CHAPTER 4 The Global Economy of Minstrelsy

For the purposes of this text thus far, Bert Williams's intra-racial, cross-cultural masquerade has been framed within the context of twentieth-century modernism: a context in which cross-cultural catalysis is the secret history of racism, and colonialism and immigration the secret history of America's celebrated penchant for self-invention and reinvention. The questions and concerns raised by Williams's performance of race can, however, be traced back much earlier to the initial moments of black-on-black culture contact during chattel slavery, itself the open secret of Western modernity. Before even the "great race-welding" that Alain Locke describes in *The New Negro*, a modern black subjectivity had already been molded via the radical juxtapositions and collisions of differential black ethnicities and cultural differences.[1] It is well known, for example, that in the crucible of chattel slavery—in the holds of ships, on long overland marches where black slaves were connected by chains, in pens, dungeons, and stables—new languages and sensibilities were forged and syncretized before landfall in the Caribbean, America, Latin America, and Europe.

Arguing against the commonly accepted notion that enslaved Africans

composed a homogeneous and specific "culture" that can be set in opposition to an equally reductive view of "European culture," the anthropologists Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price in *The Birth of African American Culture* put it this way:

> We have suggested that much of the problem with the traditional model of early African-American culture history lies in its view of culture as some sort of undifferentiated whole. Given the social setting of early New World colonies, the encounters between Africans from a score or more different societies with each other, and with their European overlords, cannot be interpreted in terms of two (or even many different) "bodies" of belief and value, each coherent, functioning, and intact. The Africans who reached the New World did not compose, at the outset, groups. In fact, in most cases, it might even be more accurate to view them as crowds, and very heterogeneous crowds at that. Without diminishing the probable importance of some core of common values, and the occurrence of situations where a number of slaves of common origin might indeed have been aggregated, the fact is that these were not communities of people at first, and they could only become communities by processes of cultural change. What the slaves undeniably shared at the outset was their enslavement; all—or nearly all—else had to be created by them. In order for slave communities to take shape, normative patterns of behavior had to be established, and these patterns could be created only on the basis of particular forms of social interaction.[2]

Such revisionist histories isolate the active process of black cross-culturality and linguistic catalysis as central to the constitution of the black diaspora. And in a postnationalist moment, they also allow for a vision of racial disaggregation and fragmentation that is still politically resistant, critical of essentialism, and motivated by the ideal of reinventing community along nonbinary lines. In this view it is in the holds of slave ships that what will become, say, African American or Afro-Caribbean identities will be forged by disparate and distinct African culture groupings. It is in the micropolitics of these social interactions that one can imagine cross-cultural, intra-racial masquerade as a major component of cultural change. For example, one wonders how many fugitive slaves took refuge in the languages and identities of other blacks as they evaded the undifferentiating eye of white slavers and black captors. How many blacks passed as other types of blacks or how many Africans went hiding in the skins of others? Certainly they were often lumped together via the racial category; but didn't that only facilitate the poetics and

politics of disappearance, dissimulation, and protective mimicry? Especially since it is the case that not all African cultural groups were enslaved and interacted with in the same ways by whites ever aware of cultural hierarchies and differences during the continental slave trade? And isn't this kind of disappearance and masquerade also at the root of a nationalist poetics of identity despite its fetish for biocultural authenticity?

Group identity or even racial subjectivity in this context must be rooted in a strategic masquerade that evolves as the mask becomes a new skin, as distinct cultural crowds become a race by pretending to be each other or choosing to act (or sound) the same. One can easily imagine any number of possible and likely scenarios where Africans pass for other Africans in order to confuse and subvert the system of racial slavery as well as simply to escape or improve their lot within it. It is on this intersubjective and micropolitical level that a specific black modernism and modernity can be described far in advance of the black transnationalism of early-twentieth-century New York. This is a modernity that doesn't romantically fetishize itself as a counterculture—especially since modernity itself is produced by so many countermovements and countercultures. The very fact of racial slavery is itself a countermovement against the dominant discourse of freedom that marks the discourses of modernity. Primitivism is another example of a counterculture/movement that is actually constitutive of modernity—as are most contemporary discourses of counterhegemonic subversion and romanticized otherness. This black modern vision of disappearance and intra-racial masquerade provides a history that is behind and within the flesh of modernity itself: heard only by echoes rather than being seen.

