Blackface, White Noise

Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot

Michael Rogin

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

Berkeley Los Angeles London

CHAPTER 1

Uncle Sammy and My Mammy

I

"Owl Jolson," the hero of a 1936 Warner Bros., Looney Tunes, and Merry Melodies cartoon, is thrown out of his father's house because he wants to sing "jazz." The father, identified by accent and demeanor as an Old World music teacher, had welcomed the hatching of Owl's older siblings—"another Caruso!" "another Kreisler!" "another Mendelssohn!"—but Owl pops out "a crooner." "Shtop! Shtop!" shouts the father as the fledgling bursts into song. Setting off on his own, the self-made American rebel auditions for a radio talent show. Failed contestants drop through a trap door whenever the judge bangs his gavel. But Owl wins the contest, and with it the approval of his entire family, by singing, "With a cheer for Uncle Sammy, and another for my mammy, I love to sing."

This animated film, titled *I Love to Singa,* is in part an ephemeron from the temporary 1930s decline of the most popular entertainer of the first half of the twentieth century. It advertised Al Jolson's effort to revive his flagging career on radio. It also promoted what would turn out to be another in his series of unsuccessful films, *The Singing Kid,* which opens and closes with the song cheering for "Uncle Sammy and my mammy." Yet both the cartoon and the failed feature were situated between two of the most widely seen movies of classic Hollywood, *The Jazz Singer* (1927) and *The Jolson Story* (1946). The paternal "Shtop!" at Owl's birth quotes the famous word with which the jazz singer's cantor father interrupts the son playing piano for his mother, thus returning the first talking picture to silence. Beginning with paternal disapproval and ending with familial embrace, the cartoon bridges the gap between the generational conflict of the 1920s film and the Americanization of the old people as well in the post–World War II, postimmigration, postgenocide *Jolson Story.*

I Love to Singa overrides the details of its historical moment, how-

ever, in the way it links art to politics. Popular culture Americanizes Owl Jolson, defeating Old World high culture. How, then, does Uncle Sammy employ "My Mammy" in that process? The film jazz singer had Jewish origins, like Kreisler, Mendelssohn, and Jolson, and, as is attested by the record collections of numerous grandfathers—mine and the protagonist's of Clifford Odets's *Awake and Sing,* for instance—the Italian, Caruso, was also an idol in immigrant Jewish households. The Owl Jolson cartoon subsumed immigrant popular music—opera and *The Jazz Singer*'s cantorial chants—under a European elite label. What took the place of foreign influence, in the cartoon as in the first talking picture, was the sound of the man known as "the mammy singer."

"Uncle Sammy" merged the patriotic icon of Uncle Sam with a familiar figure in American Jewish families—I had one—Uncle Sammy. But that hybridization, too ethnic for universal American appeal, was just another sign of Jolson's foundering for an audience in the 1930s: "Uncle Sammy" was New York provincial.[1] Jolson's act of genius was to gather immigrant Jews and other Americans together under Uncle Sam's banner by invoking a second patriotic icon. Appearing in her Jewish incarnation in the plot of *The Jazz Singer,* she is named in the song Jolson sings in blackface to climax and end the film: "My Mammy."

"The 'mammy' of whom we have so often heard," as NAACP founder, Mary White Ovington, called the African American mother, nursed the master's child as well as her own. In domestic service in millions of American homes (the percentage of black women in paid employment was several times higher than that of whites, and the difference for mothers was even greater), "mammy" bestowed "her loving care" on other families at the expense of "her own offspring"; indeed, Ovington attributed the higher infant mortality rate among African Americans to the fact that "mothers who go out to day's work are also unable to nurse their babies." Even if Ovington's specific interpretation was distorted by progressive maternalism, she understood that "mammy" nurtured whites—that is, supplied material support and a symbolic, imagined community—at the expense of blacks. She knew, too, that the mammy of unconditional love was actually a domestic worker (not least in urban, Jewish households); that forcing her to compensate for immigrant family rupture effaced the distinctive maternal losses imposed by slavery; and that desexualization was the price the black mother paid for public acceptance. Ovington understood that the condition for displays of interracial intimacy was the color line.[2]

Segregation was only half of white supremacy, however, for it coexisted alongside racial cross-dressing. A single image inspired the present

Figure 1.1. Al Jolson sings "My Mammy" in *The Jazz Singer*. Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. © 1927 by Warner Bros.

study: Al Jolson, born Jakie Rabinowitz in *The Jazz Singer* and reborn as Jack Robin, singing "My Mammy" in blackface to his immigrant Jewish mother (fig. 1.1). How could blacking up and then wiping off burnt cork be a rite of passage from immigrant to American? To whose mother is the man born in the Old World Pale of Jewish Settlement really singing? "My Mammy" forces us to consider these questions by condensing into a single figure the structures of white supremacist racial integration that built the United States: black labor in the realm of production, interracial nurture and sex (the latter as both a private practice and a unifying public prohibition) in the realm of reproduction, and blackface minstrelsy in the realm of culture.

Minstrelsy was the first and most popular form of mass culture in the nineteenth-century United States. Blackface provided the new country with a distinctive national identity in the age of slavery and presided over melting-pot culture in the period of mass European immigration. While blackface was hardly the only distinctively American cultural form, even in black-white relations and especially for African Americans, it was a dominant practice and it infected others. My subject—for one cannot study everything—is its place in motion pictures. Minstrelsy claimed to speak for both races through the blacking up of one. Jolson's blackface "My Mammy," in the service of Americanizing immigrants, pretended to the absence of conflict between black and white.

After "My Mammy" and a montage of Jolson's other hits opens *The*

Singing Kid, Jolson cheers for Uncle Sammy and his mammy on one New York rooftop as the black bandleader Cab Calloway joins in on another. The separate-but-equal verses on separate-but-equal skyscrapers illustrate Jolson's awkward efforts to incorporate actual African Americans into his 1930s films. The trouble arose not from the question of just whose mammy he was singing about, since segregation was already the long-established tool of racial harmony. By the 1930s, however, whites in blackface were giving way to African American motion picture actors. What disturbs the films where Jolson performs alongside African Americans is that he continues to appear in the burnt cork that had raised him to stardom. The presence of Jolson among the people he was supposedly representing better than they could represent themselves split in two the blackface figure of American unity.

No such problem troubled *The Jazz Singer.* With Jolson cheering for "my mammy" and Uncle Sam, blackface as American national culture Americanized the son of the immigrant Jew. In his 1914 afterword to *The Melting Pot,* a play about Jewish-gentile intermarriage that fixed its title on the United States, Israel Zangwill explained, "However scrupulously and justifiably America avoids physical intermarriage with the negro, the comic spirit cannot fail to note the spiritual miscegenation which, while clothing, commercialising, and Christianising the ex-African, has given 'rag-time' and the sex-dances that go to it, first to white America and thence to the whole white world."[3] Zangwill was naming the exclusion unthinkingly exposed by Fred Allen in the epigraph to this chapter when he listed "blackface" and not black performers among the Irish, Jewish, German, and other vaudevillians allowed to perform under the sign of their own ethnicities. Absent in substance, African Americans made their contribution in spirit. And "spiritual miscegenation" between black and Jew not only appealed to mother; it also sacramentalized under burnt cork the earthly miscegenation between Jewish son and his once taboo object of desire. For the jazz singer was marrying outside his community the figure still "scrupulously and justifiably" forbidden to African American men: the all-American (to distinguish her from mammy) "girl."

II

Jump forward half a century from "Uncle Sammy and my mammy." In mid-November 1993, perhaps in anticipation of Thanks-

giving, both *Time* and *Newsweek* published cover stories on the problem of race in the United States. The *Time* cover, visualizing anxiety over the new immigration, placed photographs of real people of various nationalities—"Middle Eastern, Italian, African, Vietnamese, Anglo-Saxon, Chinese, Hispanic"—across the top and down the side of the cover, women along the *x* and men along the *y* axes of a chromosome-linked graph. Computer software, known as "Morph" (for Metamorphosis 2.0), produced at the meeting points of the graph axes a simulation of the results of extensive intermarriage. *Time*'s cover girl, her large image superimposed on the forty-nine small ones (adding up to the number of states in the Union), represented the all-American synthesis.

What might seem a bold depiction of miscegenation in the new melting pot was, however, doubly contaminated. For one thing, the pictorialization of distinctive national origins was a throwback to nineteenth-century theories of pure racial types. Just as earlier "scientific" racism gave precise numerical values to brain size and facial bone structure, so *Time* produced a "new face of America" that was "15% Anglo-Saxon, 17.5% Middle Eastern, 17.5% African, 7.5% Asian, 35% Southern European, and 7.5% Hispanic."[4] This mathematics was doubly imaginary, since the percentages bore no relation to any actual or prospective distribution of nationality groups in the United States.

Time's foray into computer dating might seem to indicate approval of the miscegenation that scientific racism condemned, for the magazine's art directors confessed to falling in love with the cover girl they had created. However—second problem—the price of the attraction was a similar look across all the supposedly different nationalities. In the enlarged living-color chart inside the magazine, all forty-nine faces, even the real people born before computer sex, are rendered in polite, pastel shades of light yellow-brown. (Choosing original pure types of the same, youthful age intensifies the sameness displayed in the name of variety.) Not only are the two photographed "Africans" close in color to the unmorphed Asians, Hispanics, and Anglo-Saxons, but their features are Caucasian as well. The *Time* table not only whitens its Africans; it blots out the two largest racial minorities in the United States by subsuming (dark-skinned) Latinos under "Hispanic" and including no one labeled African American at all. The intermarriage chart purifies African Americans in words (by calling them Africans) as it eliminates the dark majority in images. (They would return in the infamous darkening—blacking up—of O. J. Simpson's face on the *Time* cover half a year later.)[5]

Celebrating the melting pot by whitening its blacks, *Time* is inadver-

tently faithful to the historic character of assimilation. Since well before *The Melting Pot* and *The Jazz Singer,* marriage across ethnic and religious lines has symbolized the making of Americans. African Americans were excluded from that process, however, legally as well as symbolically: twenty-four states forbade white-and-black intermarriage until the 1967 Supreme Court decision *Loving v. Virginia.* The *Time* cover responds to the changed legal and moral climate by homogenizing all its peoples of color and making the black man and woman virtually invisible. Nevertheless, the repressed returns in the title *Time* gave to its new melting pot: "Rebirth of a Nation." The magazine was invoking (without, one assumes, full consciousness of its meaning) Hollywood's founding motion picture, *Birth of a Nation,* where Ku Klux Klan punishment of the black desire for miscegenation married North to South onscreen and united immigrants and old-stock Americans in the film audience. In "Rebirth" as in *Birth,* moreover, the inclusion of some people is predicated on the violent exclusion of others; for even after restricting marriage partners by age, color, and aesthetic ideal of facial beauty, Morph still produces monsters—only now, in keeping with homophobic demonology, they are sexual instead of racial. Just as *Birth* invented and then lynched a black rapist beast, so Morph generated, and its programmers destroyed, a grotesque alter ego of the cover girl, "a distinctively feminine face—sitting atop a masculine neck and hairy chest." *Time*'s jokey, eugenic-inflected elimination of the monstrous birth stands in for the unacknowledged racial cleansing.[6]

Newsweek made up for *Time*'s erasure of African Americans by illustrating its contemporaneous cover story, "The Hidden Rage of Successful Blacks," with a wary, scowling African American man half hidden behind a smiling black mask. *Newsweek* was showing that blacks were still forced to don blackface, to minstrelize themselves to ward off white retaliation. In giving voice in the issue to several African Americans, *Newsweek* advanced well beyond *Time.*[7] One would not know from the *Newsweek* cover, however, that historically blackface permeated American culture in performances not by blacks, but by whites. Even as *Time* and *Newsweek* made visible, they also falsely separated miscegenation from racial cross-dressing. When these are put back together, the newsmagazine covers expose what they separately covered over: in the making of American national culture, whites in blackface acted out a racially exclusionary melting pot.

Newsweek did feature on an inside page a white man under burnt cork, Ted Danson, who had blacked up at a roast for his then com-

panion, the African American movie star Whoopi Goldberg. Danson's "blackface thing," in the words of Karen Grigsy Bates, his belief that it would be funny to become "a living stereotype that has haunted African Americans for a century," generated near-universal condemnation. Unremarked upon was that Goldberg's stage name was taken from Eddie Cantor's title song, "Making Whoopee," of his Jewish blackface film.[8]

Danson and Goldberg (she wrote his lines) mistakenly thought they could get away with blacking up to mock (or were they exploiting?) racial and sexual stereotypes. The actress's reappropriation of blackface, like her interracial romance, may seem like racial progress. So, too, does the movie that cast Danson with Goldberg, *Made in America,* whose miscegenation theme was forbidden to the screen before the civil rights revolution. Even more up-to-date was the plot device that brings Whoopi and Ted together in the first place: Whoopi's daughter's apparent discovery that a white man was her mother's anonymous sperm donor. Like other recent movies, *Made in America* capitalizes on both the continuing frisson over interracial sex and the enlistment of romance in the quest for racial harmony. But just as *Time*'s computer dating simulation endorses miscegenation by separating it from sex, so *Made in America* celebrates interracial sex by cutting it off from reproduction. The movie that seems to be making fun of the mother's belief that black pride requires racial purity ends up by granting her wish. Although the daughter's search for her biological father allows Ted to "make" her mother, in one meaning of the title, the daughter turns out to be made in America by a black sperm donor after all. Uncle Sam may have moved beyond spiritual miscegenation with the black mother, but he manages to provide the black mother and child with the necessary surrogate white father without violating racial descent.[9]

Made in America brings up-to-date the film tradition, once highly visible and now mostly forgotten, that is the subject of this book. The movie's title is a quadruple entendre, alluding not only to sex, babies, and melting-pot patriotism but also to the product for sale, *Made in America* itself, racialized entertainment as commodity. Blackface and miscegenation were also selling *Time* and *Newsweek,* as they had sold mass culture from its American origins. A sales campaign of the 1993 holiday season capitalized similarly on the "made in America" theme. "We hold these truths to be self-evident," declared a seductive female radio voice, "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights. Those are life, liberty, and

the pursuit of happiness. America built a nation around this idea. Leave it to Club Med to build a vacation around it."[10]

Using the American creed to sell vacations may seem like a perversion of the Declaration of Independence. To be sure, Club Med was more politically enlightened than the founding fathers. When the ad repeated Jefferson's words a second time, it added "and women" to "all men." The female voice-over was promising other women that they, too, could pursue happiness and not just occupy the object-of-pursuit position. Spoken as a female come-on, however, the inclusion of women appears a further profanation, sexualizing as the voice commodifies the sacred text. But the unspoken in the Club Med ad—what is displayed on the *Time* and *Newsweek* covers—brings the copy closer to the original. The Declaration of Independence demanded freedom for a nation built on slavery. Club Med promises mostly upscale white Americans service, to be delivered by—in their native habitats—mostly third world peoples of color. Instead of dismissing the Club Med ad, let it transport us back to Independence Hall.

