

Black Minstrelsy on Canadian Stages: Nostalgia for Plantation Slavery in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

Cheryl Thompson

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Article abstract

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Résumé

Le blackface minstrelsy, qui a vu le jour dans le nord-est des États-Unis dans les années 1820 et 1830, mettait en scène des artistes blancs, principalement des hommes, qui franchissaient les frontières raciales en imitant des Afro-Américains avec la musique, l’humour et la danse prétendument « authentiques », courants dans les plantations du sud. Dans les années 1860, les Afro-Américains nouvellement émancipés se produisaient également sur scène en blackface. À la fin du XIXe siècle, cependant, les acteurs noirs ne se grimaient plus en noir, mais ils devaient toujours perpétuer les stéréotypes de la plantation. Ces troupes étaient dirigées par des directeurs noirs et blancs qui présentaient leurs spectacles comme « authentiques » et « nostalgiques ». Ces éléments du spectacle

de minstrel noir — surtout ses représentations soi-disant « réelles » du Sud des États-Unis et de l'esclavage dans les plantations — ont trouvé un écho auprès du public canadien. Ils constituent donc une autre perspective d'approche — en dehors des politiques d'immigration et Jim Crow de facto — pour expliquer la présence du racisme et de la xénophobie anti-Noirs au Canada à la fin du XIXe siècle et au début du XXe siècle. En examinant le contenu de la minstrelsy noire, le rôle joué par les directeurs dans ses productions et la promotion dans les journaux, cet article soulève des questions sur l'étendue à laquelle les Canadiens ont été historiquement complices du dénigrement des Noirs.

The history of white minstrelsy, which involved White actors applying burnt cork makeup to perform as caricatures of African Americans on stages in theatres and, later, Hollywood films, has been explored from multiple angles.¹ Most notably, scholars have examined the rise of minstrelsy as America's first form of popular entertainment, the social relations of its "racial" production, and the structural and emotional pressures that helped to produce "Blackness" as a cultural commodity.² The history of *black* minstrelsy — African Americans performing on stage in minstrel repertoire, both in and out of blackface — is less explored.³ Compared to white minstrelsy, as Yuval Taylor and Jake Austen have argued, "*black* minstrelsy usually treasured, re-presented, or reinforced, established negative stereotypes of blacks."⁴ Where White minstrels claimed to be pupils, or even kin, of the Black people they mocked, they also passionately made clear that they were White.⁵ This distinction was often made through visual ephemera that mirrored the "before and after" imagery popularized in beauty advertisements of the period. As scholar of African American beauty Noliwe Rooks has observed, "There is no doubt that the 'before' [the body of the African American woman in opposition to the figure of the White woman] drawing represents the least desirable of the two figures."⁶ White minstrel lithographs would often feature the White body (out of blackface) juxtaposed with the White body (in blackface) to make clear that they were giving a *performance* of Blackness. *Black* minstrel shows, however, were promoted by their management without any distinction between performer and performance and were thus sold to White audiences as "authentic representations of black life."⁷

William Henry Lane (1825–1852/1853), also known as Master Juba, was the first Black actor to perform in blackface.⁸ Lane is not only remembered as the first Black minstrel and originator of African

American dance, but he is also considered “the Jackie Robinson of the American stage.”⁹ Before him, there were few — if any — African Americans appearing as performers in a White troupe before White theatre-goers.¹⁰ After Lane, the first all-Black minstrel troupe organized at the conclusion of the US Civil War in 1865 was managed by an African American, Charles Barney Hicks (1840–1902), who is commonly viewed as the father of *black* minstrelsy.¹¹ In 1865, he managed a troupe called the *Original Georgia Minstrels*, billed as “The Only Simon Pure Negro Troupe in the World.” It was so popular that it reportedly outdrew all other minstrel troupes, *black* or white, in 1866.¹² Thereafter, with few exceptions, *black* minstrel troupes were distinguished from white minstrels by one of three designations: “Georgia,” “Coloured,” or “Slave” (“Negro” was used for whites in blackface).¹³ The first *black* minstrel troupes stressed their authenticity as “genuine Negro slaves and concentrated on Southern plantation material” because many of them were formerly enslaved.¹⁴ Other troupes, such as *Georgia Slave Troupe Minstrels*, originally of Macon, Georgia, were organized by W. H. Lee, a White man who toured the troupe during the 1865/66 season, although eventually they came under the management and proprietorship of Sam Hague (1828–1901), a White minstrel performer who changed the troupe’s name to *Sam Hague’s Slave Troupe of Georgia Minstrels*.¹⁵ In 1866, Hague took his troupe to England, where he settled permanently.¹⁶ Beginning in the early 1870s, White managers increasingly took over the most successful *black* troupes, benefiting mostly from the successful 1866 tour of *Sam Hague’s Slave Troupe* in England that helped *Black* minstrels establish themselves as “bona fide entertainers back home.”¹⁷

Once African Americans became marketable as entertainers, “It was generally white managers who reaped the profits. Thus when white tavern owner Charles Callender took over Sam Hague’s troupe in 1872 and began turning *black* minstrelsy into big business through extensive newspaper advertising and [P. T.] Barnum-style sales promotion,” it launched a new era in *black* minstrelsy when White managers, who jostled for control of the industry, could be replaced if their efforts were not financially successful.¹⁸ In 1878, following poor attendances, Callender was replaced by Jack “J. H.” Haverly (1837–1901), who promoted his *black* minstrel company by increasing the troupe’s size, adding new features, advertising flamboyantly, and completely focusing his shows on the southern plantation.¹⁹ Haverly’s *Colored Minstrels*, followed by his white *Mastodon Minstrels*, reached success in Britain

and Canada in large part because of three African Americans: principal comedian Billy Kersands (1842–1915); songwriter James Bland (1854–1911); and Horace Weston (1825–1890), a musician, dancer and actor who had toured Britain several times before joining Haverly's troupes.²⁰ Ultimately, by the late nineteenth through early twentieth centuries, white and *black* minstrels accessed the popular entertainment stage, performing race — and gender — for the amusement and nostalgia of their audiences, which comprised both men and women, Black, White, and recently arrived immigrants primarily from Western Europe.²¹ However, in the 1890s, a large number of all-Black minstrels hit the stage without blackface, a practice that underlined their authenticity as “real Negroes” and which was the major bases of their appeal to White audiences.²²

Between the 1850s and the 1920s, *black* minstrelsy was underpinned by different sets of assumptions about Blackness that appealed to White Canadian audiences. After decades of white minstrelsy, they had been primed to interpret Black performance on stage as “authentic” and “real” representations of Black life. This representational Blackness was driven by nostalgia for plantation slavery, the believed-to-be rightful place for Black people, which had become the panoramic image of Blackness circulating not only in the theatre but also in visual culture. For example, when white minstrelsy appeared at the legitimate theatre, shows often recreated “Dixie,” a real and imagined symbol of culture, leisure, and pastoral romance for Whites who romanticized about having loyal southern Black servants, such as Aunt Jemima, and who through amateur minstrel show performances conceptualized the plantation South as a fictive place of longing for Black people.²³ As entrepreneurial practice, Canadian editors courted readers and businesses with these shows, and while the newspapers sometimes perpetuated the myth that the United States exclusively was home to anti-Black racism and violence, since no complaints were ever reprinted in response to the racist prose detailed in editorials about minstrelsy performance, it is reasonable to infer that such performances were widely accepted.²⁴ *Black* minstrelsy's claims of authenticity, like most of such claims, were superficial as *black* minstrelsy's supposed “realness” was at its core a pretense just like white minstrelsy. As such, this article elucidates what constituted “authentic” Blackness in *black* minstrelsy, why and how this representational Blackness constituted a form of nostalgia that appealed to White Canadians' desires to experience plantation slavery.