Every Darky Is a King: Fraud, Impersonation, and Pan-African Identities

The modernist version of this kind of social interaction and cultural change is what occurs in Harlem, the global crossroads of black community in the early years of the twentieth century. Esu-Elegbara, after all, is the god of the crossroads, so what better place to find a figure of a globalized African continuum of signifying than here? Bert Williams's masking functions on the eve of a Harlem Renaissance predicated on racial authenticity and on the political authority of that authenticity. Despite this fetish, it is a cultural and political renaissance largely due to the presence of black migrants from the American South, from the Anglophone and Spanish-speaking Caribbean,

and, in smaller numbers, from the continent of Africa itself. Minstrelsy—particularly Williams's minstrelsy—adds global significance and transcultural resonance to a form initially rooted in a binary chromatism and in the specifics of plantation slavery. Both the racist and anti-racist fetish for the "natural" were challenged and bolstered by minstrel theater for reasons of its primary conceit—the reduction of identity to a performance and the celebration of performance as the ground of identity. White minstrelsy even at its worst was an engagement with those racialized discourses of American identity, attempting to contain difference within the racial hierarchy of power and to diminish the shock of cross-cultural encounters by dramatizing and controlling them through caricature.

Black minstrelsy as performed by Williams and Walker was the anti-racist interrogation of that engagement. Behind the burnt-cork mask, Williams's accented voice became also the silent voice of a global black modernism that is often eclipsed by the rhetoric of both binary chromatism and African American exceptionalism. His was a voice that refused the noisy and vainglorious spectacles of Garveyism by opting for its own invisibility rather than an aggressive display of its own dialect. After all, since "black" meant African American and "dialect" meant its local vernacular, his parodic use of that voice emphasized that although there was little space for his own dialect in the soundings of race, it could be masked rather than forgotten and its absence controlled rather than erased. And to render the other's voice so artfully, better even than its native speakers—well, that is an immigrant politics of mimicry all to itself, a form of discursive transcoding where the alienation of the kleptoparasitic black immigrant can only be projected through the socially recognizable stereotype and by a faithful sounding of the black native.

Again, to locate a precedent for intra-racial masking and cross-cultural soundings it is possible to go further back than Bert Williams or modernism or even the Harlem Renaissance. It is possible to return even slightly closer to the dawn of modernity by exploring a text like *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789) for an early example. Although one of the black diaspora's founding texts and one of the most important anti-slavery tracts ever written, it is not the text itself that is of concern here. What is of interest is a minor controversy that attended its publication. Although in his 1967 edition Paul Edwards quickly dismissed the controversy as a ploy of those hostile to abolition (which it more than likely was), Vincent Caretta in his 1995 edition prefaced the manuscript with the controversy. Caretta does not

dwell on it, does not explore the matter beyond the conclusions made by Edwards and emphasized by Equiano himself. Yet the controversy is of increasing importance to contemporary discourse because it suggests that the authority of Equiano's narrative, that the force of his anti-slavery polemic, could be undone by the allegation of a black-on-black masquerade.

Here is Paul Edwards in reference to Equiano and the controversy:

> During these years he made enemies amongst those who stood to gain from the slave trade, and it seems to have been these who made charges against him in *The Oracle* of 25 April 1792 that he was not a native African, but was born on the Danish Island of Santa Cruz in the West Indies. This story was repeated in *The Star* two days later. However, Equiano was able to produce evidence of his African origins, and the editor of *The Star* apologized, admitting that the story must have been a fabrication of the enemies of abolition who would do anything to weaken the force of arguments against the slave trade.[3]