The racialized foundations of the United States erupt on the surface of the three drafts of the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration has now been rendered a visibly hysterical text by the editors of Jefferson's autobiography (in which Jefferson included the Declaration), who use three typefaces to distinguish between the passages of Jefferson's original that remain in the final document, those excised by the convention, and those added to Jefferson's version. Although the entire Declaration shows the marks of multiple authorship, only the section on slavery is made incoherent by their omnipresence. Jefferson himself sought to blame the king of England for inflicting slavery and the slave trade on the colonies, although the crown's effort to regulate the trade in slaves, sugar, rum, and molasses was actually a cause of the Revolution. But Jefferson's displacement of the crime was too antislavery for other southern delegates, and the final version retains only the accusation against George III of inciting slave insurrection.[11]

The Declaration of Independence, as its multiple drafts expose, bequeathed a Janus-faced legacy to the new nation: the logic (as in the Club Med ad) that the equality to which white men were born could be extended to women and slaves, and the foundation of white freedom on black servitude. Slavery's deep embeddedness in the United States produced the Declaration's slide from condemning slavery for inflicting bondage to blaming slaves for demanding freedom. And—it will come as no surprise to readers of *Time* and viewers of *Made in Amer-*

ica—as that reversal infected Jefferson himself, it took a sexualized turn. Jefferson's *Notes on Virginia* appended to his proposal to emancipate slaves speculations on the natural inferiority of Africans. Because black men desired white women, wrote Jefferson, they could not be freed without "staining the blood" of their former masters.[12] Although the father of the Declaration favored returning slaves to Africa, his twin policies of segregation—the removal of Indians as well as slaves—worked only in Indian policy. Jefferson's wish to "remove [blacks] beyond the reach of mixture," conflicting as it did with actual white dependence on African Americans, issued forth in a quadruple fantasy: that interracial sex was a barrier to emancipation, that it stained blood, that it was driven by black and not white practices, and that colonization in Africa could solve the problem.

Slave owners like Jefferson—including his own father-in-law and nephew, and likely Jefferson himself—produced children whose condition followed that of their slave mothers. Claiming that it was the black desire for white that required the separation of the races, Jefferson inverted a white male desire for black. In his day, that desire took the forms of labor and sex, chattel slavery and miscegenation. As expressive performance—in the form of blackface minstrelsy—white possession of black would help produce a second, cultural, Declaration of Independence during the Age of Jackson.

Nonetheless, there was always a contradiction between the logic of natural rights and white supremacy. Almost from the moment of its inception in the late nineteenth century, the immigrant Yiddish press began to protest against the denial of equality to African Americans. "POGROM IN PENNSYLVANIA" is the headline Alfred Kazin remembers above a 1920s *Jewish Daily Forward* report of a lynching. Lynchings and race riots, pogroms in the promised land, were, in the oft-repeated phrase, "a stain of shame on the American flag." Consciously invoking the Declaration of Independence, the phrase unknowingly reproached Jefferson for blaming the "stain" on victimized black bodies. Many Jews who were entering the melting pot had their own stain of shame, however—burnt cork—for by the turn of the twentieth century Jewish entertainers were the major blackface performers. And their stain is the link between Jefferson's Declaration and blackface Ted Danson's *Made in America.* Jews in the entertainment business—vaudeville, Tin Pan Alley, Hollywood—were creating mass culture for the immigrant, industrial age. In the cultural production of America, Jewish blackface was playing a role.[13]

III

Blackface, White Noise investigates the neglected roots of motion pictures—the dominant popular culture form of the first half of the twentieth century—in the first and most popular form of nineteenth-century mass culture, blackface minstrelsy. Motion picture blackface, I propose, inherited the function of its predecessor: by joining structural domination to cultural desire, it turned Europeans into Americans.

Frederick Jackson Turner began his classic frontier thesis with the words, "The wilderness . . . strips off the garments of civilization and arrays [the colonist] in the hunting shirt and moccasin. . . . The outcome is . . . a new product that is American."[14] Like the myth of the West, blackface was a form of racial cross-dressing.[15] Current writing on gender, race, and popular culture celebrates the subversive character of cross-dressing for allegedly destabilizing fixed identities. Such accounts need to consider history if they are to carry conviction, for far from being the radical practice of marginal groups, cross-dressing defined the most popular, integrative forms of mass culture. Racial masquerade did promote identity exchange, I argue, but it moved settlers and ethnics into the melting pot by keeping racial groups out.

History, not biology, distinguishes ethnicity from race, making the former groups (in the American usage) distinctive but assimilable, walling off the latter, legally, socially, and ideologically, to benefit those within the magic circle and protect the national body from contamination. Although inherent and immutable differences supposedly keep racial groups distinct, the racial label is a shifting one. Anglo-Saxonists postulated a racial divide between old immigrants to the United States and groups that are now called white ethnics. During the period of mass European immigration, roughly the 1840s to the 1920s, the racial status of Irish, Italians, Jews, and Slavs was in dispute. As anti-Semitism racialized Jews in Europe, however, European immigrants to the United States were coming under the banner of a new racial invention: whiteness.

"No one was white before he/she came to America," wrote James Baldwin. "It took generations and a vast amount of coercion before this became a white country. . . . There is an Irish community. . . . There is a German community. . . . There is a Jewish community. . . . There are English communities. There are French communities," Baldwin explained. "Jews came here from countries where they were not white

and they came here in part *because* they were not white. . . . Everyone who got here, and paid the price of the ticket, the price was to become 'white.' " The differentiation of white immigrant workers from colored chattel, a process organic to the creation of race-based slavery at the origins of the United States, was repeated for the waves of European immigrants that came to these shores after slavery had come to an end. Minstrelsy and Hollywood were venues for that sorting-out procedure.[16]

By transubstantiating the forbidden mixture of bodily fluids into a burnt cork–covered white face, blacking up mocks any claim of division between the personal and the political. Blackface is grounded in mammy, since the nurturing figure that deprived black men and women of adult authority and sexuality gave white boys permission to play with their identities, to fool around. Instead of assigning Uncle Sam to political iconography, mammy to a circumscribed domestic space, American national politics and culture, I will argue, issued forth from the "spiritual miscegenation" between the two. Together they provided white Americans with their imagined community, their national home.

This study examines the conjunction between blackface and Americanization, a meeting that hardly exhausts the multiple significances of either term. I will focus neither on Uncle Sam nor on mammy (though both will often appear in these pages), but rather on the acculturating Jewish male entertainers and producers who negotiated between them. Those figures appear in some of the films we will be looking at; they are implicated in various ways in others that have no explicit Jewish theme. Visible Jewish absence is significant not because of some invisible Jewish power operating behind the scenes, but rather because of the already racialized culture that immigrant Jews entered, which they had no role in originally creating. Part One sets that stage. Parts Two and Three, beginning with Al Jolson's jazz singer, examine how Hollywood blackface helped engender white America.

The Hollywood version of the American story is necessarily partial. With respect to Jewish blackface, it picks up the tale at the end of mass immigration, removing it in both space and time from the polyglot immigrant cosmos of New York's Lower East Side. An ethnography of stage blackface, vaudeville, the sheet music business, and Broadway, or a study of early, New York–based silent film, would offer a rawer, more variegated picture of Jewish blackface than the view from Hollywood.[17] Nonetheless, traces of New York, though we cannot take them at face value, are thematized in Jolson's *Jazz Singer* and Cantor's *Whoopee!*, both made from Broadway plays and both featured in the pages that follow.

Those films illustrate Hollywood's reach: no single institution in the first half of the twentieth century had more mass cultural importance than the motion picture business.

Hollywood's importance in making Americans, in giving people from diverse class, ethnic, and geographic origins a common imagined community, is by now a commonplace. What has not heretofore been noticed is that the four transformative moments in the history of American film—moments that combine box office success, critical recognition of revolutionary significance, formal innovations, and shifts in the cinematic mode of production—all organized themselves around the surplus symbolic value of blacks, the power to make African Americans represent something beside themselves.[18]

With Edwin S. Porter's film trilogy of 1902–3, encompassing the West in *The Great American Train Robbery,* the city in *The Life of an American Fireman,* and the South in *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* the history of American movies begins. It begins with race. Porter introduced national narratives and stylistic inventions into the welter of foreign imports, documentary actualities (real and staged), cinematographic tricks, and unmotivated short scenes of comedy and violence that constituted primitive cinema. Bringing the most-performed theatrical spectacle of the late nineteenth century, *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* into the movies marked the transition from popular theater to motion pictures that characterized the prehistory of classic Hollywood. The most lavish and expensive film to date, and the first to use intertitles, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was the first extended movie narrative with a black character and therefore, since African Americans were forbidden to play serious dramatic roles, the first substantial blackface film. Straddling the border between blackface and motion pictures, and undercutting Stowe's novel, Porter's one-reeler introduced the plantation myth into American movies.[19]

D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915) originated classic Hollywood cinema in the ride of the Ku Klux Klan against black political and sexual revolution. (Inadvertently underlining the status of the black menace as white fantasy, *Birth*'s two rapists and its mulatto seductress were whites in blackface.) "The longest, costliest, most ambitious, most spectacular American movie to date," its technique, expense, length, mass audience, critical reception, and influential historical vision all identify *Birth* as the single most important movie ever made. *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* with Porter at the camera, derived from the artisanal mode of film production; *Birth* confirmed the period of directorial control.[20]

The Jazz Singer (1927) was the founding movie of Hollywood sound,

and it introduced the most popular entertainer of his day, the blackface performer Al Jolson, to feature films. *The Jazz Singer* was a pure product of the studio producer system, a production assembly line that turned out film after film. Alan Crosland directed *The Jazz Singer,* but Warner Bros. was in charge. Finally, David O. Selznick's *Gone with the Wind* (1939) was perhaps the first example of the producer unit system, the method of making films that would come to dominate Hollywood, where an entrepreneur assembled the team for a single blockbuster. *Gone with the Wind* established the future of the technicolor spectacular by returning to American film origins in the plantation myth. *Birth* was the most widely seen movie of the silent period, *The Jazz Singer* broke all existing box office records, and Jolson's blackface sequel, *The Singing Fool* (1928), became the leading money-maker of the 1920s. All three were eclipsed by *Gone with the Wind,* Hollywood's all-time top box office success. Far from playing themselves in *Gone with the Wind,* black actors and actresses were assigned roles minstrelsy had already defined.[21]

American literature, critics from D. H. Lawrence to Richard Slotkin have argued, established its national identity in the struggle between Indians and whites. American film was born from white depictions of blacks. The white male hero of so much of our classic literature frees himself from paternal, Old World constraints and declares his American independence against Indians; white over black, to apply Winthrop Jordan's formulation, defines these transformative films.[22] The alternative racial roots are not arbitrary, for just as the frontier period in American history generated the classic American literature, so American film was born in the industrial age out of the conjunction between southern defeat in the Civil War, black resubordination, and national integration; the rise of the multiethnic, industrial metropolis; and the emergence of mass entertainment, expropriated from its black roots, as the locus of Americanization.

On the one hand, however, the frontier myth was hardly confined to the nineteenth century. It flourished in the industrial age, and its multiple uses made the western the most popular film genre in the silent period and during much of the history of sound.[23] On the other hand, racialized sectional conflict, urban immigration, and mass culture originated not with Hollywood but nearly a century earlier, and their most important original cultural progeny was minstrelsy. Indeed, whereas the racialized character of mass entertainment appeared on the blackface surface in the decades surrounding the Civil War, and later in the Hollywood western, very few movies organized themselves around the racial subordination of African Americans. Motion pictures normally buried their

racial foundations in white over black. Romances, melodramas, social-problem pictures, westerns and other adventure stories, historical epics, gangster and detective films, comedies—it is rare to find black and white (in the racial sense) at the center of these genre films. But the transformative moments go beneath the marginal, everyday, African American presence on screen—as servants, entertainers, buffoons. When American film takes its great leaps forward, it returns to its buried origins. Then it exposes the cinematic foundations of American freedom in American slavery.[24]

The racial revelations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Birth of a Nation, The Jazz Singer*, and *Gone with the Wind* also point to widely popular but now neglected routine films of classic talking-pictures Hollywood—films like Cantor's *Whoopee!* (1930), John Ford's *Judge Priest* (1934), Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland's *Babes in Arms* (1939), Fred Astaire and Bing Crosby's *Holiday Inn* (1942), Larry Parks's *Jolson Sings Again* (1949), and others that will appear in the following pages. These movies continue and comment on the blackface melting-pot tradition, bringing it forward beyond World War II into the early civil rights era. There, as we will see, the blackface tradition infected race relations films, like *Body and Soul* (1947), *Pinky* (1949), and *Home of the Brave* (1949), that wanted to repudiate it.