Scholarship on blackface in Canada has focused on three major areas of white minstrelsy: First, touring American minstrelsy, home-grown minstrelsy, and the role newspapers played in reporting on and promoting local blackface entertainment; second, touring *Uncle Tom's Cabin* minstrel shows in Ontario in the 1850s and 1860s and the Black community's overtures to stop the appearance of blackface acts in Toronto; and third, the promotion of amateur blackface by White Canadians performed in communities across the country.²⁵ While there is no known Canadian *black* minstrel troupe, African Americans in and out of blackface performed on stages in Canada with great regularity between the 1880s and 1920s.²⁶ Through an analysis of the discourse on *black* minstrelsy, and its best-known managers — Charles Hicks, Sam Hague, Charles Callender, J.H. Haverly — I use editorials, advertisements, and other textual records from newspapers to fill a gap in the literature on minstrelsy in Canada.²⁷ White minstrelsy's adoption in Canada was underpinned by *Negrophobia* (a fear of Black people), on the one hand, and *Negrophilia* (a love of Black culture), on the other hand. A discourse of authenticity that disseminated via newspaper editorials helped to legitimize *black* minstrelsy by framing Black performers as “real” representatives of southern plantations, and, discursively, positioning their performances as ethnographic explorations into the supposed scenes from formerly enslaved Black people. By situating Black bodies as “in place” in servitude and “out of place” in freedom, *black* minstrelsy reinforced the notion of “the primitive” as being representative of an authentic Blackness. This representational Blackness became both a site of White desire and disdain.

America's Blackface Origins and Its Canadian Adoption

On 28 December 1916, an amateur blackface minstrel troupe known as *McCormick Minstrels* posed for a photograph in the basement of the McCormick Recreation Centre in Brockton Village in Toronto.²⁸ In the photograph, 23 boys and men in blackface are seated on a stage. Of the blackface performers, four hold tambourines, but all wear large, oversized bow ties; the men wear suits, the boys wear shorts. In the front row, middle, sits a lone performer not in blackface like the band (pianist, fiddle player, conductor, drummer, and two standing men) positioned off the stage.²⁹ Above them hang two Red Ensigns and the Union Jack flag.³⁰ As part of a larger discussion about children's performance of race through dramatics in early twentieth-century

Toronto, Ann F. Murnaghan has stated that “These boys were part of ... a Christmas pageant and their performance was probably a few songs accompanied by music.”³¹ Murnaghan has written further that “The creation of a playground identity in this west-end center was organized around homosocial activities like sports, and the minstrel show reinforced racial identities alongside gendered ones. The racialized (White) masculine identity was premised on its differentiation from a feminized (Black) Other.”³² Blackface, in other words, was a familiar comfort to White Canadians by the 1920s, and its latent racist intent and disparaging embodiments were steeped in a racial logic that was similar to but different from its White American creators.

Eric Lott has centred the development of American blackface among working-class White men who, in response to demographic shifts in the northern American class structure in the 1820s and 1830s, urged the need for a discrete sphere of what he has called “working-class sociability.”³³ Meaning, just as an urban culture industry was beginning to emerge, Lott has argued, the popular theatre, the saloon, the museum, and the penny press prominently displayed “the ambiguities that resulted from the grounding of much racial discourse in working-class culture.... In minstrel acts and other forms of ‘black’ representation, racial imagery was typically used to soothe class fears through the derision of black people, but it also often became a kind of metonym for class.”³⁴ On the contrary, White Canadians reproduced the tenets of the American minstrel show not to soothe class fears but in response to fears of Black immigration and perceptions about their supposed lack of ability to assimilate into Canadian culture. The wearing of blackface onstage was, as Annemarie Bean has explained, the wink to the audience “based in the mutual understanding that we (the performers) are different from you (the audience) but only because we (the performers) are putting on a show, an act, a minstrel show in blackface.”³⁵ “This knowledge — that everyone is ‘shady,’ but no one is truly ‘black’ — is an important distinction in deriving pleasure for the white audience and white performers,” Bean has written further.³⁶ The need to distinguish between White audiences and performers and Black people is best explained by examining the wider context of early-twentieth-century Canada.

Five months before the *McCormick Minstrels* photograph was taken, on 5 July, the No. 2 Construction Battalion, the first and only Black Battalion in Canadian military history was authorized to serve in the First World War.³⁷ The unit was segregated, as Melissa Shaw

has written, because, “Black Canadians were deemed unfit for combat because of dominant racial stereotypes that assumed that they, as a racial group, were lazy and lacked initiative and were thus only suitable for unskilled duties.”³⁸ A group of White men and boys in blackface in 1916 must be read in relation to the pervasive anti-Blackness that dehumanized Black men and boys who sought to enlist in the Canadian Expeditionary Forces (CEF). “White Canadians participated in the Western ideology of racism,” James W. St. G. Walker has observed. “This was true not only in the general sense of accepting white superiority, but in the particular image assigned to certain peoples which labelled them as militarily incompetent.”³⁹ Blackface had been an important part of Canada’s military culture since the nineteenth century.

In 1879, near Battleford, Saskatchewan, one of the first cultural events to take place at the barracks of the Northwest Mounted Police was a blackface minstrel show, which included such songs as Stephen Foster’s (1826–1864) “Massa in de Cold.”⁴⁰ It was first performed by *Christy’s Minstrels*, an early minstrel troupe created by Edwin P. Christy (1815–1862), the son of “respectable” Philadelphia parents, who is often credited as one of the originators of blackface theatre.⁴¹ Published in 1852, a few days after Foster’s twenty-sixth birthday, in its first four and a half years the song earned Foster nearly \$1,000 in royalties, which represented a sale of more than 45,000 copies.⁴² While the exact numbers for sheet music sales in Canada are unknown, the music was frequently advertised in Canadian newspapers. For example, a minstrel song book printed by Oliver Ditson & Company appeared in Toronto’s *The Globe* in 1882 stating the following: “Minstrel Songs. Old and New . . . 100 popular Ballads and Plantation Songs with piano accompaniment.”⁴³ In addition to American sheet music, touring minstrel shows had toured Canada since the mid-nineteenth century.

In Canada West (present-day southwestern Ontario) touring *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* productions, known as “Tom Shows,” attracted a large segment of the population starting in the mid-nineteenth century that otherwise would have never exposed themselves to the theatre, and, in the words of Stephen Johnson, “it is safe to say that most citizens of Canada West were exposed to this performance phenomenon.”⁴⁴ Despite the fact that Toronto’s Black community petitioned city council annually from 1840 until 1843 to prohibit touring minstrel shows, blackface minstrelsy continued to draw large audiences to theatres in the city. By 1851, more than half a dozen prominent troupes visited

Toronto, including minstrel performances of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.⁴⁵ In their examination of minstrel shows in Niagara Falls, Ontario from the early-twentieth century to the 1960s, Joan Nicks and Jeannette Sloniowski have found that by the 1920s blackface amateur shows were nurtured in the city “as if a homegrown form and that the shows functioned as a carnivalesque outlet for the expression of local ambivalence about racial and class issues in an era of increased immigration and economic stress in the community.”⁴⁶ Where touring professional minstrels appeared at movie theatres in the early twentieth century, amateur blackface in Niagara Falls was enjoyed on a community level at local churches and service clubs as charity events.⁴⁷ Across the country, professional minstrelsy in the legitimate theatre and amateur minstrelsy at community venues was commonplace for over a century.⁴⁸