The attack in *The Oracle* is worth reading primarily for the tone that it takes in revealing this information to the public. There is the clear sense in this letter that a great fraud is being unmasked, that a charlatan or a trickster is being revealed as a public nuisance. One is reminded here of the presence of Marcus Garvey on the Harlem stage; he whom the black and white popular press continually described as a charlatan, a huckster, a faux African emperor, a West Indian. The letter partly reads, "there is no absurdity, however gross, but popular credulity has a throat wide enough to swallow it. It is a fact that the Public may depend on, that Gustavus Vassa, who has publicly asserted that he was kidnapped in Africa, never was upon that Continent, but was born and bred up in the Danish Island of Santa Cruz, in the West Indies."[4] Interestingly, toward the end, the writer quotes Alexander Pope's *Epistle to Bathurst*: "Old Cato is as great a Rogue as You." The attack in *The Star* reads: "The Negroe, called GUSTAVUS VASSA, who has published an history of his life, and gives so admirable an account of the laws, religion, and natural productions of the interior parts of Africa; and in which he relates his having been kidnapped in his infancy, is neither more nor less, than a native of the Danish island of Santa Cruz."[5] In the Caretta edition, the reader encounters these letters before encountering the narrative itself and hence must first wade through these allegations of inauthenticity and cross-cultural impersonation before engaging a moving attack on the horrors of racial slavery. The reader also encounters Equiano's letter of defense, in which he attacks the "invidi-

ous falsehood" of the letters that were intended "to hurt my character, and to discredit and prevent the sale of my Narrative, asserting, that I was born in the Danish island of Santa Cruz, in the West Indies."[6] He goes on to "appeal to those numerous and respectable persons of character who knew me when I first arrived in England, and could speak no language but that of Africa."[7] In addition to this process of a white validation of his African authenticity, Equiano was forced to prove an African-ness rooted not simply in race but in geography. His *type* of blackness was in question. This is remarkable because the assault on his authenticity as an African is an attempt to subvert the global and diasporic focus of a narrative that crucially links Africa, diaspora, and modernity by way of race and slavery. Questioning his origins and placing them somewhere presumably less authentic whittles down a global vision to unrelated component parts.

What is most significant about this need to claim a "real" Africa to ground Equiano's written words is that the letters suggest that to unmask him as an Afro-Caribbean is to diminish the anti-slavery polemic that is *Equiano's Travels*; that by somehow locating a "false" "African-ness" behind the "real" one, the narrative is invalid. Because it stood against multiple layers of legitimation and had then to prove its masklessness, Equiano's narrative had yet another fully acknowledged burden. The question of his cultural—not racial—origins forces the author to prove his culture in order to liberate his race in an intellectual climate where they were, ironically, generally considered to be the same. Equiano prefaced subsequent editions of his narrative with his "To the Reader," a response to both letters. That he felt impelled to begin an already successful book with this defense, even after the newspapers apologized and acknowledged his true origins, suggests that there would always be a need to police and preempt those accusations.

By relocating the controversy to the beginning of the most recent edition of *Equiano's Travels*, Caretta foregrounds the larger issue of cross-cultural, intra-racial masquerade which is a primary product of black-on-black cultural contact. Here it is much earlier in modernity and, although minor, sets the stage for what will erupt in New York at the turn of the century given the radical diversity of its black community. The above reference to Garvey is not incidental. A distinct line can be drawn from Equiano's controversy to the controversy of one Prince Kojo Tovalou-Houenou of Dahomey who in 1924 made his first trip to America under the aegis of the UNIA. In his history of African American, African Caribbean, and black French interaction and "différance," Brent Hayes Edwards appropriately describes Prince Kojo as a "phi-

losopher, lawyer and brazen social climber."[8] In his series of photographs of Harlem during its vogue, James Van Der Zee captures the prince standing between Garvey and a UNIA official. The prince stands elegant and resplendent in a white suit and wearing a hat; the two others carry their hats in their hands as if in ritual deference to him. The two men who flank the prince are clearly staged and posed to emphasize the central presence: after all, it can be no mistake that both of them frame the image by leaning slightly on opposing chairs while Kojo stands without the need for support, his flamboyant wing-tips edging forward. With his hands behind his back and against the background of what looks like a dirty Harlem alleyway, he does convey the image of royalty in exile—a symbol in no way lost on the rank and file of the UNIA. Interestingly, this is one of the few pictures of Garvey in which he is clearly not the center of the image, not clearly the subject of the picture; in fact, one barely notices him. Among the three figures, Garvey is marginalized not only by the fact of Prince Kojo's intensely bright white suit or the sober gravity of the other man's black suit. In gray, his colors matching the washed-out tones of the walls behind him, Garvey is also the shortest figure, and his head tilts slightly upward and toward Prince Kojo. For someone as scrupulous about his media representation and the power of the image, this is more than a little unusual. Another image features Prince Kojo actually sitting on a chair, with a deferential Garvey flanking him, standing.[9]

