<sup>95</sup> Harold Prince, note prefacing revised libretto, Library of Congress, Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, Box 46, Folder 5.

<sup>96</sup> Decker, Show Boat, 253.

<sup>97</sup> Oscar Hammerstein II, Typescript of libretto for Show Boat, Library of Congress, Music Division, ML 50.K43 S3 1927. Axtell labels this version of the libretto Typescript C.

<sup>98</sup> Kreuger quotes a telegram to Kern, dated March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1927, wherein Ziegfeld proclaimed that the show “has not got a chance except with the critics . . . [Hammerstein having created a] lay-out too serious. Not enough comedy.” Quoted Kreuger, Show Boat, 26. But no one has since been able to locate the telegram.

<sup>99</sup> For a detailed account, see Axtell, “Maiden Voyage,” 221-223.

<sup>100</sup> Decker, Show Boat, 104.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 110 ff.

<sup>102</sup> Axtell, “Maiden Voyage,” 235-241

<sup>103</sup> Literary studies of the subject are numerous. A useful point of entry is Werner Sollors, “‘Never Was Born’: The Mulatto, An American Tragedy?” The Massachusetts Review 27, no. 2 (Summer, 1986): 293-316.

<sup>104</sup> Decker, Show Boat, 175-6.

<sup>105</sup> Alain Locke, “The New Negro” in Alain Locke ed. The New Negro: An Interpretation (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968)

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<sup>106</sup> See, for example, Ryan Bunch’s comments on The Wiz and its Pan-African pageantry in “Oz and the Musical: The American Art Form and the Reinvention of the American Fairy Tale,” Studies in Musical Theatre 9, no. 1 (2015): 61.