As David Roediger has asserted, minstrelsy was a complicated genre: “Blackface could be everything — rowdy, rebellious and respectable — because it could be denied that it was anything.”⁴⁹ This denial fuelled White Canadians’ enthusiasm for it. In many ways, White Canadians enjoyed a double distancing from the subject matter. Like White Americans, they were distanced from full identification with African Americans, and, at the same time, they were distanced from the racial, gendered, and class politics that defined the American consciousness in the nineteenth century. Blackface minstrelsy represented both a recognition of Black life and its disavowal at the same time. This contradiction underpins the Canadian consciousness in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Sarah-Jane Mathieu has explained, many White Canadians viewed Black presence as a threat to their modernity. As a result, alarmed “white Canadians increasingly turned to American southerners for clear clues on how to handle blacks, adopting and adapting Jim Crow to fit into Canada’s own political archetype.”⁵⁰ For example, Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier’s administration led by Immigration Minister Frank Oliver proclaimed that Black migrants should be barred from the dominion as “the Negro race ... is deemed unsuitable to the climate and requirements of Canada.”⁵¹ “Yet white Canadians constantly discussed that ‘Negro Problem’ as though it were a virus carried north by black migrants themselves,” Mathieu has asserted, adding “They rationalized their xenophobia and white supremacist propaganda by blaming nature — what they called ‘climatic unsuitability’ — and black settlers themselves.”⁵² They did not, in other words, interrogate their own anti-Blackness, but rather blamed Black people for their

supposed inability to adapt, an adaptability that they, paradoxically, enjoyed viewing on stage.

This cognitive dissonance between self-identification and self-reflection helped to nurture White Canadian purveyors of minstrelsy. Quebec City-born artist Henri Julien (1852–1908) produced a serial in the *Montreal Daily Star* between January and April 1899 in which he depicted Sir Wilfred Laurier, the first French-Canadian Prime Minister, and his cabinet in blackface, singing minstrel songs.⁵³ Titled *Songs of the By-Town Coons*, Julien adopted codes of denigration associated with Blackness in dominant Western culture, such as “the black/white conflict [that was] implicitly reconfigured as both French/English and Liberal/Conservative conflicts,” as Dominic Hardy has suggested.⁵⁴ For some, Julien’s reproduction of scenes from the minstrel show was not to denigrate Black people, but to demonstrate the extent to which French politicians were not being respected by their English counterparts. In this sense, “The institution of parliament [was] seen, under the governance of a francophone-led Liberal government, as little more than [sic] the production of a minstrel troupe, as a parody of true (English-speaking, British-Canadian, Conservative) governance.”⁵⁵ The problem with this argument is that it denies the denigration of the Black body and the exploitative ways it was used by Julien to serve his own purposes. If a caricatured Black body was an insult to French Canadians, to borrow from Homi Bhabha, it was also both a recognition of difference and its disavowal.⁵⁶

Canadian blackface performers such as Calixa Lavallée (1842–1891) have also been framed as existing outside a persistent homegrown racism because they found success in America as white minstrels.⁵⁷ According to Brian Christopher Thompson, “most biographical articles published in the 1880s repeated the same stories about [Lavallée’s] life and career. They never refer to his life as a ‘blackface’ minstrel or to any events of the 1860s, with the exception of his service in the war.”⁵⁸ His ability to don the burnt cork mask meant that he condoned its racist intent similar to other homegrown white minstrels like Toronto-born Colin Burgess (1840–1905), one of the most successful Canadian-born minstrel performers of the nineteenth century, who toured with a succession of American minstrel companies, in addition to entertaining audiences in Canada and Britain during the 1870s through the 1890s.⁵⁹ These White Canadians (francophone and anglophone) were able to *become* white minstrels in America because they understood the racist intent of the shows, they

agreed with it, and, as such, must be read similarly to White American minstrel performers.

Climate unsuitability might have been one way to explain Canadian xenophobia and White supremacist propaganda, but performance was also an outlet for *negrophobia*, which at its core had the same intent as *negrophilia*.⁶⁰ *Negrophilia*, from the French *nérophilie*, signifies a love for Black culture. *Negrophobia*, on the other hand, is characterized by a fear, hatred, or extreme aversion to Black people. Petrine Archer Straw has asserted that while *negrophilia* was used positively by the Parisian avant-garde in the 1920s to affirm their defiant love of Black culture, the word's origins were not flattering: "To be called a 'negrophile' ... was to be dammed as a supporter of liberal attitudes towards slavery and its abolition. Even more negatively, negrophiles were sometimes accused of having a deviant sexual appetite for blacks, thereby placing them outside 'civilized' society's moral boundaries."⁶¹ Similarly, H. Alexander Welcome has observed that "making black males the sole reservoir of non-normative sexual drives means that, in the eyes of the Negrophobe, the black male is the pinnacle of virility. However, the Negrophobe can maintain both his sense of innocence and his sense of being the zenith of virility by adjusting mythical blackness' position in his existential world."⁶² Stated otherwise, to the negrophobe, Black men represented the embodiment of sin; "in the Negrophobe's world, innocence is the only possibility for whiteness, and sin is the only possibility for blackness."⁶³ White Canadians found pleasure in the performance of *black* minstrelsy because at the same time they viewed Black people as immoral and sinful, they desired to live vicariously through their supposed lack of civility. White managers of *black* minstrelsy exploited this desire when they took over all-Black companies in the late-nineteenth century.

White and Black Managers of *Black* Minstrelsy

How did minstrelsy's managers approach managing all-Black companies? Hicks, who was born in Baltimore, Maryland, is the only known African American manager of *black* minstrel troupes. He began touring all-Black companies in the northeast and west in 1865, and by 1870, he, and some of his Black members, joined with Hague's *Great American Slave Troupe* (formerly Lee's *Georgia Slave Troupe Minstrels*) for a tour of the British Isles.⁶⁴ Hicks eventually sold his company to Callender in 1872 but he continued to work as its manager from 1877 to 1880,

when he toured Australia with a new troupe, which was also called the *Georgia Minstrels*.⁶⁵ Hague's *Slave Troupe of Georgia Minstrels* also toured Britain with a view to "ride the wave of interest in the slavery of the Deep South that had been regenerated by the Civil War."⁶⁶ Unlike Hicks, Hague sought to exploit Black entertainers to earn as much as he could from minstrelsy's audiences who grew tired of acts just as quickly as they celebrated them. He is credited with introducing "a new business acumen, at times stepping over into ruthless capitalist practices, as for instance when he appropriated the management of the Wilmington Jubilee singers, who came to Britain in 1876."⁶⁷ Michael Pickering has observed further that "Hague disposed of their black manager, leaving him 'destitute in a foreign land', and unscrupulously stole the Fisk Jubilee Singers' programme, performance aesthetics, even their style of publicity, such that one of their members referred to him in a letter as 'a very unprincipled man'."⁶⁸

A press announcement in 1872 stated that Callender bought out the interest of his former partner, William Temple, and was now the sole proprietor of the *Georgia Minstrels*.⁶⁹ Callender's *Georgia Minstrels* brought a lot of changes to *black* minstrelsy. By the 1873/74 season, he greatly increased the size of his troupe from around a dozen to twenty-two.⁷⁰ For the next few years, Callender's *Georgia Minstrels* evolved into a troupe that became the best known across North America, as well, Callender garnered a reputation — by both White and Black contemporaries — for "recruiting the most talented Black artists he could find to perform with the Minstrels."⁷¹ But like Hague, he was not respectful to his Black performers. One man who had worked with Hague in England in the early 1870s was reportedly disgusted with Callender's "economic exploitation of black performers."⁷² In 1878, Haverly became the proprietor of Callender's *Georgia Minstrels*, and Callender was retained as manager.⁷³ A big-time promoter, Haverly used his promotional skills to advance his newly acquired *black* troupe in the same way he did his white troupes.