In *Harlem: Negro Metropolis*, Claude McKay writes:

> Prince Kogo, as a royal native potentate, was honored with a picturesque reception at Liberty Hall, where all the colors of God's fertile imagination were assembled in his honor. He made a speech full of praise for the work of the Universal Negro Association and saluted Marcus Garvey as the leader of the Negro people of the world. . . .
>
> Probably Prince Kogo, overwhelmed by the wonderful reception, was not fully conscious of the political significance of his act. He was no African clown prince. He was an authentic member of the family of Behanzin, the deposed King of Dahomey.[10]

That an authentic African prince would speak to the assembled UNIA and describe Garvey as "the leader of the Negro people of the world" was clearly a coup for the man who, despite his global impact via *The Negro World* and his international popular support, was relentlessly struggling for legitimacy in a context where even West Indian writers, activists, and intellectuals had turned against him. Yet Prince Kojo's support of Garvey was not without its cost. To give Garvey legitimacy was to have his own authenticity assaulted:

> Kogo's princely act in acknowledging Garvey's leadership came as an inspiration to the movement at that critical time. But Kogo later paid dearly for it . . . he was ignominiously humiliated. One of the largest Paris dailies published a report on his personal affairs. It stated that Kogo was a swindler and a faker. He was not truly a prince. Posing as a prince of Dahomey he had borrowed large sums of money from people which had never been repaid.[11]

It is worth noting that on this same page McKay situates Kojo and Garvey in the context of high European modernism: "It was the time when James Joyce and Marcel Proust and T. S. Eliot were the intellectual gods."[12] This was a time also where issues of cultural authenticity and value were exacerbated by new means of technological reproduction alongside a colonial poetics of the African primitive. It is also worth noting that before even introducing the allegations of fraud, McKay felt it necessary to hypersignify Prince Kojo's authenticity by identifying him as "no African clown prince." This suggests that "African clown princes" either did in fact exist or were rumored to exist in such a way as to require a certain amount of scrutiny and policing. He further describes the prince as "a rare piece of primitive African sculpture" to complete his description of the cultural and artistic climate where African authenticity was the primary fetish.[13] McKay confirms that Prince Kojo was in fact an authentic member of the deposed Dahomeyan royal family. This defense was deemed necessary because if he were not really a prince, then it was possible that he was not really an African and could be—if not as exotic as a West Indian—then perhaps something much more ignoble: an African American. Yet despite constant proofs of his identity, Prince Kojo never outdistanced the accusation of fraud, and his reputation never fully recovered.[14]

The fact of Prince Kojo being from "Dahomey" and the suspicion of fraud are more than a coincidence considering that the term had been used at least since 1908 by various African performers to describe their stage shows.[15] Of course "Ethiopian," "Congo," and "African" had already been in use in American minstrel shows since the middle of the nineteenth century and numerous black street and carnival characters had been passing themselves off as authentic Africans for generations. A footnote in Bernth Lindfors's *Africans on Stage* provides a good sketch of these practices: it references one "Edgar B. Knight, the Wombwell 'crocuser' ('quack' doctor and herbalist) originally from Demerara, who called himself Abyssinian and dressed in long 'African' robes"; also, there was "Black Dougie, from Jamaica, who worked the British racecourses as an African." From Guyana there was Peter McKay, who posed as "Ras Prince Monolulu . . . who from the 1920s on entertained

people at railway stations, racetracks, and in the streets of London."[16] This latter character is particularly interesting given the title "Ras," which appears as the name of a militant West Indian Garveyite in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*; this years before the Rastafarian movement even appeared in New York City or the continental United States. That these and many other such "performances" occurred in England is interesting considering the popular success of *In Dahomey* there in 1903 and the fact that blackface minstrelsy was popular in England up until 1978 with the cancellation of the beloved *Black and White Minstrel Show* by the BBC—the same year it decided to screen the television series *Roots*. In England, where encounters with black peoples were limited, *In Dahomey* was so successful that King Edward VII and the royal family asked for a command performance, thereby establishing minstrelsy in the imagination of British popular culture. At this performance Bert Williams performed his hit, "Evah Darkey Is a King":