Hollywood was descended from nineteenth-century forms of American popular culture. Along with vaudeville and Tin Pan Alley, however, it also added something new to American entertainment: the creative presence of immigrant Jews. Jews—Al Jolson, Eddie Cantor, George Jessel, George Burns, Sophie Tucker—had pretty well taken over blackface by the early twentieth century. Jewish songwriters—Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, and Jerome Kern, to name only the most famous—created melting-pot American music in the Jazz Age from African American sources. Jewish moguls invented Hollywood, in Neal Gabler's phrase. The anti-Semitic pamphlet "Jew Stars over Hollywood" charged, "The motion picture industry has become a Jew industry run by and for Jews." Since Gabler is right, one cannot meet such anti-Semitic accusations (brought up-to-date by Louis Farrakhan, Leonard Jeffries, and Khalid Abdul Muhammad) by burying the Jewish presence in the entertainment business.[25]

Just as immigrant Jews were helping to produce a racialized twentieth-century mass culture in the United States, they also led the fight for civil rights. Unlike adherents of the working-class, Irish, Democratic Party milieu of stage blackface, Jewish activists were distinctively allied with African Americans in the struggle for racial equality. Both civil rights and minstrelsy were ways of establishing an American imagined

community, making new identities out of the diverse peoples of the Old World. Supporters of civil rights invoked the Declaration of Independence, which founded the new nation politically in natural right. The historian of Jewish support for black causes Hasiah Diner explains that Jews could prove their Americanness by supporting the American creed.[26] Blackface minstrelsy founded the new nation culturally in racial wrong. Jews acquired American credentials by, in this racially divided society, taking control of the black role. Civil rights descended from what Lincoln called "the father of all moral principle," extending to all those not "descended by blood from our ancestors"—the high words of "that old Declaration of Independence." Blackface staged the return of what the document repressed—slavery—by displaying the racialized body whited out beneath the Declaration's universalist claims. The demand for racial justice extended the melting pot to peoples of color, offering an inclusionary alternative to melting-pot blackface. Instead of aspiring upward to a unifying ideal, minstrels dressed down through hierarchical, racial division.[27]

Civil rights called blackface into question, posing—from Wendell Phillips, Frederick Douglass, and Lydia Maria Childs, to W. E. B. Du Bois, Joel Spingarn, and Jane Addams, to A. Philip Randolph, Rosa Parks, and John Lewis (or James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman)—the most fundamental, politically significant challenge ever mounted to racial inequality in the United States. It would be seriously mistaken, from the position either of misguided sympathy for blackface popular culture or of legitimate disappointment at the shortcomings of civil rights politics, to collapse the differences between the two. Such a declaration of political virtue would be fatuous, however, if blackface did not cast its shadow over civil rights as well, for the two forms of Jewish/black identification shared a common world. Targets alike of discrimination and racial prejudice, Jews and African Americans formed a political alliance. As the anthropologist Franz Boas put it in his foreword to Mary White Ovington's "refutation of the claim that the Negro has equal opportunity with the whites, and that his failure to advance more rapidly than he has is due to innate ability," "The Negro of our times carries even more heavily the burden of his racial descent than did the Jew of an earlier period."[28] Under the conditions of white supremacy in politics and entertainment, though, Jews could speak for blacks but not blacks for Jews. Racial hierarchy placed such pressure on the idea of equality, moreover, that even representations intending to include peoples of color within the Declaration of Independence still

often reproduced racialized images. These were images embodying desire, finally, not just repulsion, since blackface and civil rights shared an investment in the other side of the racial divide. Although minstrelsy advertised that interest as racial difference, while civil rights presented it as common humanity, the movies we will look at expose a less clearly divided picture.

Michael Roemer, a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany who directed *Nothing but a Man* (1963), a film about a southern black family, recently explained, "In the 1960s we felt we could cross these racial lines, that we were all one, and I think we were a bit optimistic." Equally fascinated with crossing the racial line, blackface and civil rights often cohabited as secret sharers. This commonality was not universal, however. It was less characteristic of the real-world civil rights struggle, for example, where—in legal challenges and on the streets—African Americans played significant leadership roles, than of Hollywood versions of interracial sympathy, where they did not. Even on the motion picture screen, minstrelsy does not infect *Nothing but a Man.*[29] As director and self-critic, however, Roemer is exceptional. Motion picture blackface, neglected in so many ways, illuminates the prehistory of the current, widely reported troubles between these two historically identified groups, African Americans and Jews.

Hollywood blackface once celebrated America, and we should not avert our eyes from its country. The literal meaning of blackface—blacking up to play the African American role—as used here subsumes two metaphors. One points to white modes of representing blacks that take the form of appropriative identification. The other includes African Americans who, whether or not literally under burnt cork, perform against themselves for white eyes—although to what extent minstrel roles actually constrained blacks in blackface, particularly in front of African American audiences, is a disputed question. Figurative blackface played a role when African Americans got parts in film and as the modern civil rights period began. But black minstrel roles and civil rights, I will argue, are embedded in the long history of literal blackface, which itself requires interpretation. The view through burnt cork places race relations at the center of mass politics and culture in the United States; it displays the peculiar feature of American nationalism, a popular expression that emerged (by way of the frontier myth on the one hand, blackface minstrelsy on the other) not to free oppressed folk but to constitute national identity out of their subjugation; and it opens up the links that have bound Jews and African Americans together, supportively and problematically, in popular culture and liberal politics.

CHAPTER 2

Two Declarations of Independence

The Contaminated Origins of American National Culture

I

The first white European in recorded history to black her face was Queen Anne, wife of James I, Stuart king of England. Blackface occupies at its origins a privileged place in the conjoined histories of the English theater and the English court, imperial politics and Elizabethan culture. Courtiers had masked themselves as Moors since the early sixteenth century, as had blackface players on the English stage. Lady Mary, sister of Henry VIII and the future queen of France, had worn a Moorish costume, but before 1605, the year in which Queen Anne asked Ben Jonson to write a masque in which she and her ladies could play black, there had been no actual darkening of skin. *The Masque of Blackness* and *The Masque of Beauty* were, notably, Ben Jonson's first court masques, his first collaborations with the theatrical designer and architect Inigo Jones, and the first court masques with scenery and prepared text. At the apex of a political system where theatricality was a form of power, the English court was dramatizing the royal imperium.[1]

Blackface is a product of European imperialism, the material and psychological investment in the peoples being incorporated into the capitalist world system of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Curiosity about these new peoples, the trying on of their identities as Europeans imagined them, was part of the exploitive interaction between Europeans, Africans, and inhabitants of the New World. African slavery is the material base of blackface. Although England was not yet significantly involved, the Atlantic slave trade was well established by 1600, underpinning the Caribbean, Brazilian, and Mexican export economies. One route to racial masking lay in the slave trade. But blackface also grew out of relations, real and imaginary, between medieval Christians and Moors. And it superimposed itself on a religious and theatrical tradition in which masks provided access to states of intense experience—holy or satanic,

tragic or comic—removed from everyday life. Masks blocked out mundane reality to reveal archetypal substrates. They also often exposed to ridicule either the figures represented or their representatives. When Queen Anne blacked up, she linked the masking method to representations of a particular people, a people in the process of being subjugated and ridiculed, a people who had their own, sacred (African) masks and who would develop, under slavery, their own form of defensive masking.[2]

Queen Anne's desire to play a blacked-up role dramatized a curious sympathy for Africans, an effort to imagine oneself inside the skin of an exotic people. Ultimately that desire produced, in Aphra Behn's late-seventeenth-century novel *Oroonoko*, a protest against the enslavement of African royalty. Queen Anne could hardly impersonate a slave, but there was precedent for the portrayal of dignified black royalty in late-medieval representations of the Moorish magus. Although the black magus worshipped a white Christ, he retained his African identity. Not so the blackface Queen Anne. She and her ladies played princesses from "the blackest nation of the world." However much their father, Niger, praised them, they longed "to leave their blacknesse, and true beautie to receive." The natural sun had turned them black; King James, bringing them to England, had the power to turn them white. Ben Jonson's masques, produced by the white desire to play black, imagined royal blackness as the desire for white.[3]

Jonson's color symbolism conflated three meanings. In the first, classical and Neoplatonist, the dark desire for light moved the ladies of Niger from ignorance to knowledge. The body of touch, a nocturnal blackness that could not be seen—and that, in one of her plays, Aphra Behn associated through a black female character with the "black ace," the invisible female genitalia—gave way to the higher sense of sight. Night yields "to the light, As Blacknesse hath to *Beautie*." Hidden, mysterious, and invisible, the black hole signified absence (or was it engulfing presence?), the dark continent of Freud's later imperial conflation of woman and Africa. The masque turned blackness into the desire to be illuminated by and for the white male gaze. Sexualized, that imaginary desire of lower black for higher white would move with the slave trade to the British colonies in the New World, where, two centuries after "The Masque of Blacknesse," the father of the Declaration of Independence postulated a chain of lust running upward from orangutan to African to colonizer.[4]

The second meaning of the color symbolism, Christian, "washed white" the *Aethiope*, as the blood of the lamb cleansed English sins. The

souls of the damned in medieval mystery plays were often black, a spiritual darkness that, in its rejection of the Christian second birth, allied blacks with Jews. In a text that foreshadows the American melting pot, St. Jerome preached, "You are of your father the devil. . . . So it was said to the Jews. . . . Born in this first instance, of such parentage, we are naturally black. . . . But you will say to me, 'I have left the home of my childhood, I have forgotten my father, I am born anew in Christ.' . . . Your bridegroom [Christ] . . . has married an Ethiopian woman. He will miraculously change your complexion so that [you have] . . . been made white."[5]

Promising regenerative identity, St. Jerome's salvation whitened Jews much as the king of England whitened blacks. *The Masque of Blacknesse,* however, was contemporary with the racialization of Jews and Africans in early modern Europe, the insistence that their sinful souls were imprisoned in sinful bodies from which conversion could not free them. Reconquered Spain expelled its Jews in 1492, the year Columbus discovered America, and persecuted converted Moriscos in the next century because heresy now resided in blood and not faith. Slaves were undergoing the same racialization, for by the time the slave trade joined together Africa, Europe, and the New World, it had created the first period in European history in which almost all slaves were black.[6] In dramatizing a royal black conversion to white, Ben Jonson was looking backward to the medieval magus. Whites in blackface in the imperial capitalist future would play black mimicry of white to expose the fixedness of black racial inferiority.

Moreover, the power of Jonson's English monarch, in the third meaning of the masques' color symbolism, exemplified not so much medieval magic as modern sovereignty. Knowledge and salvation were in the hands of King James, who, standing for art against nature, "can salve the rude defects of every creature." His orb of illumination, in a locution that English imperialism would later apply to the natural sun as well, "neither rises nor sets in Britain." Blackness in Jonson's masques served the political art of the king.[7]

Even if it were subversively carnivalesque, or else an early instance of universalizing human sympathy, Queen Anne's desire to play black was recuperated for political order. Fitting Stephen Greenblatt's model of the Tudor/Stuart court, *The Masque of Blacknesse* staged subversion in order to contain it. Queen Anne could descend so long as she ascended. Blacked-up characters sank into chaos and bestiality in Jonson's play for the popular theater *The Gypsies Metamorphosed.* Unmasking themselves

to display the difference between their dyed skins and real "tawny faces," they warned against a depravity from which those dark by nature could not escape. Othello is exceptional in the sympathy accorded him in this era, but, with his gentleness instantaneously turned murderous, he does not violate the rule. The only benign Moors on the Tudor and Stuart stage had traded their freedom for singing and dancing on the pastoral plantation. Presented as arcadian denizens cut off from the real world, these slaves were actually at its material base. When blackface took center stage two centuries later in the former English colony that was now the United States, it had traversed the path from Africa to England, from the Stuart court to the popular theater, to be born, in its own myth of origins, on the southern plantation.[8]

Slavery forced Africans to perform for whites; the truth behind the fantasy that blackface accurately represented plantation slaves was that it mimed their expropriation. By domesticating transgressive desire, servitude made blacks safe for white attraction. Neither Africa nor southern slavery actually gave birth to American blackface, however: it emerged in the early nineteenth century from the new cities of the market revolution. Democratized from the court and the plantation, minstrelsy enacted the urban white desire to acquire African American expressive power and supposed emotional freedom without actually freeing the slaves.

If European blackface points to New World colonialism, the forced performance of black laborers on expropriated Indian land, American blackface emerged from the domestic history that formed the United States. The "cry was that we have no NATIVE MUSIC," proclaimed the preface to an antebellum book of "plantation songsters," "until our countrymen found a triumphant vindicating APOLLO in the genius of E. P. Christy, who . . . was the first to catch our *native airs* as they floated wildly, or hummed in the balmy breezes of the sunny south."[9] Among the most popular of the early minstrels, Christy turned black to white (advantage). Democratic descendant of Ben Jonson, he promoted America by advertising himself. Burnt cork, so the minstrel claimed, gave Apollonian form to the Dionysiac African, making art from his nature. The Apollo who turned the sounds of slaves into music supplied the United States with its original national culture.

The move from the Stuart court to the Bowery stage, from high to popular culture, democratized blackface. American minstrelsy, unlike its European antecedents, emerged from intimate contact between blacks and whites, from actual white experience with African American perfor-

mance. Did popular blackface challenge racial nature in the name of art? Liberated from royal glorification, did it support the proposition that subversion is more likely to be found in popular than in elite forms? Does resistance to elite domination appear when we turn our attention from traditional political arenas and reconceive politics in broader, cultural terms? Although blackface emerged from slavery, did its play with identity undercut the postulate of essential racial difference that justified white supremacy? Or did the beheading of the sovereign instead spread blackface influence, so that it served not the politics of dynastic empire but the culture of an imperial nation? Did the democratization of blackface liberate it from political control, or rather free it to serve new, micropolitical, racist functions in the service of national integration? If theatricality failed to contain subversion and preserve the power of the Stuart court, what was its relation to power in the democratic United States?

II

The slave owner who fathered the Declaration of Independence bequeathed to Americans a double national birth in both slavery and natural right. The Declaration of Independence, demanding freedom from enslavement to England for a new nation built on slavery, is the core product of that *mésalliance* in political theory. Blackface is its central cultural progeny. The Declaration of Independence, speaking for the equality of all men, seemed to promise that black could turn white. Blackface, organic to America's cultural declaration of independence from Europe half a century after the revolution, allowed whites to turn black and back again. From one point of view these forms of emancipation break down racial difference; from another they reinscribe it. However one turns the kaleidoscope, the popular culture form bears on the making of Americans as much as does the political doctrine.