White managers' interest in Black entertainers did not derive from their desire to liberate the race. Rather, "They, in all likelihood, were building upon the popularity of the slave dramas of the earlier part of the century, such as *Darling Nelly Gray* (1856), William Wells Brown's *Escape; or, A Leap to Freedom* (1858), and the many versions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* being performed simultaneously throughout ... the 1850s," as Bean has argued.⁷⁴ Of all the White managers, it was Hague "who began a new vogue for large troupes of up to 60

performers, and for extravagant display that moved minstrelsy away from ‘negro delineation’ towards the variety entertainment that would eventually supersede both minstrelsy and music hall.”⁷⁵ By the time *black* minstrelsy hit Toronto’s stages, large extravaganzas were the talk of the town; and like in Britain and elsewhere, newspaper coverage sheds light on the content of the productions that for the most part was centred on *black* minstrels’ imitation of life on the plantation.⁷⁶ In 1920s Paris, the White avant-garde’s “participation in black culture meant rejuvenation and liberation from the trappings of bourgeois values. But it was the ‘idea’ of black culture and not black culture itself that informed this modernity.”⁷⁷ Similarly, the newspaper discourse on *black* minstrelsy tells us how White Canadian audiences indulged in reproduced Black culture through performance, it does not necessarily reveal what, if any, these audiences knew about Black people themselves.

Black Minstrelsy’s Imitated Authenticity and Canadian Nostalgia

On 13 December 1882, an advertisement in Toronto’s *The Globe* announced that Hague’s *British Operatic Minstrels* would appear at the Grand Opera House, one of the city’s legitimate theatres.⁷⁸ By the time Hague’s troupe performed at the Grand, it was managed by Oliver Barton Sheppard (1848–1928), who had insight into how the international touring and booking syndicates brought plays and blackface acts to theatres across North America.⁷⁹ At the same time that Hague’s group attracted public attention, other groups calling themselves *Georgia Minstrels* toured in the east, one of them under the management of Hicks, whose *Georgia Minstrels* had come off a yearlong tour of the American West Coast that included Oregon, California, British Columbia, and fourteen weeks in San Francisco.⁸⁰ In February 1883, *The Globe* reported that Callender’s *Georgia Minstrels* would hold a brief engagement at the Grand Opera House. “The members are genuine coloured men, and there is no use for burnt cork amongst them,” the newspaper explained.⁸¹ In May the following year, the Grand Opera House featured “The Callender Minstrel Festival” after a “triumph in all the largest cities.”⁸² In addition to a festival of artists, one of the headline acts, Billy Kersands (1842–1915), is described as “the greatest comedian living, in his original specialties.”⁸³ Kersands started performing with Callender’s *Georgia Minstrels* in the 1870s, singing such songs as “Old Aunt Jemima” and “Mary’s Gone with a

Coon.” He became renowned for his slow-witted, big-mouthed, *black* caricature.⁸⁴ In 1894, Hick’s *Original Georgia Minstrels*, featuring thirty artists, appeared at the Grand Opera House in Hamilton.⁸⁵ As late as 1910, another iteration of the *Georgia Minstrels* appeared in Toronto. This time, James McIntyre (1857–1937) and Thomas Heath (1853–1938), two White American men performing as the duo “McIntyre and Heath” brought the blackface show to Shea’s Theatre. McIntyre and Heath developed a blackface act in which McIntyre played “Alexander Hambletonian,” a buffoonish stable boy, while Heath acted as “Henry Jones,” a *black* entertainer who frequently outwitted Alexander. Their *Georgia Minstrels* was a skit in which “Henry” persuaded “Alexander” to quit working as a stable-boy to join a travelling show where he is promised fame and fortune.

These editorials about *black* minstrelsy’s appearance in Canada must be understood through the lens of authenticity and nostalgia, two complex and often contradictory concepts. As Nowatzki has explained,

On the one hand, minstrelsy’s racial performance was based on concepts of authenticity, and white minstrels often advertised themselves as ‘authentic’ or ‘genuine.’ . . . However, as minstrelsy grew, most American audiences realized that the ‘black’ bodies on the stage were usually blacked-up whites performing ‘blackness,’ ‘and there was often a tongue-in-cheek quality to the performers’ claims of authenticity.⁸⁶

Stated otherwise, White minstrel performers were imposters; and they knew it. That was part of the entertainment of white minstrelsy. How could the White actor approximate Black dance and musical styles such that it appeared to be just as “genuine” as the real thing? Initially, *black* minstrels performed as if they were white minstrels *performing* Blackness; but over time, as Black actors like Kersands became famous, *black* minstrelsy developed its own authentic forms of dance and song that was distinct from white minstrelsy. When Kersands rose to fame, for instance, he played heavily caricatured roles that emphasized Black men’s supposedly large lips and mouth. While White minstrels had made themselves up to appear to have huge mouths before this, Kersands made his own unusually large mouth, often out of blackface, one of the central features of his act, and eventually a core tenet of *black* minstrels in general, so audiences knew they were going to see “the real thing,” not White imitators *performing* the real thing.⁸⁷

As its popularity grew, *The Globe* began to describe *black* minstrelsy as “the Black Boom.” One piece described Haverly’s *Coloured Minstrels*’s opening act on 19 May 1881 as “a very striking *coup d’œil*, the curtain been rolled up on a beautiful set scene with a southern river in the background, and the entire company grouped upon the stage singing the Suwanee River.”⁸⁸ By this time, Black troupes were performing in a genre that had crystallized into a set format and had become highly commodified. White managers increasingly demanded that Black minstrels act out racial caricatures, preventing them from introducing significant changes to its format and tone.⁸⁹ When Black performers removed the burnt cork, however, their performative Blackness was interpreted as more real than white minstrelsy, which in comparison, was viewed as counterfeit, though still entertaining to audiences especially if the white troupe’s approximation of Blackness was deemed “genuine.” Of the *black* minstrel shows that graced the stage in the 1890s, Alfred Griffin Hatfield (1848 or 1850–1921) often billed as Al G. Field, or Al G. Fields, manager of *Darkest America*, would oversee the first show to feature many of the major Black entertainers at one time.

Darkest America premiered in 1894. Together with 1895’s *Black America*, it was billed as the most “authentic” minstrel show in history and marked a fundamental change in *black* minstrelsy’s direction.⁹⁰ As Taylor and Austen have explained, “*Darkest America* was a minstrel show. The performers, even though they were Black, wore blackface ... mainstream newspapers went out of their way to emphasize the differences between *Darkest America* and white minstrel shows ... because they were Black, these performers were truer to real life than were white minstrel shows.”⁹¹ *Darkest America* was also one of the first shows to centre plantation life. By 1897, the show’s scenes included a cotton field with a fully operating cotton gin, a Louisiana sugar plantation like the one made infamous by *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the levee at New Orleans, a panorama of the Mississippi showing the famous 1870 race between the *Natchez* and the *Robert E. Lee*, the interior of the South Carolina State House during the 1876 Hayes-Tilden election dispute, a gambling scene, a camp meeting, Jacksonville on the night of the 1894 Corbett-Mitchell prize fight, and a black ballroom scene in Washington.⁹² That same year, Fields brought *Darkest America* to Hamilton and London, and then onto Toronto. On 7 April 1896, a London Grand Opera House playbill celebrated the elaborate staging of *Darkest America*. The first page of the playbill read “Al. G. Field’s

Big, Black Boom, *Darkest America*, under the management of Will A. Junker. 40 – Real Southern Negros — 40 Home life in the South. Pictures of Dixie Land. Plantation Pastimes. Dances of the South.”⁹³ On 11 April 1896, the show appeared at Hamilton’s Grand Opera House and by the time it arrived in Toronto, there was plenty to be said in *The Globe* about its content.