> Evah darkey is a king!
> Royalty is jes' de ting.
> If yo' social life's a bungle,
> Jes yo' go back to yo' jungle,
> And remember dat your daddy was a king.[17]

In "Ethnological Show Business: Footlighting the Dark Continent," Bernth Lindfors charts these various performances of African identity by exploring their connection to ethnological display and the rise of the circus. After the Anglo-Zulu wars, for example, circus entrepreneurs actually recruited Zulus for their shows. P. T. Barnum even offered the British government $100,000 for permission to exhibit Cetewayo, the captured leader of the Zulus, known for routing the British army in two great and bloody victories.[18] The British fascination for this specific African group helped kick-start the market for "Zulus" on display throughout the end of the nineteenth century. Yet intraracial masquerade was also crucial to this form of containment and entertainment in British popular culture. As Lindfors points out, "Needless to say, many of these Zulu performers were frauds."[19] From the memoirs of two showmen, we have testimony. A British circus showman writes in his memoir, "I recollect at the time of the Zulu war how one showman conceived the idea of exhibiting a number of Zulu warriors. There was only one drawback—not a single Zulu was at that moment in the country. But drawbacks do not exist for the born showman and a party of ordinary niggers were easily made up into Cetewayo's savage soldiery."[20] An American circus showman adds this transatlantic echo:

> In the side show we had a big Negro whom we had fitted up with rings in his nose, a leopard skin, some assegais and a large shield made out of cow's skin. While he was sitting on the stage in the side show, along came two Negro women and remarked, "See that nigger over there? He 'aint no Zulu, that's Bill Jackson. He worked over here at Camden on the dock. I seen that nigger often." Poor old Bill Jackson was as uneasy as if he was sitting on needles, holding the shield between him and the two Negro women.[21]

In subsequent sections of this book, more will be made of the specific kind of specularity at work here between the African American gaze and ethnographic display. It must be distinguished from the colonial gaze or the white European gaze which used ethnographic display in order to both constitute colonial/racial subjects and to establish what both Curtis Hinsley and Anne McClintock argue as a form of touristic display as the colonies were translated into commodities by the market forces which defined the particulars of an American imperial vision.[22] This "other" gaze is important also because it is at the heart of the kind of minstrelsy at work in Williams's and Walker's *In Dahomey* and the "other" modernisms that are located in Bert Williams's use of blackface. These are modernisms in which a black diasporic vision is articulated and refracted through plural and multiple masking, explicitly as a product of a black ethnographic vision which produced distinct black subjects via the same technologies of touristic display and the consumption of minstrelsy.

But the use of "ordinary niggers" in the place of authentic Africans in fact became so widespread that even naturalists had to declare the authenticity of their specimens. In 1885, one had defensively to prove that the Africans on display were actually Africans, not "as some of the journalists have wickedly insinuated, Irish immigrants, cunningly painted and made up like savages. They are genuine Zulus."[23] It would be fascinating to hear what Eric Lott would make of this alleged Irish impersonation of continental Africans. Even P. T. Barnum—the self-described high priest of "humbug" who was responsible for many such frauds—had to acknowledge this before his own show at Madison Square Garden in 1888.[24] He advertised his specimens as "Two Real African Zulus" not simply to authorize his display in relation to other suspected fakeries but to distinguish *this* particular display from his own frauds, such as the infamous "Zip, the What-is-it" a monkeylike "missing link" that was often performed by small, microcephalic African Americans.[25] The hyperbolic assertion of the realness of Barnum's Zulus is reminiscent of Bert Williams's and George Walker's billing themselves as "Two Real Coons"

to distinguish their performance of authenticity from that of the dominant white minstrel tradition.