Since politics and culture do not exist in separate, watertight compartments, blackface calls into question both the dominant liberal approach to the contradiction between slavery and freedom and the two perspectives, one focusing on racial oppression and the other on ethnicity, that have come to challenge it. Liberal universalism—from antebellum antislavery to Gunnar Myrdal's *American Dilemma* and Thurgood Marshall's and Earl Warren's *Brown v. Board of Education*—has

employed the promise of the Declaration of Independence against the practice of racial inequality. Slavery and segregation violated America's own principles on that view; the answer to racial subordination lay in extending equality to those excluded from it. "In principle the Negro problem was solved long ago; in practice the solution is not yet effectuated," wrote Myrdal, and while he stressed the resistance to matching practice to principle, the redemptive path, as he saw it, lay through the American creed.[10]

But the very recovery of racial inequality as a property of American society rather than of the stigmatized groups—the acknowledgment that produced *Brown*—shattered the liberal consensus along two fault lines. One, subjecting egalitarian theory to the judgment of racial practice, rather than the other way around, subordinated universalism to racism. Racial inequality was no southern exception outside liberalism, from this perspective, but the very ground of American freedom. Indian land and black labor generated the Europe-Africa-Americas trade that laid the foundation for commodity agriculture, industrial production, and state power. Slavery not only financed and undergirded the American revolution, Edmund Morgan showed; by keeping the propertyless proletariat racially stigmatized and in chains, it also permitted the assertion of natural rights for the white population without threatening social revolution. Worse yet, the Declaration of Independence's claim to equality shifted white supremacy onto pseudoscientific grounds. The same man who authored the Declaration, argued Winthrop Jordan, originated scientific racism as the new basis for sustaining racial hierarchy. Faced with southern resistance (including his own) to ending hereditary servitude, Jefferson grounded slavery in an irredeemable defect in black bodies that neither conversion to Christianity nor emancipation could cure. Chattel slavery, the expropriation of Indian and Mexican lands, and the repressive use and exclusion of Chinese and Mexican American labor were the conditions of American freedom rather than exceptions to it.[11]

The second challenge to the liberal position moved in the opposite direction, rejecting the binary racial division to displace race by ethnicity. In one formulation, ethnic pluralism characterized American social relations. The racial was a special instance of the ethnic group, not a contradiction to liberal individualism, and American history was characterized less by racial than by ethnocultural conflict. From the inverse perspective, the melting pot created permeable ethnic and racial boundaries, dissolving Old World, parochial ties to effect a shared American iden-

tity. Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan's *Beyond the Melting Pot* classically stated the first position, Werner Sollors's *Beyond Ethnicity* the second; beneath the argument between these books, however, was their shared turn away from race.[12]

Both the perspective centering on racial inequality and the one decentering race by ethnicity are blinded by their central insights. Racial subordination formed the American nation, giving racist stereotypes an intractable material base resistant to the liberal wish for equality. Thus white predation was inverted and assigned to colored nature, most famously in the attributions to Indians of violence and lack of respect for the property of others, and in the assignment to black men of laziness and sexual desire for white women. The fantasy of racial contamination names, against itself, the contaminated origins of the United States in white supremacy. Nonetheless, a paradox lies at the heart of the racial basis of the formation of the United States. For the development of a distinctive national identity, the emancipation of the United States from colonial dependence on England, derived not only from expropriated Indian land and black labor, but also from a proclaimed intimacy between whites and peoples of color. The society that developed materially from establishing rigid boundaries between the white and dark races developed culturally from transgressing those same boundaries. Hysteria over miscegenation and the mixing of bodily fluids operated alongside racial cross-dressing. The supremacist elevation of the white above the inferior races constituted red and black as points of attraction. White men entered, in sexual and theatrical invasion, the black bodies they had consigned to physicalized inferiority. Minstrelsy practices what James Snead calls " 'exclusionary emulation,' the principle whereby the power and trappings of black culture are imitated while at the same time their black originators are segregated away and kept at a distance." To adapt Milton Gordon's terms, structural segregation of racial minorities engendered white cultural assimilation in the racial interactions that constituted the dominant culture. Racial aversion alone cannot account for the American history of race-based inequality. American identity was formed as well out of destructive racial desire.[13]

The land, the frontier, and Indian war shifted American sacred history from biblical text to New World nature. The captivity narrative was the first American national literature. Together with other tales of Indian warfare, it produced the wilderness hero as the first distinctive American and the frontier myth as the first distinctive meaning of America. Meanwhile, as Daniel Boone and Leatherstocking were becoming

national heroes, blackface minstrelsy was emerging as the first and most pervasive form of American mass culture. Both the frontier myth and blackface enacted triumphs over peoples of color. Both also exploited identification, for the Indianization or the blacking up of the white was the crucial step in leaving behind an Old World identity and making a new. Just as frontier violence imitated the imaginary Indian by punishing native Americans for dismembering whites, so blackface symbolically entered the black body, crossing the barrier supposedly erected to protect whites from black desire.[14]

Analogous to the blacked-up E. P. Christy, Natty Bumppo cross-dressed as Indian and yet remained pure because he was "a man without a cross" of Indian blood. But the extermination of Indians as the frontier moved west restricted "the red [race to] our border," in James Madison's formulation, limiting redface largely to metaphor. The actual darkening of skin in popular theater, however, emerged from and regulated relations with "the black race in our bosom."[15] Since race created Americans, the ethnocultural perspective should attend to racial history rather than substitute for it. Racial cross-dressing turned sojourners into pioneers and immigrants into whites. Blackface and the frontier myth, bringing race and ethnicity together, created the distinctive feature of American multiculturalism: racial division and ethnic incorporation.

The rediscovery of the centrality of Indian land and black labor in the creation of the United States has led to claims about the marginalization of peoples of color in this country and the need to make them visible. That reproach may properly be directed to twentieth-century scholarship, particularly the consensus versions of American exceptionalism during the cold war. *The Power of Blackness,* Harry Levin's classic study of the American literary Renaissance, alluded not to African Americans but to gothic, psychological darkness. Levin had forgotten Richard Wright's reminder with regard to *Native Son* that he had not invented horror: rather, as the classic American literature itself insisted, horror had invented him.[16]

Indeed, if cold war scholarship blacked out the power of blackness, the classic literature certainly did not. "The very manner by which American literature distinguishes itself as a coherent entity," writes Toni Morrison, "exists because of this unsettling presence [of first Africans and then African Americans]."[17] Examining texts in which blacks are at the margins, Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* has been accused of falsely making race central to American literature. Although the view from the margins shifts the center, there is nothing marginal in the Indian and

black presences that have constituted high and popular American culture from James Fenimore Cooper to William Faulkner to Morrison herself, from Mary Rowlandson to John Ford to Leslie Marmon Silko, from Stephen Foster to Elvis Presley to Otis Redding. Far from ignoring peoples of color, the white gaze renders them invisible, as Ralph Ellison's novel shows—not by averting the eyes but by staring so as not to see. Focusing attention on blackness protects whiteness as the unexamined given, the absence of color, the terrible void at which, Morrison has reminded us, *Moby Dick* tried and failed to make the country look. Blackface, the performance of the white man's African American, opens the door to the meanings of whiteness in the United States.[18]

III

White men portrayed blacks on the American stage before the revolution as bestial figures of low comedy. In the first native musical, *The Disappointment* (1767), a blacked-up white actor plays the vain, greedy, cowardly role that was already the blackface stereotype. But there was no effort to root blackface characters in Afro-American life until the resurgence of American nationalism in the wake of the War of 1812. The Age of Jackson, which began with the slave-owning general's nationalist campaigns against English and native Americans, combined political and cultural democratization. American blackface is a product of that moment.[19]

Westward expansion, the market revolution, and political democratization engendered a national culture in the antebellum United States. Declarations of cultural independence from Europe—including those of Emerson (on nature) and Melville (on Cooper and Hawthorne), as well as F. O. Matthiessen (on the American Renaissance), Richard Chase (on the romance), R. W. B. Lewis (on the American Adam), and Leslie Fiedler (on interracial *Liebestod* along the frontier)—have all located the birth of our canonical high culture in the Jacksonian Age. While the writers of the American Renaissance were striving for national renown, however, the mass public was devouring sensation novels, reform tracts, domestic melodramas, gothic stories, captivity narratives, and frontier tall tales. The canonized writers themselves, writes David Reynolds, drew upon "a raw and vibrant Americanism" in popular literature to combat staid, genteel European imports. But when James Gordon Bennett de-

cided in the 1830s to "blacken his face" to attract an audience for the *New York Herald* with scandal and sensation, his turn of phrase pointed to the most popular and nationalist form of all. For the Jacksonian period was marked by urban as well as westward expansion. It also gave birth—in the cities not the countryside, among the new working class not the pioneers, and in relation to African not native Americans—to blackface minstrelsy. Like the classic American literature of Fielder's description, minstrelsy was an all-male entertainment form, combining racial and gender cross-dressing, male bonding and racial exclusion, misogyny and drag.[20]

When Arthur Schlesinger Jr., in 1946, presented Jacksonian Democracy as an urban, popular, worker-based movement, he failed to make the blackface connection. But the repressed returns in Schlesinger's paean to Jackson's New Deal, where blackface serves this Jewish historian of immigrant descent as the sign of American democratic culture. *The Age of Jackson* begins with crowds, flocking to Washington for Old Hickory's inauguration, who "went to the Amphitheatre to watch George Washington Dixon, . . . first of the great black-face artists." The masses enjoyed blackface, writes Schlesinger, though "the more high-toned preferred [the] bewitching Clara Fisher at the Theatre." Half a century later, Schlesinger, protesting against "the disuniting of America," might do well to remind himself of what he once embraced as the fancy dress of nationalist popular revival.[21]

Yankee, backwoodsman, and blackface minstrel, emerging simultaneously in assertions of American nationalism, were the first voices of the American vernacular to challenge aristocratic Europe. Just as each proclaimed a regional identity—Northeast, West, and South—each also came to signify the new nation as a whole. The Yankee became Uncle Sam, while the backwoodsman metamorphosed into the western hero of the frontier myth. Both these figures, however, were surpassed in national appeal by the minstrel. Edwin Forrest was, in 1820, the first actor on the American stage to impersonate a plantation slave. Three years later, T. D. Rice, claiming to be imitating a crippled black hostler, began to "jump Jim Crow." Coming out of the commercial bustle on the Ohio River, wearing Uncle Sam's red, white, and blue striped trousers and a blue coat beneath his black face, the enormously popular "Daddy" Rice combined Yankee, frontiersman, and minstrel into a single national icon. Dan Emmett introduced the professional blackface minstrel troupe to New York in 1842, and minstrels performed at the White House two years later. For the next half century "our only original American insti-

tution," as one minstrel called it, remained the most popular mass spectacle in the United States.[22]

Minstrelsy's successors, vaudeville, Tin Pan Alley, motion pictures, and radio, did not so much displace as incorporate blackface. Ethnic stereotypes performed in blackface were a vaudeville staple. Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll, white men with black voices, invented the serial form that established a distinctive niche for radio. Their *Amos 'n' Andy* became the most popular radio show of the period bridging the end of the Jazz Age and the beginning of the New Deal. Likewise, white Americans created a national popular music by capitalizing on black roots, from Stephen Foster's "Oh! Susanna" and "Old Folks at Home," performed by minstrels in the Age of Jackson; to Irving Berlin's "Alexander's Ragtime Band" and George Gershwin's "Swanee," staples of the blackface revitalization of the early twentieth century; to Elvis Presley and his successors, who found inspiration in black music and performance styles after literal blackface had lost national legitimacy. Movies covered a large territory in American dream life, and playing black was marginal or absent from the normal studio product; but as we have seen, the four transformative moments in motion picture history were founded on blackface. When the eighth edition of *Halliwell's Filmgoer's Companion* used for its cover the blackface poster advertising *The Jazz Singer,* it displayed the links between minstrelsy, vaudeville, and motion pictures.[23]

In 1927—the foundational date for this book—when *Amos 'n' Andy* was on the verge of becoming the most popular radio show in the United States, *The Jazz Singer* opened as both the first talking picture and the first movie musical. *Show Boat,* the first Broadway musical play (in which the story was more than a pro forma excuse for the songs), premiered that same year. *The Jazz Singer* featured Al Jolson in blackface, while in *Show Boat* Tess Gardella, billed as "Aunt Jemima," played Queenie in blackface. *Show Boat*'s subplot featured one of the two major tropes in racial mixing: the tragic mulatta who tries to pass. *The Jazz Singer* took as its subject the other: blacking up. Warner Bros.' first Looney Tunes animation paid homage to Jolson with a black boy named "Bosco." The most ubiquitous cartoon character of all, Walt Disney's white-gloved and black-faced Mickey Mouse, was copied from the *Jazz Singer.*[24]

What does it mean that a structure of exploitation produced a culture of identification? Three interpretations of blackface bear on that question. The most contemporary, by way of its class-based attention to popular culture on the one hand and its gender-based celebration of cross-

dressing on the other, approaches blackface as a protest, however compromised, against rigid, biologized divisions. That perspective is post–new left and postmodern, in that it shifts from radical politics and high culture to subversive moments in a popular culture traditionally considered nonpolitical, turns to the sensationalized body genres of the expressive lower classes, and ransacks history to bring old forms up-to-date.[25]

The postmodern recuperation of blackface as expressive popular culture challenges the censorship of blackface desire in politically oriented, old left, class-based, integrationist condemnations of minstrelsy. Modernist and radical in their suspicion of mass culture, those repudiating minstrelsy favor political transformation to overcome a contaminated past.[26] That view reversed, in turn, traditional celebrations of minstrelsy as the common people's culture, in one form, or, in another, as the pure product of a unified America. I proceed in reverse, from postmodern cultural pleasure and danger to modernist political disapproval to patriotic nostalgia. Carrying back the contributions of the more recent historiography, I will argue, far from demolishing the original position, simply turns a positive into a negative sign.

IV

Blackface is a form of cross-dressing, in which one puts on the insignias of a sex, class, or race that stands in binary opposition to one's own. Current attention to cross-dressing, however, derives from gender and not racial studies. There are good theoretical reasons to privilege sexual over racial cross-dressing, since the construction of sexual difference is a universal feature of culture. Sexual and racial cross-dressing may not do the same work, a possibility that problematizes the use of gender cross-dressing theory to answer questions raised by race. But where the prevailing historical cross-dressing practice has been grounded on race, then the theory must do justice to the resulting sexuoracial system.[27] I begin by bringing race to theories of gender cross-dressing, and then turn to postmodern accounts of ethnic and racial masquerade.

An early feminist suspicion that cross-dressing gave men license to speak for women has been challenged by the more recent feminist, gay, and lesbian promotion of destabilized gender boundaries. In the first view, the cross-dresser acquires power over the sex from whose position

he speaks and reassures himself about his own identity. In the second view, however, the cross-dresser parodies and denaturalizes the binary opposition. The movement from nature to art thereby empowers not Ben Jonson's political sovereign but the role-players, who, performing their own multiple identities, subvert political power.[28]

Supporters and opponents of cross-dressing within gender studies share a common target: the well-defended, rigidly bounded, heterosexual white male. The focus on gender challenges his place as universal subject; it celebrates boundary fluidity, whether in the service of a community of women or of gender transgression. In the United States, however, white males are the historically important cross-dressers, and their transvestitism operates inside their racial masquerade. Cross-dressing came to center stage not as gender play in a period of growing sexual equality, but as racial play in an epoch of racial inequality. Minstrelsy challenged compulsory heterosexuality with blackface female impersonation and straight and gay homoerotic desire, by making race the enabling condition. With occasional exceptions, those most fascinated by whites in blackface, from its theatrical origins to the present moment (and I include myself), have been white men.