“Advance Manager Irons of the ‘Darkest America’ company is in the city, making arrangements for the coming of the colored swells next week,” read *The Globe* on 4 May 1896.⁹⁴ “The organization is claimed to be the largest all-colored minstrel company travelling,” the newspaper added. Two days later, the newspaper alerted readers that “Al. G. Field’s big colored minstrel company, ‘Darkest America,’ will be next week’s attraction at the Toronto Opera House. Mr. Field, with his usual good judgment, has not only selected first-class talent, but has also introduced into his entertainment a great variety of material of a novel and original character.”⁹⁵ On 8 May, *The Globe*’s editorial promoted another week’s engagement of *Darkest America*. “The southern States of America and the dusky denizens thereof have a peculiar interest and fascination to those who have never lived or travelled extensively through the south.” It went on to add, “The negroes of the south are an interesting race. Their habits, customs, home-life are but little known outside of the section where they dwell. As natural musicians they are not excelled by any people on earth. There is a charm to the negro southern melodies that has made them popular the world over.”⁹⁶ *Darkest America* is described further as “music, singing and dancing and the representation of home life in the south as it actually exists in the cities and on the plantation.” Why was the plantation-themed minstrel performance of *Darkest America* so appealing to Canadian audiences at the end of the nineteenth century?

By the turn of the twentieth century, part of the reason why White Canadians were so drawn to the southern plantation was because there were multiple industries recreating nostalgic sojourns back to “simpler times” and the pre-industrial South was the dominant aesthetic that captured this desire for a long lost way of life, especially in the North where industrialization, urbanization, and immigration had sped up the pace of daily life and the demands on individuals living in cities.⁹⁷ In the aftermath of the Civil War, a vast pedagogical industry worked ceaselessly to oblige young Americans to remember/forget the war as a great “civil” war between “brothers” rather than between — as they were briefly — two sovereign nation states (the North and the

South).⁹⁸ The South was reinvented as a place of pastoral leisure, happy Black slaves, and “southern hospitality” via advertising, the theatre, and eventually film. At the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, for example, audiences (some of whom were Canadian) became increasingly nostalgic for the antebellum South. Most notably, during the Exposition, Nancy Green made her debut as Aunt Jemima, a slave appearing in a booth designed to look like a giant flour barrel where she greeted guests and cooked pancakes all while singing and telling stories of her life on the plantation. Canadians consumed American culture, including its exportation of commodified nostalgia for a past where African Americans were not only stuck on the plantation but were happy there.

For Black performers during this time, as David Krasner writes, “the real was commodified in order to lead the challenge against minstrel theater.”⁹⁹ Stated otherwise, given the few economic opportunities for African Americans, they sold one of the few commodities available to them — their “primitive realness.” This performative authenticity was not just unique to *black* minstrelsy, it was as Taylor and Austen write, a fundamental element of American entertainment, which “has always had a desire to ‘keep it real,’ and the black minstrel show was necessarily more real than the white minstrel show could be.”¹⁰⁰ Entertainment and advertising delivered a hyperreal Blackness by tapping into the domain of White desires.¹⁰¹ Whites could feel good after seeing *black* minstrelsy because “it confirmed and reinforced White ideas about the inferior nature of blacks and the merits of continuing their degradation by staging elaborate plantation fantasies in which Blacks were happy and foolish, while the Whites, by implication at least, were benevolent and protective.”¹⁰²

By the 1920s, the prevailing mood was a desire to return to what American President Warren Harding called the “normalcy” of the good old days.¹⁰³ Theatrical productions of slavery played a pivotal role in engendering this desire for the past. In 1925, for example, when African Americans Eubie Blake and Nobel Sissle brought *Plantation Days* to Hamilton and Toronto, an ensemble photograph on 28 April appeared alongside the caption, “‘Plantation Days,’ the big all-colored revue which is featured at the Pantages theater this week.”¹⁰⁴ Three days prior, an advertisement declared it the “fastest show in Canada,” adding “Brand New 1925 Edition of the Greatest All-Coloured Revue Ever Produced for the American Stage.”¹⁰⁵ Canada had, since the nineteenth century, propagated a mythology about its White citizens as

benevolent and protective through the narrative of the “Underground Railroad” and the North as a safe haven for enslaved African Americans. This mythology drew White Canadians to *black* minstrelsy’s plantation-themed shows because they could reminisce about slavery while denying their own latent anti-Black racism.

Conclusion

Black minstrelsy complicates how we think about minstrelsy and its lasting impact on performance history. Like white minstrelsy, *black* minstrelsy was also a “love and theft” of Black cultural forms, to borrow from Eric Lott. It was mimetic, as Krasner has asserted, in that “Not all black performers opposed what was then the status quo; in fact, the use of the blackface mask by black performers perpetuated the accepted stereotype.... The new ‘realism’ at the turn of the century was paradoxical in its appeal to both what was real and what was not.”¹⁰⁶ Stated otherwise, while Black performers had to don the burnt cork mask of minstrelsy and perpetuate stereotypes that White people had come to expect from blackface, these performers also innovated dance, theatrical performance, and comedy in ways that subverted some of the stereotypes. For example, Bahamian-born headliner Bert Williams (1874–1922) performed from behind the burnt cork mask even as African Americans found more opportunities in mass entertainment in the 1920s, but he was heralded as a performer who could carry on in the Kersands-like minstrel tradition of “playing the coon” while also dancing the high-kicking, strutting cakewalk, a distinctly African American dance.¹⁰⁷

The production of Black culture in minstrelsy helped to facilitate White people’s regression into the primitive within.¹⁰⁸ Meaning, the authenticity of Black culture did not matter to White audiences. What mattered was their ability to experience Black life as real, and in turn, this realness enabled them to sojourn into transgressive, nonconformist, and subversive behaviours that would not have been condoned in the dominant culture. *Black* minstrelsy, and by extension, Black entertainers’ seemingly display of reckless abandon appealed to Whites’ (Canadians, Americans, and Britons) desire to depart from Protestant Anglo-Saxon ideals of “self-control, self-discipline, and hard work.”¹⁰⁹ In other words, Blackness was exploited as a fleeting sojourn from the ordinariness of White life. As *black* minstrelsy faded in the twentieth century, replaced by vaudeville and, later, film, White Canadians

celebrated their newfound status as an Anglo-Saxon modern nation-state by putting on their own amateur minstrel shows. As part of the Anglo-Saxon defence of the nation's cultural heritage, Whites put on amateur minstrel shows and created social glue for local groups-service clubs, youth and church groups, Protestant and Catholic, while excluding non-Whites.¹¹⁰

Ultimately, blackface gave Canadians — including ethnic Whites such as Jews, who, in the 1920s, also began to don the burnt cork mask of minstrelsy — an outlet to reassert their dominance over Black people, who by the first decades of the twentieth century, were immigrating to the country in significance numbers.¹¹¹ As E. Patrick Johnson writes, “When white Americans essentialize blackness, for example, they often do so in ways that maintain ‘whiteness’ as the master trope of purity, supremacy, and entitlement, as a ubiquitous, fixed, unifying signifier that seems invisible.”¹¹² *Black* minstrelsy's performative Blackness gave Whites an outlet to exert their power over Black people at the same time their fleshly investment in the Black body engendered an inauthentic Blackness that was made real with each performance. White audiences did not care about Black culture and Black life. What they desired was to live vicariously through a performative *blackness* that both made them feel superior to, and paradoxically envious of, the freedom that was on display through the performances. The theatre, then, must be located as a vital tool during Canada's modern period that demarcated the boundaries of Whiteness, becoming the vehicle through which Black people could be seen, and in turn acknowledged, but only if performing the role of being perpetually stuck in servitude to Whites, rather than enjoying the full rights of an emancipated citizenship.