For Williams and Walker, the African American stereotype had been filtered through many generations of white impersonation; only their own racial authenticity could be used as an edge in the "mimic warfare" of vaudeville. This, by the way, was not unlike the claim, made by producers of African American culture, of an authentic relationship to Africa as a competitive edge over white moderns, who were already identifying and claiming Africa as the site of their own distinguishing subjectivities and attempts to redefine "the new." For Barnum, his own and so many African frauds made an appeal to authenticity necessary—however, like Equiano's situation, this was not simply a question of race but one of culture, for the blacks on display had to here be differentiated from the *less authentic* African Americans. Lindfors concludes by pointing out that " 'Zulu' thus became synonymous with artifice and disguise. Pseudo-Zulus proliferated, emerging as a stock character type that eventually entered the standard vocabulary of ethnic imagery projected by such powerful media as Hollywood films."[26] David Killingray and Willie Henderson note that by the early part of the twentieth century, "imitating Africans was a well-established practice among black entertainers."[27] Lindfors also explains that in American circus jargon, "Zulu" as a term "gradually expanded its field of reference to include any Negro who participated in the 'spec.' A black laborer or musician employed by the circus could earn a 'Zulu ticket' (a credit slip for more pay) by donning a costume and parading around the hippodrome track in the grand opening pageant."[28]

So by the time of Williams's and Walker's comic spectacle *In Dahomey* and by the time of Prince Kojo's appearance on the UNIA stage, the terms "Ethiopian," "African," or "Dahomeyan" (not to mention "Nubian," "Congo," or even just "jungle") had started to fold racial masquerade within their field of meaning much as did the term "Zulu." It was just five years after *In Dahomey* that a troupe of Sierra Leoneans worked in England as "Dahomey warriors," no doubt exploiting the resonance of that word as established by the Williams and Walker minstrel show.[29] As noted, this masquerade was also a common practice outside the circus or ethnographic exhibitions among black con men and hucksters. For them the exotic authenticity of the African mask enabled a greater degree of social mobility than plain old despised black skin. In *Pan-Africanism from Within*, Ras Makonnen describes how this intra-racial passing/masquerade could work against racism in America: "Once you had discovered this American folly, you would put on your fez

and 'pass' like any other white. . . . People might think you were an African prince."[30] In *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison will also note this sociopolitical oddity which operates on the plane of the visual only to facilitate a strategic absence: "I recalled a report of a shoe-shine boy who had encountered the best treatment in the South simply by wearing a white turban instead of his usual Dobbs or Stetson."[31]

It is worth noting that this observation strikes the text's nameless hero after he hears a powerful declamation by the multiply masked Reinhart, he who existed in "a vast seething, hot world of fluidity."[32] Ellison's representation of Reinhart explicitly depends on both minstrelsy and the classic trickster figure. This child of Esu declaims, "BEHOLD THE SEEN UNSEEN/ BEHOLD THE INVISIBLE."[33] The observation also occurs right before the narrator accepts the strength of this politics and puts it to use not only in relation to white America but in relation to those other blacks who root themselves in nationalist discourse of presence: "I felt that somewhere between Rinehart and invisibility there were great potentialities."[34] He realizes something about this strategic possibility that is of use in this work's exploration of black cross-cultural contact and signifyin(g) during modernism; it enables a recovery and a redefinition of alternate modalities of resistance in a rhizomatic postmodern era: "Not only could you travel upward toward success but you could travel downward as well; up and down, in retreat as well as in advance, crabways and crossways and around in a circle, meeting your old selves coming and going and perhaps all at the same time."[35] That this politics of masquerade is already the parodic product of double-consciousness within the specifically African American context—signifyin(g) within signifyin(g), something also central to African American feminism—is important. It reminds us that every local articulation of race is itself shot through with its own parodic undoing, its own masquerade. However, to return to the cross-cultural politics of the fez and the turban, the primary equation here in both Ellison and Ras Makonnen is fascinating: *black skin plus African costume equaled social whiteness.* This emphasizes how much American racism was dependent on the cultural specificity of and a deep historical intimacy with African Americans.

Killingray and Henderson also state that during this period "for black entertainers to pretend an African origin and to append a 'royal' title was not uncommon in Britain or the United States."[36] Every darky could then become a king and claim an abstract historical and racial origin as well as a nifty costume and grandiloquent title as the source of royalty. For a white audience