Racial integrationists, like gender-benders, wanted to break down a socially constructed binary that was presented as biologically based. But because blackface was the product of slavery and segregation, a defense of cross-dressing did not emerge from the integrationist politics of race. Nor did racial cross-dressing find favor in the shift from a civil rights to a black nationalist perspective. The relative success of middle-class white women compared to blacks, in the wake of the feminist and civil rights movements, may have initially generated boundary-breakdown theories from within the former group and a boundary-maintenance consciousness within the latter. Nationalism, however, risks postulating an essential black subject, thus reinscribing the supposedly overthrown patriarch within the Afrocentric community. Many black intellectuals now insist on historically inscribed, multiple black subject-positions—as hybridity or double consciousness, as individuals or a people (like any other) composed of more than one gender, class, and sexual orientation. Does the rejection of a sealed-off, homogeneous blackness move one closer to supporting the practice of whites speaking as blacks or the theory that rejects fixed identity in favor of performativity?[29]

Cross-dressing allegedly challenges binary categories in two ways: by locating pleasure in the in-between condition (woman dressed as man, white as black) and by parodying the supposedly natural identity. Cross-

dressing is said, first, to signify not either/or but both/and, the "both" pointing to the two identities in play, the "and" to the playfulness itself. Because it challenges the either/or, cross-dressing marks what Marjorie Garber calls a "category crisis." Occupying the "space of desire" at the entrance into culture, Garber's transvestite calls into question the repressive division between man and woman, aristocrat and commoner, white and black.[30]

Liminal figures are often border-crossing incendiaries. But marking a category crisis may also provide symbolic reassurance, mastering the anxiety about mobile identities rather than challenging the social order. Garber shows how cultural prohibitions generate the return of what was intended to be repressed. Brilliantly allying her "third sex" with the third term in the Lacanian system of real/imaginary/symbolic, she argues that the transvestite and Lacan's "law of the father" overcome the splitting that characterizes the imaginary, mirror, stage. However, rightly suspicious of those who see transvestitism as simply the refusal to grow up, Garber does not sufficiently acknowledge in theory what her breathtaking proliferation of examples shows in practice: that repressive, narrow, adult identities and play-acting at the excluded alternatives may be mutually reinforcing.[31]

To point to appropriative desire in cross-dressing is not to espouse an essentialism in which, for example, white should remain white, and black, black; rather, it is to investigate whether racial masquerade may be generated and contaminated by the rigid boundary itself. One sign of contamination, in an analogy with an individual's hysterical symptom, is the deauthorization of the cross-dresser, who comes forward as a ridiculous both/and rather than a dignified either/or. Although both/and sounds more radical and inclusive than either/or, its racial history points in quite the other direction. Slaves were both human and property in proslavery thought; the primitive trying to become civilized was made fun of as both man and animal. Blackface played with that doubleness, ridiculing, for example, the alleged misuse of the English language by African Americans. Crossing boundaries to parody those who crossed boundaries, minstrelsy participated in the both/and of racial inequality.[32]

Parody, as the instance of the savage who presumes to speak indicates, implies constraint perhaps more than liberation. Judith Butler is right to argue that "the replication of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original. Thus gay is to straight *not* as copy is to orig-

inal, but rather as copy is to copy. The parodic repetition of 'the original' . . . reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the *idea* of the natural and the original."[33] But reveals to whom, one wants to know, for the contemporary critic may decipher a relationship between imitation and imitated at odds with that intended by performers or perceived by historical audiences. Since stereotypes hold together the centrifugal forces that would otherwise pull believers apart—the difference denied between human and animal, for example, or the similarity denied between male and female—the analyst's ability to identify those contradictions should be confused with neither the creator's intention nor the mass audience's reception.

Moreover, as Butler has also argued, performativity scripts identities. It defines group members by the roles they are forced to play. Far from simply escaping power, performance also operates under its sign.[34] Saidiya Hartman has powerfully applied Butler's notion of performativity to the condition of slaves, who were forced to perform as minstrels were not. She shows how the master's demand for the production of pleasure penetrated to the heart of pain, to chattel singing and dancing on their way to be sold. From the slave-auction coffle to the use of the fiddle, slaves struggled to seize and subvert their coerced roles. The master's command performances, in Hartman's analysis, compromised and made vulnerable black efforts to regain and retain self-expression. Slaves developed masks of entertainment and servitude to protect themselves from white intrusions.[35]

How do we situate minstrelsy in this field of power? African Americans may have inhabited an expressive culture that whites in blackface were drawn to copy, and minstrels may have imitated free blacks in the first instance rather than slaves, but in appropriating African American virtuosity minstrels presented a masking means of defense as if it issued forth from the essential black. Turning masking against its originators, minstrelsy copies of black often mocked black efforts to imitate white. The genteel version of white supremacy operated according to the same punishing logic of mimicry. Encouraging blacks to model themselves on whites, paternalists trapped African Americans into role-playing. Given that the African "genius was imitative," wrote the plantation historian U. B. Phillips, slaves learned civilization by copying their masters. Populist whites in burnt cork followed that injunction—just as Butler's theory predicts—to parody the aristocratic pretensions of the planter ruling class. Nonetheless, they denaturalized class only by reducing the planter to the low human level of the blackface slave.[36]

"Performativity describes [the] relation of being implicated in that which one opposes," writes Butler. That insight should not lead one to confuse black with blackface performances, however, for the racial cross-dressing mode did not oppose the racial hierarchy in which it, like black role-playing, was implicated. If performance makes caricatures, thus essentializing as well as denaturalizing social roles, it is necessary to ask whether, when, and for whom cross-dressing is a "turning of power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power."[37] Blackface, I will argue, loosened up white identities by taking over black ones, by underscoring the line between white and black.

Drag queens who dress as women and whites who black up call attention to the gap between role and ascribed identity by playing what, in the essentialist view, they cannot be. The inverse form of masquerade opens that same gap by acting the ascribed role rather than the forbidden one. Joan Riviere's classic "Womanliness as a Masquerade" reported on independent women who performed as ultrafeminine to cauterize the threat, to both themselves and male co-workers, of their phallic power. This feminine masquerade, Mary Ann Doane suggests, freed Riviere's subjects from woman-as-body—as black was female in *The Masque of Blacknesse* for Ben Jonson's daughters of Niger—and gained them distance from their prescribed identities. Seeking to be subjects rather than objects, they acquired the same sight that the daughters of Niger gained by turning from black to white. Butler notices the other side, however, the price paid by private role-playing, which neither discredits the performed female part for those not in the know (who include Riviere's female masqueraders themselves) nor obtains the bodily pleasure that would come with full embrace of the "masculine" position.[38]

Blacking up is a public rather than a secret border crossing; but unlike the female masquerader, the minstrel passes down. Those with the insignias of power can play at giving them up, suggests Tania Modleski, without putting themselves at risk.[39] Multiple status hierarchies may complicate a single up-and-down directionality, to be sure; how does one classify the drag queen of color? But s/he suggests yet another distinction in performing identities, that between the costume as a way of life and as a part that can be discarded at will. The more freedom there is to try on different genders, ethnicities, and other roles, the more likely the performed identity will have little purchase on the self.[40]

The more performance scripts identity, the more it serves power; the more the freedom to perform any role, the less subversion in the play.

The transvestite seizure and subversion of power relations by mocking them from within is only one cross-dressing modality. It may share a family resemblance with others. Does it share one with minstrelsy?

V

Admiration and ridicule, appropriation and homage, transience and permanence, pathos and play, deception and self-deception, stereotyped and newly invented, passing up and passing down, class, sex, and race—all these elements in contradictory combination can play their role in masquerade. Because cross-dressing contains multiple possibilities in theory, celebratory accounts must enter history. Yet American history seems to stand in the way. One might expect endorsements of masquerade to run aground on their largely repressed past, meeting their match in blackface. In the current excitement over popular culture, however, the direction of influence runs the other way, not disciplining present theory by past practice, but opening the past to contemporary interests.

Some studies, subsuming racial within more permeable ethnic divisions, make blackface one more example of the play with group identity, that is, the supposed use of ethnic stereotypes to break those same stereotypes down. The ideology of pure racial types is discredited, according to these scholars, when Irish blackface performers mock the white man's vanishing Indian, when Eddie Cantor dons Jewface, blackface, and redface in a single show, when Hugh Herbert, playing the Chinese "Chow Chow," breaks into Yiddish before he drops to his knees in an imitation of Jolson's blackface "My Mammy." Other studies turn the minstrel show itself into the center of interracial attraction. Minstrelsy, writes Eric Lott, was "a manifestation of the particular desire to try on the accents of 'blackness' and demonstrate the permeability of the color line." Blackface operated "to facilitate safely an exchange of energies between two otherwise rigidly bounded and policed cultures. . . . Cross-racial desire," as Lott sees it, "coupled a nearly insupportable fascination with a self-protective derision with respect to black people." That explosive combination "made blackface minstrelsy less a sign of absolute white power and control than of panic, anxiety, terror, and pleasure." Or as the headline over a 1993 *New York Times* review put the matter, evincing even more sympathy for minstrelsy than

the book under discussion, "Minstrel Tradition: Not Just a Racist Relic."[41]

Love and Theft, Lott's immensely creative, richly textured study, uncovers within blackface what it had to disown: white attraction to African Americans not just as instinct but as authority. Lott's minstrels, far from condescendingly passing down when they masqueraded as members of a stigmatized group, acquire what George Lipsitz (who withheld his term from blackface) calls "prestige from below." The prominent early minstrel Dan Emmett claimed he "always strictly confined [him]self to the habits and crude ideas of the slaves of the South." Minstrelsy was actually born, Lott shows, at more egalitarian sites of interracial mixing, on the docks and in the taverns and theaters of northern and western cities. The people who originated minstrelsy, moreover, also came from below. They may have been straight white males, not women or gay men, but they belonged to the working class.[42]

Blackface, in Lott's view, is an American carnivalesque, allied to rituals of transgression in early modern Europe. It bears a family resemblance to charivaris, where women on top, ritually humiliating men, temporarily reversed the traditional gender order, and to rites of protest, where, for example, male youths in female dress and blackface defended their communal forests from the encroachments of capitalist enterprise. In the American form, young white working-class men challenged the traditional culture of deference and the class hierarchy and self-discipline of the emerging bourgeoisie by speaking in the accents and assuming the bodies of African Americans. Mocking elite hypocrisy and power, expressing an exuberant, democratic culture, minstrelsy, in this view, authorized a black place to stand. Attentive to African American linguistic and performance practices, minstrels, writes William Mahar, "inject[ed] a vital, discordant, and satirical language into popular comedy." Blackface caricature demeaned its subjects, Lott does not forget, but only under the sign of ridicule could minstrels celebrate (the *Love* in Lott's title) "the long-tailed blue," "the rampageous black penis," and appropriate (the *Theft*) black language, labor, and performance styles. Caricature masked "the surreptitious return of desire," in Stuart Hall's phrase, the disowned attraction that retained subversive political potential.[43]

Lott's interracial solidarity points to class; for W. T. Lhamon, blackface mobilized youth revolt as well. Working-class young men were, in Lhamon's analysis, challenging the family structure, sexual self-denial, and adult role-expectations of merchant capitalists and middle-class fam-

ilies. By borrowing black parodies of their masters, rebellious white youths created, against a European-oriented cultural elite, an authentic American vernacular. Blackface "passed well beyond racist travesty," Lhamon insists, because its primary targets were moralizing women and white men with aristocratic pretensions, not African Americans. The self-control and thrift promoted in marketplace and domestic ideology were made fun of in popular culture.[44]

Focusing on class and youth revolt brings postmodern fluidity into productive relationship with bounded social structures. The consequences for interracial solidarity and generational and class conflict, however, are very nearly the opposite of what Lott and Lhamon wish. So anxious are they to find points of identification across racial lines that, protests notwithstanding, they dwell insufficiently both on the exclusion of actual African Americans from their own representations and on the grotesque, demeaning, animalistic blackface mask. Blackface buffoonery varied widely in content but was flawed fundamentally in form, for the color line was permeable in only one direction. Driving free blacks from the stage, burnt cork substituted for African American entertainers. Blackface took hold in the North, where blacks were free, not because it challenged racial subordination but because it replaced African American performance; blacks themselves entertained white masters, on informal as well as formal occasions, where they were safely in chains.[45]

The myth of the American West provides a useful point of comparison. Ralph Waldo Emerson, seeking to liberate American culture from "the sepulchres of the fathers," praised "the exploits of Boone and David Crockett" for injecting "a new and stronger tone in our literature." These Indianized frontier heroes, like Lhamon's minstrels, rebelled against the controls being imposed on middle-class young men. But the rhetorical aggression of Crockett's generational revolt, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg shows, served not social oedipal rebellion but westward expansion. Although as a Whig congressman the real Crockett opposed Jacksonian Indian removal, the mythic Crockett's western violence boasted of the tortures the frontiersman inflicted not on the fathers at home but on women and people of color.[46]

By the same token, blackface was an alternative to interracial political solidarity, not the failed promise of it. Young urban working-class men blacked up to attack African American neighborhoods. Stage blackface followed these blackface riots of the 1820s, and even if the rioters and minstrel audiences were not identical,[47] they came from the same milieu. Whites put on burnt cork to attack blacks onstage as well as off.