DR. CHERYL THOMPSON is an Assistant Professor in Creative Industries at The Creative School. She is the author of *Uncle: Race, Nostalgia, and the Politics of Loyalty* (2021) and *Beauty in a Box: Detangling the Roots of Canada's Black Beauty Culture* (2019). Dr. Thompson is currently working on her third book on Canada's history of blackface. This book is based on research Dr. Thompson has conducted with the assistance of multiple Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) grants. The first project, funded through an Insight Development Grant (2019-22), has examined Canada's history of

blackface performance, and at its completion will produce an open-source resource website and video series. The second project, funded through a Connection Grant, is in collaboration with Toronto-based film company Pink Moon Studio. Together, we are co-producing a feature documentary film on Canadian blackface. In 2021, Dr. Thompson launched a Media Representation and Archives lab for her project, “Mapping Ontario’s Black Archives Through Storytelling,” funded through an Ontario Early Researcher Award (2021-26). In addition to publishing in academic journals, magazines, newspapers, Dr. Thompson has also appeared on numerous podcasts and media platforms in Canada and internationally. Dr. Thompson holds a PhD in Communication Studies from McGill University. She previously held a Banting Postdoctoral Fellowship at the University of Toronto’s Centre for Theatre, Drama & Performance Studies, and the University of Toronto Mississauga’s Department of English & Drama. She grew up in Scarborough, and currently resides in Toronto.

CHERYL THOMPSON est professeure adjointe en industries créatives à la Creative School de l’Université Ryerson. Elle est l’auteure de *Uncle : Race, Nostalgia, and the Politics of Loyalty* (2021) et *Beauty in a Box : Detangling the Roots of Canada’s Black Beauty Culture* (2019). Mme Thompson travaille présentement à son troisième livre sur l’histoire du *blackface* au Canada. Ce livre est basé sur des recherches qu’elle a menées avec l’aide de plusieurs subventions du Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada (CRSH). Le premier projet, financé par une subvention de développement Savoir (2019-22), a examiné l’histoire canadienne des spectacles *blackface* et, à son terme, produira un site Web de ressources en accès libre ainsi qu’une série de vidéos. Le deuxième projet, financé par une subvention Connexion, est en collaboration avec la société cinématographique Pink Moon Studio, basée à Toronto. Ensemble, nous coproduisons un long métrage documentaire sur le *blackface* canadien. En 2021, Mme Thompson a inauguré un laboratoire sur la représentation et les archives médiatiques dans le cadre de son projet intitulé « Mapping Ontario’s Black Archives Through Storytelling », financé par une Bourse de nouveaux chercheurs de l’Ontario (2021-26). En plus de publier dans des revues savantes, des magazines et des journaux, Mme Thompson a également participé à de nombreux balados et à des plateformes médiatiques au Canada et à l’étranger. Elle est titulaire d’un doctorat en études de la communication de l’Université McGill. Elle a précédemment été

stagiaire postdoctorale au Banting Centre for Drama, Theatre & Performance Studies de l'Université de Toronto, et au Département d'anglais et d'art dramatique de l'Université de Toronto à Mississauga. Elle a grandi à Scarborough et réside actuellement à Toronto.

Endnotes

- 1 Burnt cork makeup was made by crushing burned, pulverized champagne corks with water (sometimes petroleum jelly) to the face and exposed areas of the body.
- 2 Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); John Strausbaugh, *Black Like You: Blackface, Whiteface, Insult and Imitation in American Popular Culture* (London: Penguin Books 2006); W. T. Lhamon, Jr. *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).
- 3 Italics are used throughout the article to distinguish *black* minstrelsy (Black actors in blackface) from white minstrelsy (White actors in blackface). *Black* in this case is not a racial identifier but a performative artifice that is interconnected with racial caricature, stereotypes, and denigrated depictions of Black people — some of which were performed by Black people, as well as Whites.
- 4 Yuval Taylor and Jake Austen, *Darkest America: Black Minstrelsy from Slavery to Hip-Hop* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012), 72.
- 5 David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 2007), 116.
- 6 Noliwe M. Rooks, *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 29.
- 7 Taylor and Austen, *Darkest America*, 72.
- 8 Taylor and Austen, *Darkest America*, 47.
- 9 Taylor and Austen, *Darkest America*, 49.
- 10 Taylor and Austen, *Darkest America*, 49.
- 11 Hicks had been a theatre manager and a performer before managing and owning multiple *black* minstrel companies.
- 12 Taylor and Austen, *Darkest America*, 50.
- 13 Taylor and Austen, *Darkest America*, 50–1.
- 14 John Springhall, *The Genesis of Mass Culture: Show Business Live in America, 1840 to 1940* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 71.
- 15 Eileen Southern, “The Georgia Minstrels: The Early Years,” in *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy*, eds.

- Annemarie Bean, James V. Hatch, and Brooks McNamara (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 164.
- 16 Southern, "The Georgia Minstrels," 164.
- 17 Springhall, *Genesis of Mass Culture*, 71.
- 18 Springhall, *Genesis of Mass Culture*, 71.
- 19 Springhall, *Genesis of Mass Culture*, 71.
- 20 Michael Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 27. As Stephanie Dunson has written of James Bland, "[he] came to be touted as 'The World's Greatest Minstrel Man' while a member of the internationally acclaimed *Haverly's Genuine Colored Minstrels*." See Stephanie Dunson, "Black Misrepresentation in Nineteenth-Century Sheet Music Illustration," in *Beyond Blackface: African Americans and the Creation of American Popular Culture, 1890–1930*, ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 56.
- 21 Annemarie Bean, "Black Minstrelsy and Double Inversion," in *African American Performance and Theater History: A Critical Reader*, eds. Harry J. Elam Jr. and David Krasner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 176.
- 22 Taylor and Austen, *Darkest America*, 51.
- 23 Cheryl Thompson, "Locating 'Dixie' in Newspaper Discourse and Theatrical Performance in Toronto, 1880s to 1920s," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 49, no.2 (Summer 2019): 205-225, <https://doi.org/10.3138/cras.2017.032>; Cheryl Thompson, "'I's in Town, Honey': Reading Aunt Jemima Advertising in Canadian Print Media, 1919 to 1962," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 49, no.1 (Winter 2015): 205-37, <https://doi.org/10.3138/jcs.49.1.205>.
- 24 Joan Nicks and Jeannette Sloniowski, "Entertaining Niagara Falls: Minstrel Shows, Theatres, and Popular Pleasures," in *Covering Niagara: Studies in Local Popular Culture*, eds. Joan Nicks and Barry Grant (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010), 302, 298.
- 25 See Thompson's previously cited works; see also Stephen Johnson, "Uncle Tom and the Minstrels: Seeing Black and White on Stage in Canada West prior to the American Civil War," in *(Post)Colonial Stages: Critical and Creative Views on Drama, Theatre and Performance*, ed. Helen Gilbert (Coventry: Dangaroo Press, 1999), 55–63; Patricia Conroy, "A History of the Theatre in Montreal Prior to Confederation" (PhD dissertation, McGill University, 1936); Patrick O'Neill, "A History of Theatrical Activity in Toronto, Canada: From Its Beginning to 1858" (PhD dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1973); Gerald Lenton-Young, "Variety Theatre," in *Early Stages: Theatre in Ontario 1800–1914*, ed. Ann Saddlemyer (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 166–213; Nicks and Sloniowski, "Entertaining Niagara Falls," 285–310; Lorraine Le Camp,