perhaps nothing was more comical and exotic than the notion of Negro royalty—something that mocked nobility and sociocultural hierarchy while serving to further debase the Negro. But one can imagine that to a black viewer, beyond this racist mockery were traces of a desire for power and nobility, a kingdom and a nation. The various titles by which Garvey described himself and UNIA notaries as having great suzerainty over Africa—for example, Duke of Nigeria, Overlord of Uganda, Empress of the Nile, and Lord High Potentate of Africa—should be read in line with this history; after all, such titling was an established popular tradition in theater, carnival, and the street con game and was a desire buried deep in the hearts of the black oppressed. Garvey made this performance politics but could not strip it of its ridicule. Bert Williams would exploit its ridicule to make it cultural politics. As we will see, *In Dahomey* features songs like "Leader of the Colored Aristocracy" and "On Emancipation Day" which mock and celebrate the notion of black nobility and power while simultaneously suggesting that the very notion of such a thing *as impossible* was intolerable. Du Bois's description of Garvey and the UNIA's public spectacles by way of a reference to Bert Williams then makes sense given that the international success of *In Dahomey* preceded and prepared the way for those street and cultural performances in which Africa was the mask for multiple and competing local intentions.

For confirmation that black intra-racial passing was a thriving strategy during the Harlem Renaissance, one can turn to the work of such Caribbean writers as W. A. Domingo and Eric Walrond. In his "Gift of the Black Tropics" in *The New Negro*, the former alludes to those black immigrants who were "too dark of complexion to pose as Cubans or some other Negroid but alien-tongued foreigners."[37] Language functions here as the cultural border, not pigment; passing as a strategy is then opened up to include multiple vernacular directions within the skin of race. Although Domingo does not say this, it is clear that only an "African" masquerade would be available to these black immigrants because of the color of their skin, where their lighter-skinned peers could pass as Italians, Latin Americans, or Egyptian/Middle Eastern exotics. But the primary point here is that Domingo acknowledges that the act of intra-racial passing and masquerade was common during Harlem's vogue. West Indian writers seemed particularly attuned to this issue. Throughout his work, Eric Walrond identified and criticized those among the black immigrant community who "passed" as other types of blacks. In his marvelous essay "Vignettes of the Dusk" he describes this process of black-on-black passing as "philological assimilation," which recalls the "ethnic altercasting" mentioned previously.[38]

Philological assimilation, however, entails the power dynamic at work between African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans, whereas ethnic altercasting is primarily concerned with the flexibility of discursive possibilities among bi- or tri-dialectal immigrants. In an interesting take on Walrond's term, this poly-dialectical context was claimed by the West Indian aviator Hubert Fauntleroy Julian, who immigrated to Harlem in 1921. Dubbed "the black Lindbergh," Julian was the first black person to obtain a pilot's license. As Ann Douglas writes in *Terrible Honesty*:

> White journalists loved Julian for the colorful copy he provided, but they invariably cast even his most heroic exploits in terms of updated minstrel comedy, presenting him as a boastful and too stylish Zip Coon figure. Dignified reminders from Julian, "No monkey business with this story. It's very serious," were of no avail. Like many West Indian and American blacks, Julian used two forms of English; he called it being "ambidextrous." In addition to various European and African tongues, he spoke both Standard English and a mixture of West Indies and Black English; journalists liked to parody what they saw as his linguistic confusion.[39]

No monkey (chaser) business indeed; there was little space in the popular imagination for this confident and destabilizing (yet colorful) version of Mikhail Bakhtin's "polyglossia." Yet the white American attempt to recuperate the linguistic "excess" that was Julian's always media-savvy persona as a form of minstrelsy is no surprise. However, Walrond was very aware of the "dialectical oppression" experienced by black immigrants in a Harlem where the African American vernacular was the status quo and West Indian English was mocked and marginalized.[40] As he wrote in 1935 in "White Man, What Now," reflecting on his migration to America:

> I went on to New York. I settled in the Harlem Negro quarter. I found the community fairly evenly dominated by Southern Negroes and West Indian emigrants. A wide cleavage existed between the two groups. The West Indian with his Scottish, Irish or Devonshire accent, was to the native Black who has still retained a measure of his African folk-culture, uproariously funny. He was joked at on street corners, burlesqued on the stage and discriminated against in business and social life. His pride in his British heritage and lack of racial consciousness were contemptuously put down to "airs."[41]

Walrond was wise to see this cleavage in terms of the larger racial dynamic which ultimately motivates the masking and intra-racial performances with which this chapter is concerned: "The white man in America, strangely, does

not consider the West Indian a 'nigger.' He is to him a 'foreigner.' "[42] An argument could easily be made that Walrond's stunning book *Tropic Death* has suffered by reason of his own "foreignness" in a climate where African American literature and cultural production were prioritized. The text depends on various West Indian dialects, languages, and settings in a literary renaissance where "the South" is the dominant site of "home" for blacks and where the African American vernacular is the more marketable sound of "the folk." One could extend this argument to include Claude McKay, whose success as a poet and novelist came primarily after he suppressed his Jamaican dialectal specificity in order not to become "universal," as Edward Kamau Brathwaite suggests in his deeply flawed but historically essential *History of the Voice*, but to perform a much more marketable and audible African American-ness. This is, in fact, precisely the argument of this book's closing chapter.