Blackface did not engender a single interracial political working-class alliance. On the contrary, as Lott himself writes, the turn to culture in the working class—temperance and religion on the one side, the expansion of blackface on the other—followed the defeat of labor party and trade union militancy after the panic of 1837.[48]

Politically oriented, modernist interpretations also root blackface in class division. But for Alexander Saxton and David Roediger, minstrelsy marks not the "moment when a possible interracial laboring alliance went awry," but rather the point of origin for white worker consciousness in terms simultaneously of class and color. Slavery "stalled the development of a telling critique of hireling labor," writes Roediger, by generating the contrast between degraded, dependent blacks and manly, independent whites. Artisans facing proletarianization, together with day laborers and unskilled workers denied access to mastery of a craft, turned the republican critique of effeminate dependence against blacks.[49]

Minstrelsy constitutes white worker self-consciousness, for Saxton, in straightforward race hatred. But why would white workers assume, perform, and watch an imaginary black body they merely despised? Whereas Saxton sees only racial aversion, Roediger focuses on contaminated racial desire. Attraction did not subvert domination, in his account, but rather required it. The white worker subjected to a new labor discipline turned the African American into (the phrase is George Rawick's) "a pornography of his former life." In Roediger's words, "The white working class, disciplined and made anxious by fear of dependency, began during its formation to construct an image of the Black population as 'other'—as embodying the preindustrial, erotic, careless style of life the white worker hated and longed for." White workers who attacked wage slavery to distinguish themselves from black chattel on the job enjoyed imitations of the imaginary black at play. Enacting "the natural self at odds with the normative self of industrial culture," minstrelsy retained in leisure-time release the pleasure that had to be left behind. Admiring and expropriating what it saw as African American expressive power, minstrelsy split work from play, tied gratification to shiftlessness, and, writes Roediger, deprived black and white workers alike of access to the collective, preindustrial work rhythms of African American labor.[50]

Instead of flirting with interracial solidarity, white workers who crossed racial boundaries turned against public black events. The carnivalesque Negro Election Day festivals, which whites had once joined under the lead of blacks, succumbed both to white urban hostility toward a collective black presence on the streets and to the free black com-

munity's concern for public dignity. Negro Election Days were replaced first by blackface riots and then by blackface minstrelsy. Minstrels who played black were the first self-consciously white performers; "blackface literally stepped in as [a] popular entertainment craze at the very moment that genuinely black performers and celebrations were driven out."[51]

Cross-racial identification may or may not have had its transgressive moments; blackface gender cross-dressing expressed only mockery. Far from challenging rigid sexual divisions, minstrel drag ridiculed women who crossed gender boundaries by demanding their rights. The aggressive women of minstrel caricature made grotesque both female bodily desire and the moral authority of domestic ideology. Opened wide enough to swallow "the long-tailed blue," in Lott's account, was the enormous female blackface mouth. White men masked as black women to display and ridicule insatiable female sexual appetite and the weaker sex's pretensions to independence. Minstrelsy's attack on genteel culture paralleled the classic American literature described by D. H. Lawrence and Leslie Fiedler. White youths, both in writing and on the stage, embraced men of color in turning against civilizing female morality. The difference is that there was more sex in working-class blackface than in the boys' books of Fiedler's America.[52]

Minstrelsy did not remain a distinctive class expression for long, however. By the 1840s class conflict was giving way to national unity. Although it had originated in unstructured popular spaces, where performers and spectators changed places, blackface now swept the country as commercial, scripted, mass spectacle, with a separate stratum of celebrated, paid entertainers. Minstrelsy was maturing from popular to mass culture. The young white working-class men who stole black culture rebelliously to create their own class and generational identities were themselves expropriated in turn. Minstrelsy may have staged the sex and violence frowned upon by genteel culture, but like the Baltimore mobs that spurned bankers to attack free black neighborhoods, blackface performed, in Roediger's phrase, the "respectable rowdiness of safe rebellion." The minstrelized black body in lower-class performance spaces did not set class against class but rather released middle-class men from civilized self-restraint. Soon blackface was uniting the sexes as well. Mark Twain may have scandalized his mother and aunt by taking them to a minstrel show, but they ended up laughing as hard as he did: blackface was meeting with family-values approval. Since minstrel pseudopopulism celebrated not worker against boss but America against Europe,

and since its masquerades reinforced rather than challenged racial and gender hierarchies, blackface quickly acquired national cultural status.[53]

Blackface did produce a racial politics, but it was a party, not a class, politics, and it allied white workers not with slaves but with masters. The political party that created, against old-family elite deference, the first form of mass democratic politics was also tied, as Alexander Saxton has shown, to the first form of mass culture. Like the early expressions of independent working-class political and economic organization, blackface was co-opted by the Jacksonian Democrats. Most of the leading minstrel performers, as well as the leading minstrel songwriter, Stephen Foster, were proslavery, Democratic unionists; Foster wrote campaign songs for the Democratic Party. Instead of promoting a cross-race political alliance of black and white workers, minstrelsy cemented the cross-class regional alliance between the white-worker and southern-planter wings of Jacksonian Democracy. Far from representing a failed interracial workers' union, minstrelsy realized the Jacksonian dream of allying the northern popular classes with slave labor. Ethnoculturally as well, minstrelsy's sex and violence fit Jacksonian populism better than Whig moral guardianship. In the half century surrounding the Civil War, minstrelsy mostly served the Democratic Party.[54]

The Forty-niners who crossed the country singing "Oh! Susanna" carried Jacksonian expansion westward. They blacked up the third wing of the democracy, the proponents of Manifest Destiny. Blackface spread to California, becoming immediately popular among miners and in the new city of San Francisco. "The national airs of America," Bayard Taylor reported back, "follow the American race in all its migrations, colonizations and conquests." America's national music, "the Ethiopian melodies," were made in the minstrel show.[55]

The nationalization of blackface registered the splintering of the Democratic Party, however, which could no more control blackface than could the white working class. The Forty-niners who sang as slaves freed by the West had no interest in emancipating blacks; they wanted to preserve California for free white men. That free-soil opposition to the expansion of slavery split the Democratic Party.

As longing for a lost home supplemented the ribald sexuality of early working-class blackface, minstrelsy's appeal broadened across class and gender lines. The comforting, emotional slave, an entirely proslavery creation, counterbalanced the sexual aggression enacted by the blackface northern male. In such Foster classics as "Old Black Joe" and "My Old Kentucky Home," slaves were carrying the desire of mobile whites for a

stable, ordered, pastoral world. Foster, an antisecessionist Democrat, opposed emancipation even as he wrote Union songs during the Civil War. But he had composed "My Old Kentucky Home" for the stage, blackface Uncle Tom, hero of the novel that had turned plantation nostalgia in an abolitionist direction.[56]

Enacting Harriet Beecher Stowe's insistence that white Americans imagine themselves as suffering slaves, whites in blackface played Tom, Eliza, and Topsy in the theatrical productions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that swept the country in the 1850s. Now blackface was not only embracing slaves but also supporting antislavery politics. There was considerable overlap, to be sure, between the proslavery and sentimental abolitionist structures of feeling, for maternalist abolitionism embedded itself in plantation nostalgia. Stowe may speak for freedom, but her heart belongs to the interracial southern home. The fundamental losses required and lamented by *Uncle Tom's Cabin* point backward to the extended black-and-white Shelby family (sans white father) in Kentucky and to the erotic triangle of Tom, St. Clair, and Little Eva (sans white mother). (Stage productions often condensed the novel by having Tom's crucifier, Simon Legree, destroy the Louisiana polymorphous paradise by killing St. Clair.)[57]

Nonetheless, if some stage versions detached carefree and nostalgic slaves from Stowe's antislavery message, others did not. Stowe's romantic racialism celebrated the black race's emotional primitivism and the African's Christian capacity to endure suffering. The novel that, as Abraham Lincoln told Stowe, caused the Civil War realized the sympathetic potential and revolutionary political implications of blackface. But, by taking revenge on the working-class male bonding at blackface's origins, it did so as domestic melodrama, not male youth revolt, with tears and not semen (to invoke Linda Williams's fluid-based classification of low-culture body genres). Although contemporary feminists divide over cross-dressing, it is no surprise that when racial boundary fluidity served antislavery, it took a maternalist form.[58]

Daddy Rice began his blackface career jumping Jim Crow; he ended it playing Uncle Tom.[59] He supplied the two faces of the plantation darky, carefree and ("Old Black Joe") mournful. Antislavery blackface capitalized on the imago of the feminized black male; Jacksonian working-class minstrelsy offered his negative, the oversexed, hypermasculine exhibitionist. Divided between them was the imaginary past self left behind—passive, dependent, and longing for lost nurture on the one hand, grotesque, libidinal, and aggressive on the other.

Working-class audiences cheered for Eliza's escape across the ice and wept for Uncle Tom. Insofar as blackface supported antislavery sentiments, however, it lost both its masculinist and class-specific appeals. Nor did antislavery blackface survive the Civil War. There were significant interracial working-class alliances in the wake of emancipation, as there had not been under slavery. Moments of postbellum labor solidarity across racial lines, however, emerged not from imaginary identifications with a disowned black self in popular culture, but rather from the success of the antislavery political struggle. Blackface served neither interracial labor rebellion nor radical Republican politics, but rather Democratic Party Negrophobia.[60]

Uncle Tom's Cabin remained the most often performed theatrical spectacle in the United States, as touring companies kept Foster's songs alive for half a century. Far from perpetuating antislavery, however, the play mourned a lost antebellum world. Plantation scenes took over the minstrel show after the Civil War. Like other baroque minstrel spectacles, postbellum productions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* promoted national reconciliation by celebrating the plantation, on the one hand, and intensifying racial division, on the other. Racist caricatures dominated minstrelsy after the Civil War even more pervasively than they had in the Jacksonian period; these were the years, moreover, in which the female impersonator became the most popular blackface type. Although once again tied to the Democratic Party, minstrelsy appealed beyond it, uniting the states after the war more successfully than had the failed unionism promoted by Jacksonian blackface.[61]

With its own version of plantation nostalgia, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* illuminates blackface's southern exposure. If a Puritan mission or a liberal tradition engendered the United States, as the classic studies of Perry Miller, Sacvan Bercovitch, and Louis Hartz maintain, then the slaveholding South is an exception outside the national consensus.[62] Placing blackface, slavery, and race at the center, by contrast, makes the South organic to American national identity. Seen in blackface and from the South, the United States is at once a *Herrenvolk* republic, where racial subordination hides class inequality, and a capitalist society permeated by longing for a lost, preindustrial, feudal home. Agrarian nostalgia from a southern point of view is rooted less in rural innocence—the yeoman farmer myth—than in the racial guilt of slavery. The Civil War may enact the final triumph of liberal capitalism over the slave mode of production, but it also forms the bloodiest chapter in the continuing combination of American freedom with racial inequality.[63]

That blackface reached the peak of its popularity in the years surrounding the Civil War points not to its affinity with abolition but to its role as a register of race relations. Blackface abolition is the exception that proves the rule: burnt cork contaminated every white American political perspective on race. It also spread to the urban nightlife that, at the turn of the twentieth century, drew the respectable working and middle classes out of their homes and into places of public entertainment. Only in "the world of commercial amusements . . . that straddled the social divisions of class and ethnicity," writes David Nasaw, "could [urban dwellers] submerge themselves in a corporate body, an 'American' public."[64] The blacked-up white body unified the body politic and purified it of black physical contamination. Public sites signified their respectability by barring African Americans or segregating them in the audience as "darky shows" and "coon songs" were performed onstage. Occasional African Americans, like Billy Kersands and Ernest Hogan, performed in blackface or wrote coon songs. Hogan's "All Coons Look Alike to Me" swept the country in the 1890s, although his song sheet publisher, Isidore Widmark, claimed to have improved the words and music before putting them into circulation. That same decade, "If the Man in the Moon Were a Coon" sold over three million copies. "The experience of white solidarity inside every performance," Warren Goldstein writes of the vaudeville show, "forge[d] a newly American identity . . . while building and reinforcing . . . the unbreachable wall separating whites from African Americans." That process, as Goldstein observes, climaxed with *The Birth of a Nation*.[65]

Minstrelsy also spread, once African Americans were allowed access to the stage, to postbellum black troupes in blackface, who provided the major commercial entertainment in African American communities. The great classic blues singers Ma Rainey, Ida Cox, and Bessie Smith all got their start in minstrelsy.[66] The occasional African Americans allowed to perform before white audiences also had to don blackface. The greatest of these, Bert Williams, adopted the persona of the "shuffling, inept 'nigger' " and spoke in a stage language that, he explained, "to me was as much a foreign dialect as that of the Italian." Williams, who amused audiences by putting himself in the spectator's place to laugh at his own misfortunes, stated, "It was not until I was able to see myself as another person that my sense of humor developed." Williams masqueraded as a minstrel black, and one need only listen to him sing his signature song, "Nobody," to hear him turn self-denigrating irony against the viewer. Self-torture was, indeed, the condition of Williams's performing ge-

nius.[67] Blacks in blackface entertaining African Americans may have operated outside a self-alienating economy of pleasure. Certainly they pushed the form as far in the direction of Afro-American self-expression as it could go, though the spread of burnt cork to cover those it supposedly represented is hardly evidence of progress toward racial equality. Whatever challenge blackface had originally offered to genteel culture, it defined the United States for natives, immigrants, and foreigners, Europeans and African Americans alike, by the turn of the twentieth century.[68]

Slave narratives, the abolitionist Theodore Parker proclaimed, answered the call for an American national literature; blackface was the nightmare realization of Parker's wish, gothic in the specific sense that it enacted the possession of one people by another. Not Negro spirituals but minstrel songs made up the authentic American national music, wrote jazz critic Henry Osgood in 1926; his examples were Stephen Foster's "My Old Kentucky Home" and "Old Folks at Home," and "Dixie," "written by a minstrel, Dan Emmett, for a minstrel show. . . . The property today of all the English-speaking peoples of the world," Osgood continued, blackface numbers like these "were on the song sheets supplied to the crowds that assembled in Pretoria and Johannesburg, South Africa, to welcome the Prince of Wales."[69] Normalized in its own self-understanding, minstrelsy was neither racially nor regionally nor class divided; it served instead as our unifying, national popular culture. The postmodern and modern critiques of blackface disturb the traditional equation between blackface and the United States not by successfully challenging that identification but by defamiliarizing—as contaminated class expression, as political, sexual, and racial domination—our experience of it. Blackface is also made strange when it is set alongside nineteenth-century European nationalism.

Notes

Chapter 1. Uncle Sammy and My Mammy

1. See Henry Jenkins, *What Made Pistachio Nuts? Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic* (New York, 1992), 153–84.

2. Mary White Ovington, *Half a Man: The Status of the Negro in New York* (New York, 1911), 56–59, 70, 80–81. Progressive maternalism names the importance white women reformers placed on biological and social mothering. On the meanings of mammy, see Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17 (summer 1987): 65–81; Toni Morrison, ed., *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality* (New York, 1992). I want to acknowledge here also the comments of Donna Murch, and the clarifications provided by reading in manuscript, after the penultimate draft of my own study was completed, Jeffrey Melnick's *Ancestors and Relatives: The Uncanny Relationship of African Americans and Jews* (Harvard University Press, forthcoming).