- “Racial Considerations of Minstrel Shows and Related Images in Canada” (PhD dissertation, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, 2005), vii–337. For a timeline of Canadian minstrelsy from the nineteenth century to the contemporary period, see Philip S. S. Howard, “Timeline of Canadian Blackface Incidents,” <https://mcgill.ca/aapr/files/aapr/blackface-timeline.pdf>.
- 26 These troupes primarily toured Hamilton, London, and Toronto in Ontario and Montréal, and some toured Vancouver.
- 27 This lack of discussion on White audiences’ reception to *black* minstrelsy is one noticeable gap in this article’s framing that I hope to uncover with further research.
- 28 Ann Marie F. Murnaghan, “Exploring Race and Nation in Playground Propaganda in Early Twentieth-Century Toronto,” *International Journal of Play* 2, no. 2 (2013): 140. See also David Wencer, “Historicist: Challenging Times at Brockton Town Hall,” *Torontonist*, December 5, 2015, <https://torontoist.com/2015/12/historicist-challenging-times-at-brockton-town-hall/>. Brockton Village, a community annexed by the City of Toronto in 1884, is located west of Dufferin Street, along Dundas Street West.
- 29 In the minstrel show, “end-men” played tambourine and bones (they were sometimes called “Tambo and Brudder Bones”) and they were part of the ensemble who portrayed Black people as lower class in costume — their enlarged satin lapels, oversized ties, an overly exaggerated makeup reflected their lack of sophistication — and in dialogue they spoke using a non-standard “Black” English that denoted illiteracy and a happy-to-be-so attitude. The smartly attired “interlocutor,” on the other hand, who did not wear blackface, always commanded centre stage. The interlocutor served as a bogus mouthpiece for high culture in that his dress and speech were upper class, and the plot usually centred on the end-men putting down the interlocutor. See Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of The White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (London: Verso, 1990), 170.
- 30 The Red Ensigns was Canada’s flag until 1965, when it was replaced by the Maple Leaf.
- 31 Murnaghan, “Exploring Race,” 140.
- 32 Murnaghan, “Exploring Race,” 140.
- 33 Lott, *Love and Theft*, 71.
- 34 Lott, *Love and Theft*, 72.
- 35 Bean, “Black Minstrelsy,” 172.
- 36 Bean, “Black Minstrelsy,” 172.
- 37 Calvin Ruck, *Canada’s Black Battalion: No 2. Construction 1916–1920* (Halifax: The Society for the Protection and Preservation of Black Culture in Nova Scotia, 1986), 21.

- 38 Melissa N. Shaw, “Most Anxious to Serve their King and Country”: Black Canadians’ Fight to Enlist in WWI and Emerging Race Consciousness in Ontario, 1914–1919,” *Histoire sociale / Social History* 49, no. 100 (Novembre/November 2016): 566.
- 39 James W. St. G. Walker, “Race and Recruitment in World War I: Enlistment of Visible Minorities in the Canadian Expeditionary Forces,” *Canadian Historical Review* 70, no. 1 (March 1989): 25.
- 40 Jonathan Vance, *A History of Canadian Culture* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press 2009), 100. The song is also called “Massa in de Cold Ground.”
- 41 Saxton, *Rise and Fall*, 167.
- 42 Stephen Collins Foster, *A Treasury Of Stephen Foster* (New York: Random House, 1946), 99.
- 43 “The Musical Success of the Season. Minstrel Shows, Old and New,” *The Globe*, October 18, 1882, 3. Foster’s “Old Folks at Home,” “Old Kentucky Home,” and “Camptown Races” were some of the listed songs. These songs, coupled with the themes of the blackface minstrel show helped to create a mythologized plantation South.
- 44 Stephen Johnson, “Uncle Tom and the Minstrels: Seeing Black and White on Stage in Canada West prior to the American Civil War,” in *(Post)Colonial Stages: Critical & Creative Views on Drama, Theatre & Performance*, ed. Helen Gilbert (Coventry: Dangaroo Press, 1999), 57.
- 45 Johnson, “Uncle Tom,” 60. See also Gerald Lenton-Young, “Variety Theatre,” in *Early Stages: Theatre in Ontario 1800–1914*, ed. Ann Saddlemeyer (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 178.
- 46 Nicks and Sloniowski, “Entertaining Niagara Falls,” 286.
- 47 Nicks and Sloniowski, “Entertaining Niagara Falls,” 287.
- 48 Cheryl Thompson, “Come One, Come All’: Blackface Minstrelsy as a Canadian Tradition and Early Form of Popular Culture,” in *Towards an African-Canadian Art History: Art, Memory, and Resistance*, ed. Charmaine Nelson (Concord, Ontario: Captus Press, 2018), 95-121.
- 49 Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 116.
- 50 Sarah-Jane Mathieu, *North of the Color Line: Migration and Black Resistance in Canada, 1870–1955* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 7.
- 51 Eli Yarhi, “Order-in-Council P.C. 1911-1324 – the proposed ban on black immigration to Canada,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, September 30, 2016, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/order-in-council-pc-1911-1324-the-proposed-ban-on-black-immigration-to-canada>.
- 52 Mathieu, *North of the Color*, 25, 26.
- 53 See Dominic Hardy, “Historical Ironies of Henri Julien (1852–1908): Researching Identity and Graphic Satire Across Languages in Québec,”

- Working Papers on Design*, 2 (2007): 10–5; Thompson, “Come One, Come All,” 99. Hardy observes that “Julien’s work as a caricaturist followed on from training first as a reproductive engraver and then as an illustrator at the publications founded by George-Edouard Desbarats and William Leggo, the *Canadian Illustrated News* and its sister publication *L’Opinion Publique* (1869–83 and 1870–83, respectively).” See Hardy, “Historical Ironies,” 8.
- 54 Hardy, “Historical Ironies,” 10–11.
- 55 Hardy, “Historical Ironies,” 12.
- 56 “The fetish or stereotype gives access to an ‘identity’ which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence, for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it,” writes Bhabha. See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 75.
- 57 Born in Quebec, Lavallée was a French Canadian-American musician, who became a Union Army band musician during the American Civil War, and eventually composed the song, “O Canada” (1880), which eventually became Canada’s national anthem; he spent years performing in blackface in minstrel shows. See Robert Harris, *Song of a Nation: The Untold Story of Canada’s National Anthem* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2018). In a 2019 interview with the CBC’s *The Current*, Harris said that as a music prodigy born in Verchères, Quebec, “Lavallée ran off at the age of 16 to the United States to join a minstrel show.” See “‘He clearly did not believe in Canada’: The surprising story behind the man who wrote O Canada,” *CBC*, January 1, 2019, <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-january-1-2019-1.4954366/he-clearly-did-not-believe-in-canada-the-surprising-story-behind-the-man-who-wrote-o-canada-1.4962389>.
- 58 Brian Christopher Thompson, *Anthems and Minstrel Shows: The Life and Times of Calixa Lavallée, 1842–1891* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2015), 306.
- 59 David Gardner, “Colin Burgess,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, 1994, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/burgess_colin_13E.html. In an 1887 interview with Toronto’s *The Globe*, Burgess even boasted, “I believe I have played at one time or another with nearly every great actor in America.” See “About Town,” *The Globe*, October 26, 1887, 3.
- 60 Negrophobia, a term used by Robin Winks to describe the *Voice of the Fugitive*, an anti-slavery newspaper published by Henry Bibb in Sandwich and Windsor, Ontario, between 1851 and 1853 with the aim of campaigning against anti-Black hatred. See Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1971), 395. The term has also been used to describe how the mid-nineteenth-century visibility of Black people produced a backlash