3. Israel Zangwill, *The Melting Pot* (New York, [1908] 1914), 207.

4. "From the Managing Editor" and "Rebirth of a Nation, Computer-Style," in "The New Face of America," *Time* 142 (special issue, fall 1993): 2, 66–67. *Time* was looking forward as well as backward, as is evidenced by the publication a year later of Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray's *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (New York, 1994) and J. Philip Rushton's *Race, Evolution, and Behavior: A Life History Perspective* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1994), whose theories of quantitatively measurable, hierarchically arranged, pure racial types received favorable notice in the *New York Times Book Review* (Malcolm W. Browne, "What Is Intelligence and Who Has It?" Oct. 16, 1994, 3, 41, 45–46.) *The Bell Curve* would spend weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list. Thanks to the students in my fall 1993 seminar on racism and anti-Semitism, and especially Gaston Alonse Donate, for directing me to the *Time* and *Newsweek* issues.

5. "New Face of America," 2, 66–67; "The Bloody Odyssey of O. J. Simpson," *Time,* June 27, 1994.

6. "New Face of America," 2, 66–67. See A. Leon Higginbotham Jr., "An Open Letter to Clarence Thomas from a Federal Judicial Colleague," in Morrison, ed., *Race-ing Justice,* 21–25, on *Loving v. Virginia;* and, on *Birth of a Nation,* Michael Rogin, " 'The Sword Became a Flashing Vision': D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation,*" in *"Ronald Reagan," the Movie, and Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (Berkeley, 1987), 190–235.

7. "The Hidden Rage of Successful Blacks," *Newsweek,* Nov. 15, 1993, cover; Elliot Cose, "Rage of the Privileged," ibid., 56–63.

8. Bates is quoted in Mark Whitaker, "White and Black Lies," *Newsweek,* Nov. 5, 1993, 53–54. On *Whoopee!* see below, chapter 5.

9. Goldberg made another mammy movie, *Corrina, Corrina,* after *Made in America;* for a discussion of that film, see below, chapter 4.

10. This advertisement ran for several weeks in November and December 1993 on San Francisco's classical music station, KKHI.

11. Thomas Jefferson, "Autobiography," in *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson,* ed. Adrienne Koch and William Peden (New York, 1944), 25–26; James A. Rawley, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A History* (New York, 1981), 311–19, 342–46; Stephen Hopkins, "The Rights of Colonies Examined [1763]," in *Tracts of the American Revolution, 1763–1776,* ed. Merrill Jenson (Indianapolis, 1967), 41–62.

12. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on Virginia,* in Koch and Peden, eds., *Life and Selected Writings,* 256, 262.

13. Alfred Kazin, "Jews," *New Yorker,* Mar. 7, 1994, 72. See also Hasiah R. Diner, *In the Almost Promised Land: American Jews and Blacks, 1915–1935* (Westport, Conn., 1977). I owe "the stain of shame" to Hasiah Diner, paper at the conference "Blacks and Jews: An American Historical Perspective," Washington University, St. Louis, Dec. 2–4, 1993.

14. Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York, 1920), 4.

15. On blackface as cross-dressing, see below, chapter 2, with sources cited at note 28.

16. James Baldwin, "On Being 'White' and Other Lies," *Essence,* Apr. 1984, 90–92. Thanks to George Shulman for calling this article to my attention. See also Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975); Peter Kolchin, *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), 31–35; David Roediger, *Toward the Abolition of Whiteness* (New York, 1994), 1–17, 181–98; Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race* (New York, 1994).

17. Cf. Melnick, *Ancestors and Relatives.*

18. As with the surplus value of labor, the extraction of surplus symbolic value is a material process. Eric Lott has grounded it in the expropriation of black sexuality and labor; see his *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York, 1993).

19. On pre-Hollywood cinema, Porter, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* see Charles Musser, *Before the Nickelodeon: Edwin S. Porter and the Edison Manufacturing*

Company (Berkeley, 1991); William L. Slout, "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* in American Film History," *Journal of Popular Film* 2 (spring 1973): 137–52; Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films,* 2d ed. (New York, 1989), 3; Thomas R. Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film, 1900–1942* (New York, 1977), 12–14; Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, 1974), 1–5; Edward D. C. Campbell Jr., *The Celluloid South: Hollywood and the Southern Myth* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1981), 12–14, 37–39; Janet Staiger, *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (Princeton, N.J., 1992), 101–23.

20. J. Hoberman, "Our Troubling Birth Rite," *Village Voice,* Nov. 3, 1993, 2–4 (quoted 3). See also David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York, 1985), 90–142, 183; Rogin " 'The Sword Became a Flashing Vision.' "

21. J. Hoberman, "Is 'The Jazz Singer' Good for the Jews?" *Village Voice,* Jan. 7–13, 1981, 32; Steve Whitfield, "Jazz Singers," *Moment,* Mar. 1981, 20; Harry M. Geduld, *The Birth of the Talkies* (Bloomington, Ind., 1975), 138, 213n; William K. Everson, *American Silent Film* (New York, 1978), 373–74; J. Douglas Gomery, "Hollywood Converts to Sound: Chaos or Order," in *Sound and the Cinema: The Coming of Sound to American Film,* ed. Evan William Cameron (Pleasantville, N.Y., 1980), 32–33; Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, *Classical Hollywood Cinema,* 320–29, 353–56; Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (New York, 1988); " 'Gone with the Wind' Champ Again," *Variety,* May 4, 1983, 5. I am indebted to Peter Wollen for adding *Gone with the Wind* to the sequence. The Margaret Mitchell novel on which the film was based has sold more copies than any other book except the Bible (see Jerry Schwartz, "Margaret Mitchell's Atlanta Home Gets a Reprieve," *New York Times,* Dec. 18, 1994, A18).

22. See D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York, 1923); Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (New York, 1950); Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York, 1960); Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860* (Middletown, Conn., 1973); Winthrop Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1969).

23. The western was the most popular genre of 1920s silent and of cold war film, but not during the years of the classic, talking-pictures studio system, roughly 1927–49, covered by this study. On the frontier myth and the western in the industrial age, see Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800–1890* (New York, 1985), and *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York, 1992), 254–57, 347, and passim; Robert B. Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930–1980* (Princeton, N.J., 1985), 70, 145–46; Richard Koszarski, *An Evening's Entertainment, 1915–1928* (Berkeley, 1990), 182; Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (New York, 1980), 215.

24. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom.* On the enormous vari-

ety of early silent films, out of which precipitated a set of Hollywood genres, see Eileen Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907–1915* (Berkeley, 1990).

25. For the preeminent Jewish role in blackface, Hollywood, and Tin Pan Alley, see Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York, 1988); Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York, 1976), 562; Lester D. Friedman, "The Conversion of the Jews," *Film Comment* 17 (July–Aug. 1981): 48–50; idem, *Hollywood's Image of the Jew* (New York, 1982), 19; Marc Slobin, "Some Intersections of Jews, Music, and Theater," in *From Hester Street to Hollywood: The Jewish-American Stage and Screen*, ed. Sarah Blacher Cohen (Bloomington, Ind., 1983), 31; Gary Giddins, *Riding on a Blue Note: Jazz and American Pop* (New York, 1981), 5–17, 145–60; and chapter 4, below. "Jew Stars over Hollywood" is an undated pamphlet (St. Louis, Patriotic Tract Society) on display at the Jewish Museum in New York. On Jeffries, Farrakhan, and Muhammad, see *New York Times*, May 12, 1993, A12; May 16, 1993, A20; and Paul Berman, ed., *Blacks and Jews: Alliances and Arguments* (New York, 1984).

26. Diner, *In the Almost Promised Land*, xvi.

27. Abraham Lincoln, speech at Chicago, June 10, 1858, in *Abraham Lincoln: Selected Speeches, Messages, and Letters*, ed. T. Harry Williams (New York, 1957), 91–92.

28. Franz Boas, "Foreword," in Ovington, *Half a Man*, viii.

29. Roemer is quoted in *New York Times*, Mar. 28, 1994, C11, C16. For an extraordinary account of Jewish refugees like Roemer who taught at segregated southern colleges, see Gabrielle Simon Edgcomb, *From Swastika to Jim Crow: Refugee Scholars at Black Colleges* (Malabar, Fla., 1993).

Chapter 2. Two Declarations of Independence

1. Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Blacknesse* and *The Masque of Beautie*, in *Works*, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson, (Oxford, 1925–63), 7:161–94; John C. Meagher, *Method and Meaning in Jonson's Masques* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1946), 1–3; Anthony Gerard Barthelmy, *Black Face, Maligned Race* (Baton Rouge, La., 1987), 1–19.

2. Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System* (New York, 1974); Rawley, *Transatlantic Slave Trade*, 1–60, 148–52; Henry Louis Gates Jr., *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the "Racial" Self* (New York, 1987), 51–53, 167–75; Wahneema Lubiano, "Black Ladies, Welfare Queens, and State Minstrels: Ideological War by Narrative Means," in Morrison, ed., *Race-ing Justice*, 353; Valerie Harris Smith, *Masks in Modern Drama* (Berkeley, 1984), 12; Susan Manning, *Ecstasy and the Demon: Feminism and Nationalism in the Dances of Mary Wigman* (Berkeley, 1993), 69–71.

The conflict between Christians and Moors contributed to puppet theater in Italy. One of the sources of blackface minstrelsy, and itself containing a black African component, the Italian harlequinade enjoyed popularity in its own right in the nineteenth-century United States. Puppet (marionette) theater used the harlequinade characters. It also staged the triumph of white Christian heroes over

black Moorish infidels. These burlesques dramatized feudal love and war or clownish carryings-on between equals rather than the imagined practices of black primitives. Puppet theater is at once less rooted in African or African American culture and less racist than blackface. The comparison between puppet theater and minstrelsy is based on Gates, *Figures in Black,* 51–53; Lott, *Love and Theft,* 38–62; Helen P. Trimpi, *Melville's Confidence Man and American Politics in the 1850s* (Hamden, Conn., 1987), 6–8; exhibits and brochure (1994) of the International Museum of Marionettes, Palermo, Italy; and the June 1994 production of "Orlando Amorato" by the Sicilian marionette theater.

3. Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko* (1688), in *Oroonoko, The Rover, and Other Works,* ed. Janet Todd (New York, 1992). See also Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Authors in the Literary Marketplace, 1670–1820* (Berkeley, 1994), 54–85; Paul H. D. Kaplan, *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art* (Ann Arbor, 1985); Jonson, *Masques of Blacknesse* and *Beautie,* 169, 173, 183.

4. D. J. Gordon, "The Imagery of Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Blacknesse* and *The Masque of Beautie,*" *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 6 (1943): 130; Gallagher, *Nobody's Story,* 34–48; Sigmund Freud, "The Question of Lay Analysis: Conversations with an Impartial Person" (1926), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* ed. James Strachey (London, 1964), 20:212; Jefferson, *Notes on Virginia,* 256–62. On Afro-American trickster reappropriations of the black hole, see Houston Baker, *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (Chicago, 1984), 3–6, 144–54; and Toni Morrison, *Tar Baby* (New York, 1981).

5. Jonson, *Masque of Beautie,* 183; Barthelmy, *Black Face, Maligned Race,* 3–4 (quoting St. Jerome).

6. Ronald Sanders, *Lost Tribes and Promised Lands* (Boston, 1978), 39–65; Deborah Root, "Speaking Christian: Orthodoxy and Difference in Sixteenth-Century Spain," *Representations* 23 (summer 1988): 118–34; Rawley, *Transatlantic Slave Trade.*

7. Gordon, "Imagery of Ben Jonson," 129 (quoting Jonson); Meagher, *Method and Meaning,* 109. The immediate English imperial project (which produced in other colonial propaganda the conflation between Irish primitives, New World savages, and African blacks) was represented in Jonson's *The Irish Masque at Court.* In that spectacle's "magical thinking," as Elizabeth Fowler puts it, "Irish chieftains are instantly transformed into English earls, throwing off their heavy dialects and mantels, by the metamorphosing presence of James" (Fowler, "The Failure of Moral Philosophy in the Work of Edmund Spenser," *Representations* 51 [summer 1995]: 55).

8. Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago, 1980); David Suchoff, "The Rosenberg Case and the New York Intellectuals," in *Secret Agents: The Rosenberg Case and the McCarthy Era* (New York, 1995), 155–56 (on Greenblatt); Barthelmy, *Black Face, Maligned Race,* 33–35, 72–76, 167–204; Jordan, *White over Black,* 37–39 (on Othello).

9. Quoted in Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, 1990), 166.

10. Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Mod-*

ern Democracy (New York, [1944] 1962), 24; cf. Saxton, *Rise and Fall of the White Republic,* 1–18.

11. See, for example, Jordan, *White over Black,* 429–81; James Campbell and James Oakes, "The Invention of Race: Rereading *White over Black,*" *Reviews in American History* 21 (1993): 172–83; Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom;* David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1975); Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley, 1971) and *Rise and Fall of the White Republic;* Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building* (Minneapolis, 1980); Robert Blauner, *Racial Oppression in America* (New York, 1972); Ronald T. Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, 1979); Michael Rogin, *Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* (New York, 1975) and *"Ronald Reagan," the Movie.*

12. Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963); Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York, 1986).

13. James Snead, *White Screens/Black Images* (New York, 1994), 60; Milton Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (New York, 1964).

14. See Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New York, 1975); Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence;* Turner, *Frontier in American History.*

15. Quoted in Rogin, *Fathers and Children,* 7. On Natty Bumppo, see Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence,* 466–517.

16. Harry Levin, *The Power of Blackness: Hawthorne, Poe, Melville* (New York, 1958); Richard Wright, "How Bigger Was Born," introduction to *Native Son* (New York, [1940] 1966), xxxiv. On the role of newly accepted academic Jewish intellectuals in cold war consensus history, a subject returned to at the end of this study, see (implicitly) my *The Intellectuals and McCarthy: The Radical Specter* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967) and (explicitly) *"Ronald Reagan," the Movie,* 275–79.

17. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 5–6.

18. See ibid.; Toni Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28 (winter 1989): 14–18; Michael Wood, "Life Studies," *New York Review of Books,* Nov. 19, 1992, 7–11; Ralph Ellison, *The Invisible Man* (New York, 1952); Robert Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York, 1978); Richard Dyer, "White," *Screen* 29 (autumn 1988): 44–64; Roediger, *Abolition of Whiteness.* I am also indebted to George Lipsitz in seminar discussion at the Humanities Research Institute, University of California, Irvine, Nov. 1992.

19. Toll, *Blacking Up,* 26; Joseph Boskin, *Sambo: The Rise and Fall of an American Jester* (New York, 1986), 70; W. T. Lhamon Jr. "Constance Rourke's Secret Reserve," introduction to Constance Rourke, *American Humor: A Study*

of the National Character (Gainesville, Fla., [1931] 1986), xxiv; Rogin, *Fathers and Children.*

20. F. O. Matthiesen, *The American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York, 1941); Richard Chase, *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (New York, 1957); R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago, 1955); Fiedler, *Love and Death.* See also Michael Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville* (New York, 1983), 15–23, 70–76; David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance* (New York, 1988), 170 (quoted), 174, 205; Toll, *Blacking Up;* Saxton, *Rise and Fall of the White Republic,* 119–80; David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, 1991); Lott, *Love and Theft.*

21. Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston 1946), 4–5; idem, *The Disuniting of America* (New York, 1991). Thanks to Kathleen Moran for calling Schlesinger's blackface to my attention.

22. See Lhamon, "Constance Rourke's Secret Reserve," xxxii, xxiv; Rourke, *American Humor,* 95–104; Lott, *Love and Theft,* 56; Toll, *Blacking Up,* 1–30 (minstrel quoted, 1); Saxton, *Rise and Fall of the White Republic,* 118–23.

23. Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity,* 131–48; Melvin Patrick Ely, *The Adventures of Amos 'n' Andy: A Social History of an American Phenomenon* (New York, 1991); William W. Austin, *"Susanna," "Jeannie," and "The Old Folks at Home": The Songs of Stephen C. Foster From His Time to Ours,* 2d ed. (Urbana, Ill., 1989); Gary Giddins, *Riding on a Blue Note: Jazz and American Pop* (New York, 1981), 5–17; Frank Halliwell, *Halliwell's Filmgoers Companion,* 8th ed. (New York, 1974).

24. Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (New York, 1981), 187; Ethan Mordden, " 'Show Boat' Crosses Over," *New Yorker,* July 3, 1989, 94. On Jolson as the inspiration for Bosco and Mickey Mouse, see Hugh Kenner, *Chuck Jones* (Berkeley, 1994), 24; Susan Willis, *A Primer for Daily Life* (New York, 1991), 130–31.

25. The major examples are Lott, *Love and Theft;* W. T. Lhamon Jr., " 'Ebery Time I Wheel About I Jump Jim Crow': Cycles of Minstrel Transgression from Cool White to Vanilla Ice" (ms., n.d.) and "Constance Rourke's Secret Reserve"; Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York, 1992). Lhamon places himself under the postmodern rubric in his book on the 1950s, *Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a Cultural Style in the American 1950s* (Washington, D.C., 1990), 16–17, 99–101, 200. Lott's proclaimed genealogy is from British cultural studies, but he also invokes poststructuralism. To consider the Americanization of British cultural studies would require a separate essay.

26. The major recent examples are Saxton, *Rise and Fall of the White Republic;* and Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness.* A more compromised position, combining political disapproval with cultural pleasure, is associated with a popular-front orientation. See Toll, *Blacking Up;* Boskin, *Sambo.* These share the orientation of Lawrence Levine's seminal *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (New York, 1977). My modernist/postmodernist division derives from Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into the Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New

York, 1982); and Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington, 1987). Saxton and Roediger depart from Frankfurt School and *Partisan Review* modernism, however, in their interpretations of blackface mass culture from the bottom up.

27. I adapt this term from the sexuoeconomic system of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Woman and Economics* (New York, [1898] 1966).

28. See Sandra M. Gilbert, "Costumes of the Mind: Transvestism as Metaphor in Modern Literature," in *Writing and Sexual Difference,* ed. Elizabeth Abel (Chicago, 1982), 199–201; Elaine Showalter, "Critical Cross-Dressing: Male Feminists and the Woman of the Year," *Raritan* 3 (fall 1983): 130–49; cf. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1990); Garber, *Vested Interests;* Carol Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton, N.J., 1992). Cross-dressing celebrations have in turn been challenged in Tania Modleski, *Feminism Without Women* (New York, 1991); and Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley, 1993). I rely especially on Gaston Alonso Donate, "In Whose Eyes Is What Chic Radical?: A Tootsie Ruminates on Cross-Dressing," *Critical Sense* 3 (spring 1995): 5–35, which provides a much fuller analysis of the literature than the one offered here.

29. See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993); Henry Louis Gates Jr., " 'Authenticity,' or the Lessons of Little Tree," *New York Times Book Review,* Nov. 24, 1991, 1, 26–30.

30. Garber, *Vested Interests,* 6–40; also Lhamon, "Constance Rourke's Secrete Reserve," xvi–xxi.

31. Garber, *Vested Interests,* 12, 28, and passim; Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits,* trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1977).

32. Cf. David Lloyd, "Race Under Representation," *Oxford Literary Review* 13 (summer 1991): 81.

33. Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 31.

34. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York, 1993), 231–42.

35. Saidiya V. Hartman, *Performing Blackness: Staging Subjection and Resistance in Antebellum Culture* (Oxford, forthcoming). See also Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "The Mask of Obedience: Male Slave Psychology in the Old South," *American Historical Review* 93 (Dec. 1988): 1228–52.

36. Phillips is quoted in Boskin, *Sambo,* 118. See also William J. Mahar, "Black English in Early Blackface Minstrelsy: A New Interpretation of the Sources of Minstrel Show Dialect," *American Quarterly* 37 (summer 1985): 260–85.

37. Butler, *Bodies That Matter,* 241.

38. Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as a Masquerade" (1929), in *Formations of Fantasy,* ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (London, 1986), 35–44; Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator," *Screen* (Sept.–Oct. 1982): 79–82; Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 50–54, 138–46. See also Garber, *Vested Interests,* 142; Modleski, *Feminism Without Women,* 54; and Stephen Heath, "Joan Riviere and the Masquerade," in Burgin, Donald, and Kaplan, eds., *Formations of Fantasy,* 45–53. Cross-dressing, as

a practice that proclaims the distantiation between ascribed identity and role, is sometimes distinguished from masquerade, which is understood as the hiding of that distantiation. That distinction usefully differentiates Butler's drag queens and my blacked-up white men from Riviere's masqueraders. However, I use both terms, *masquerade* and *cross-dressing*, to describe blackface.

39. Modleski, *Feminism Without Women*, 18–22.

40. Cf. Mary C. Watters, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (Berkeley, 1990).

41. Lott, *Love and Theft*, 6–12; Margo Jefferson, "Minstrel Tradition: Not Just a Racist Relic" (review of Lott), *New York Times*, Oct. 27, 1993, B3. See also Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, 131–38; Charles Musser, "Ethnicity, Role-Playing, and American Film Comedy: From *Chinese Laundry Scene* to *Whoopee!* (1894–1930)," in *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema*, ed. Lester D. Friedman (Urbana, Ill., 1991), 39–81; Jenkins, *What Made Pistachio Nuts?* 153–84, 198–205, 216–20.

42. George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis, 1990), 133–60, 262–63; Austin, *"Susanna," "Jeannie," and "The Old Folks at Home,"* 19–20 (Emmett quote); Lott, *Love and Theft*, 39–48.

43. Lott, *Love and Theft*, 25–29; idem, " 'The Seeming Counterfeit': Racial Politics and Early Blackface Minstrelsy," *American Quarterly* 43 (June 1991): 226–27 (Hall quote); Mahar, "Black English in Early Blackface Minstrelsy," 37, 260–85 (quoted 285). Cf. Natalie Z. Davis, "Women on Top," in her *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, 1975); Peter Sahlins, *Forest Rites: The War of the Demoiselles in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994).

44. Lhamon, " 'Ebery Time I Wheel About,' " 3–9, and "Constance Rourke's Secret Reserve"; Randall Knoper, *Acting Naturally: Mark Twain in the Culture of Performance* (Berkeley, 1994), 42–46. Cf., for later periods, Lewis Ehrenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890–1930* (Chicago, 1981); Lhamon, *Deliberate Speed*.

45. On this last point see Hartman, *Performing Blackness*.

46. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance*, 450 (quoting Emerson); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct* (New York, 1985), 90–108; Rogin, *Fathers and Children*, 2d ed. (New Brunswick, N.J., 1991), xxv.

47. Cf. Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 102–7; Lhamon, " 'Ebery Time I Wheel About,' " 6–7.

48. Lott, *Love and Theft*, 69–75.

49. Lott, *Love and Theft*, 12 (quoted); Saxton, *Rise and Fall of the White Republic;* Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 87.

50. Saxton, *Rise and Fall of the White Republic;* Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 95 (quoting Rawick), 13–14, 116; also Lipsitz, *Time Passages*, 64. Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democracy in the Mid–Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1983), 213–57, shares Saxton's perspective. Roediger is indebted to the Marxist interpreters of African American history W. E. B. Du Bois and George Rawick, the latter a follower of the West Indian Marxist C. L. R. James, and to Nathan Huggins, to whose psychologi-

cal interpretation of blackface he adds a class dimension. Roediger avoids the subtextual attraction to blackface found in Jewish writers from the civil rights period, who are fascinated by a practice of which they know they should disapprove. Cf. Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness,* 11–15; George Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community* (Westport, Conn., 1972); Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (New York, 1971), 244–72; Toll, *Blacking Up;* Boskin, *Sambo;* Levine, *Black Culture,* 137–99.

51. Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness,* 104 (quoted). Cf. Shane White, " 'It Was a Proud Day': African American Festivals and Parades in the North, 1741–1834," *Journal of American History* 81 (June 1994): 28–46.

52. Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness,* 108–9; Lott, *Love and Theft,* 25–27, 122, 165–67, 173–81; Fiedler, *Love and Death;* Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature.* T. Walter Herbert, in his examination of Hawthorne family relations, argues that, for middle-class culture as well, strong, sexual women (coded masculine) paid the price for the transgressions of male androgyny (Herbert, *Dearest Beloved: The Hawthornes and the Making of the Middle-Class Family* [Berkeley, 1993]).

53. Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness,* 127; Knoper, *Acting Naturally,* 42–46 (whose position, however, is closer to Lott's than to mine); Charles Neider, ed., *The Autobiography of Mark Twain* (New York, [1917] 1959), 58–62.

54. Saxton, *Rise and Fall of the White Republic,* 43; Austin, *"Susanna," "Jeannie," and "The Old Folks at Home,"* 19, 31, 49; Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788–1850* (New York, 1984), 171–75, 214–16, 226–27; Walter Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class* (Stanford, 1960); Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy* (New York, 1960); J. Baker, *Affairs of Party,* 213–57.

55. Lott, *Love and Theft,* 105–7, 164–70, 202–9; Austin, *"Susanna," "Jeannie," and "The Old Folks at Home,"* 29 (quoting Taylor); Rourke, *American Humor,* 103.

56. Lott, *Love and Theft,* 201–10; Lhamon, " 'Ebery Time I Wheel About,' " 6; Austin, *"Susanna," "Jeannie," and "The Old Folks at Home,"* 19, 31, 49, 73–76, 99, 189, 233–35, 311; William Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and the American National Character* (New York, 1961). In these paragraphs I am borrowing the data Lott has brilliantly assembled to reach conclusions at variance with his.

57. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (New York, [1852] 1981); Lott, *Love and Theft,* 211–33; Austin, *"Susanna," "Jeannie," and "The Old Folks at Home,"* 233–35; P. Gabriella Foreman, " 'This Promiscuous Housekeeping': Death, Transgression, and Homoeroticism in *Uncle Tom's Cabin,*" *Representations* 43 (summer 1993): 51–72.

58. Lott, *Love and Theft,* 211–33; Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," *Film Quarterly* 44 (summer 1991): 1–13, and her presentation on *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* Humanities Research Institute seminar, University of California, Irvine, Nov. 1992.

59. Lott, *Love and Theft,* 33.

60. Ibid., 226–33; Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness,* 173–81; David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862–1872* (New York, 1967); J. Baker, *Affairs of Party,* 249–58.

61. Austin, *"Susanna," "Jeannie," and "The Old Folks at Home,"* 189, 292; Ely, *Adventures of Amos 'n' Andy,* 28–34; Toll, *Blacking Up,* 144.

62. Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (New York, 1956); Bercovitch, *Puritan Origins of the American Self,* and *Rites of Assent* (New York, 1992), 20n, 30n; Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York, 1955).

63. Pierre L. van den Berghe, *Race and Racism: A Comparative Perspective* (New York, 1967); Saxton, *Rise and Fall of the White Republic,* 77–203; Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness,* 59–60.

64. David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (New York, 1993), 45.

65. Warren Goldstein, "Coming Together," *Nation,* Sept. 5–12, 1994, 224–26. See also Ehrenberg, *Steppin' Out;* Michael Rogin, "The Great Mother Domesticated: Sexual Difference and Sexual Indifference in D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance,*" *Critical Inquiry* 15 (spring 1989): 525–30; Nasaw, *Going Out,* 1–2, 45–61, 91–94, 115–16 (quoted 45); Melnick, *Ancestors and Relatives;* Rogin, " 'The Sword Became a Flashing Vision,' " 190–235.

66. Daphne Duval Harrison, *Black Pearls: Blues Queens of the 1920s* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1988), 225, 244; Francis Newton [Eric Hobsbawm], *The Jazz Scene* (Harmondsworth, Eng., 1961), 36; Marshall Stearns, *The Story of Jazz* (New York, 1956), 119–20.

67. Ann Charters, *Nobody: The Story of Bert Williams* (New York, 1970), 10, 19, 28 (quoting Williams); Bert Williams, *"Nobody" and Other Songs,* Folkways Records (1971), RBF602. "Funny Feathers," from the 1990 Vernel Bagneris musical *Further Mo'* (set the same year as *The Jazz Singer,* 1927), blacks up Bert Williams. Bagneris presents a tortured Williams, who comes alive in forcing himself to do a number he hates. (I rely on my memory of the performance. See also Louis Botto, "And Further Mo'," *Village Gate Playbill,* 1990–91 season; and, for the theory of this practice, Hartman, *Performing Blackness.*)

68. For an account of a minstrel troupe set in the years surrounding the Civil War in which white supremacist torture produces a blackface interracial community, see Wesley Brown's remarkable novel *Darktown Strutters* (New York, 1994).

69. Theodore Parker is quoted in Houston A. Baker Jr., "Introduction" to Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of an American Slave* (New York, 1982), 12–13; Henry O. Osgood, *So This Is Jazz* (New York, 1926), 5n. For the spread of minstrelsy to another part of the British empire, see Richard Waterhouse, *From Minstrel Show to Vaudeville: The Australian Popular Stage, 1788–1914* (Kensington, N.S.W., Austr., 1991).

Chapter 3. Nationalism, Blackface, and the Jewish Question

1. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, 1983), 74 and passim; Lott, *Love and Theft,* 193–94; Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War* (New York, 1962).

2. Lhamon, "Constance Rourke's Secret Reserve," xxiii–xxiv.

3. See Toll, *Blacking Up,* 27; Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nations and States* (Lon-