- of segregationist legislation in Canada, specifically the White population in Upper Canada (Ontario) and Nova Scotia did not want to associate or compete with Black people, which led to a system of separate schools, separate communities, and “separate but equal” legislation. See Dorothy W. Williams, *The Road to Now: A History of Blacks in Montreal* (Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1997), 29.
- 61 Petrine Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 9.
- 62 H. Alexander Welcome, “Snow-blind in a Blizzard of Their Own Making: Bodies of Structural Harmony and White Male Negrophobes in the Work of Frantz Fanon,” in “Charles Mills and His Critics,” special issue, *Critical Philosophy of Race* 5, no. 1 (2017): 93. muse.jhu.edu/article/645850.
- 63 Welcome, “Snow-blind,” 94.
- 64 Dominique-René de Lerma, “Hicks, (Charles) Barney,” *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (22 September 2015), <https://doi-org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2284623>.
- 65 de Lerma, “Hicks”.
- 66 Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy*, 25.
- 67 Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy*, 26.
- 68 Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy*, 26. The Fisk Jubilee Singers, founded at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, is a cappella choral group that started out on a small fundraising tour for the school in 1871; they soon rose to international prominence, performing in Europe before Queen Victoria of England, as well as at the White House for President Ulysses S. Grant, and multiple tours of Canada. Choral music in the Black community was largely centred in the church and numerous groups were making the rounds of the churches and concert halls of Canada and the United States to favourable reviews. See Adrienne Shadd, *The Journey from Tollgate to Parkway: African Canadians in Hamilton* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2010), 190.
- 69 Southern, “Georgia Minstrels,” 167.
- 70 Southern, “Georgia Minstrels,” 167.
- 71 Southern, “Georgia Minstrels,” 167–8.
- 72 Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy*, 26.
- 73 Southern, “Georgia Minstrels,” 173.
- 74 Bean, “Black Minstrelsy,” 177–8.
- 75 Bean, “Black Minstrelsy,” 177–8.
- 76 Taylor and Austen, *Darkest America*, 51.
- 77 Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia*, 183.
- 78 “Amusements,” *The Globe*, December 13, 1882, 3. Opened in 1874, the Grand was located at 11 Adelaide Street West, on the south side

- of the street just west of the Yonge Street corner. The theatre, which was initially owned and run by the eccentric Ambrose J. Small (who would vanish without a trace in 1919, sparking an epic, but fruitless, police search) seated 2,100 and had been Toronto's undisputed number one playhouse from 1880 until a fire destroyed the old Academy of Music on King Street West. That concert hall was rebuilt and reopened in 1895 as the Princess, an 1,800-seat legitimate theatre. See Robert Brockhouse, *The Royal Alexandra Theatre: A Celebration of 100 Years* (Toronto: McArthur & Co., 2007), 8.
- 79 Kevin Plummer, "Historicist: Gone but Not Forgotten," *Torontoist*, February 10, 2010, https://torontoist.com/2010/02/historicist_gone_but_not_forgotten/.
- 80 Bob Carlin, *The Birth of the Banjo: Joel Walker Sweeney and Early Minstrelsy* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007), 88.
- 81 "Callender's Coloured Company," *The Globe*, February 14, 1883, 8.
- 82 "Look Out For Now," *The Globe*, May 8, 1884, 6.
- 83 "Look Out For Now," *The Globe*, May 8, 1884, 6.
- 84 Springhall, *Genesis of Mass*, 73.
- 85 "Amusements," *Hamilton Spectator*, September 14, 1894, 8. Shea's (1899–1910) moved to 91 Yonge Street and Victoria Street where it became The Strand, and later, one of Toronto's first movie theatres. In 1899, when the building was taken over by the Shea Amusement Company and transformed into a theatre it became one of the most popular theatre houses in the city.
- 86 Robert Nowatzki, *Representing African Americans in Transatlantic Abolitionism and Blackface Minstrelsy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 36.
- 87 Toll, *Blackening Up*, 254.
- 88 "The 'Black Boom'," *The Globe*, May 19, 1881, 10.
- 89 Nowatzki, *Representing African Americans*, 37.
- 90 Taylor and Austen, *Darkest America*, 64.
- 91 Taylor and Austen, *Darkest America*, 25-6.
- 92 Taylor and Austen, *Darkest America*, 64.
- 93 Grand Opera House, London, Ont., programme [microform]: Al. G. Field's big, black boom Darkest America. University of Toronto, Microtexts CIHM no. 55590.
- 94 "Music and Drama," *The Globe*, May 4, 1896, 7.
- 95 "Music and Drama," *The Globe*, May 6, 1896, 12.
- 96 "Music and Drama," *The Globe*, May 8, 1896, 10.
- 97 Between the 1880s and the 1920s, the growth of cities, industry, the state, and capitalism transformed Canada into a modern nation at the same time rapid urbanization "sparked feelings of anonymity and social estrangement among many. Although individuals in small towns

- usually enjoyed extended kin networks, in cities anonymity, isolation, and loneliness reigned." See Donica Belisle, *Retail Nation: Department Stores and the Making of Modern Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 3, 70.
- 98 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso: 2016), 201.
- 99 David Krasner, "The Real Thing," in *Beyond Blackface: African Americans and the Creation of American Popular Culture, 1890–1930*, ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 101.
- 100 Taylor and Austen, *Darkest America*, 75.
- 101 Thomas Postlewait, "The Hieroglyphic Stage: American Theatre and Society, Post-Civil War to 1945," in *The Cambridge History of American Theatre: Volume II 1870–1945*, eds. Don B. Wilmet and Christopher Bigsby (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 162.
- 102 Taylor and Austen, *Darkest America*, 75.
- 103 See Mary Vipond, "The Image of Women in Mass Circulation Magazines in the 1920s," in *The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History*, eds Susan Mann Trofimenkoff and Alison Prentice (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977), 116.
- 104 "Plantation Days' at Pantages Theatre This Week," *Hamilton Herald*, April 28, 1925, 2. Hamilton's Pantages Theatre (1921–1972), located on King Street (between Catharine Street and Mary Street), opened in 1921 and was renamed The Palace Theatre in 1930; at the time, it was the largest theatre in Canada with a seating capacity of 3,500. See Brian Henley, *Hamilton: our Lives and Times* (Hamilton, ON: The Hamilton Spectator, 1993).
- 105 "Pantages," *Hamilton Herald*, April 25, 1925, 11.
- 106 Krasner, "Real Thing," 100, 101.
- 107 Springhall, *Genesis of Mass*, 73. See also Toll, *Blacking Up*, 257; Pickering, *Minstrelsy in Britain*, 25. The origins of the cakewalk date back to a plantation dance in which slaves mocked their White masters' dance styles; at the height of the cakewalk craze around 1900, Black performers were often recruited to teach the dance to elite Whites. See Alison M. Kibler, *Rank Ladies: Gender and Cultural Hierarchy in American Vaudeville* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 117; see also Susan A. Glenn, *Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 113; Shirley Staples, *Male-Female Comedy Teams in American Vaudeville 1865–1932* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1984), 92-3.
- 108 Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia*, 180.
- 109 Christina Burr, *Spreading the Light: Work and Labour Reform in Late-Nineteenth-Century Toronto* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 88.
- 110 Nicks and Sloniowski, "Entertaining Niagara Falls," 294.

- 111 In the early 1920s, there was a growing Black population in Toronto (comprised of West Indians, Africans, Americans, and Canadians). See Jared G. Toney, "Locating Diaspora: Afro-Caribbean Narratives of Migration and Settlement in Toronto, 1914–1929," *Urban History Review* 38, no. 2 (2010): 76.
- 112 E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 4.