Forging the Dark Continent: An African Savage's Own Story

An intriguing example of the kind of intra-racial and cross-cultural passing/masquerade being discussed can be found in the life and work of a man who, at the same time as Garvey's Prince Kojo, made quite a career for himself as a Dahomeyan prince. In this case ethnic altercasting is linked clearly to both vaudeville and ethnographic display; and "philological assimilation" is turned back to not Africa but a commodified performance of its absence. Prince Bata Kindai Amgoza Ibn LoBagola was the author of *An African Savage's Own Story*, an autobiography first published in *Scribner's* magazine in 1929 and in book form soon thereafter. We have David Killingray and Willie Henderson to thank for unearthing and unmasking LoBagola, since his book was forgotten after having been widely dismissed and discredited upon its publication. In its time the "autobiography" was compared to Rene Maran's *Batouala* (1921), the first black novel to win the French Prix Goncourt. However, the narrative, style, and language have more in common with Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Tarzan of the Apes* than with *Batouala* or even *Equiano's Travels*. Knopf, LoBagola's eventual publisher, already had success publishing the work of Walter White, James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, and Carl Van Vechten; so the presence of this racial "forgery" in the midst of a literary renaissance obsessed with racial and cultural authenticity is too good to be true.

LoBagola's story is an essential text of its time because it shows just how

much intra-racial masquerade occurred not only on the margins of the "great race welding" that was the Harlem Renaissance but also in the shadows of the undifferentiating gaze of white ethnography. Like Bert Williams, Lo-Bagola provides the link between "ethnological show business"—the display of "foreign peoples for commercial and/or educational purposes"—and a heteroglot pan-African politics and sensibility.[43] Such impersonation is undertaken in relationship to the "spectatorial apparatus," as Bill Brown would have it, that "incitement to visibility and a protection from contact" which "makes visible the need to make the black man and the blackness of the black man visible."[44] It is the stress on race as a visual form of knowing that is exploited here as a mode of strategic disappearance. To become an "African" was in some ways a partial escape from race by asserting a cultural specificity and authenticity that may or may not have been one's own. However, to call oneself a "prince" was also to ennoble that site of racial/cultural origins and, in both cases, to blind white spectatorship and its desire for visual fidelity. In other words, one could pass in the other direction and in such a way that one would disappear into a fictional authenticity and operate cannily from within it.

An African Savage's Own Story strangely parallels *Equiano's Travels* and *Batouala*. It begins with an exotic West African setting—one that was both imaginary and produced by an untrained ethnographic vision. The first few sections are rich with folk tales, strange customs, and details of social life, and the final chapters are curious compendiums of ethnographic material. In the first section, "A Savage Home in the Ondo Bush," Ibn LoBagola tells us that he was born "in the village of Nodaghusah, six hundred miles north of Abomey Calavi, once the capital of Dahomey, and about forty-five days' walk north of the Gulf of Guinea, and three days' walk south of the native city Timbuktu. The country is in the Sudan, in the sphere of influence of the French Colonial Government."[45] According to his telling, the term "Dahomey" does not come from the natives of that savage bush, although it is in the local vernacular. "Dahomey" as a name for this space between bushes arises from his particular subculture: the "B'nai Ephraim," or as called by the natives, the "Emo-Yo-Quaim."[46] His people are the "strange people," the "Black Jews of the Ondo Bush" who arrived in the land of "Da-Ome" (Good Water) almost two millennia earlier. It should be noted that Equiano, in his *Travels*, on a number of occasions liken the natives of his Africa to Jews. Ibn LoBagola writes:

> How this name left our present country and drifted to the coast, I have never found out, but Dahomey is the name of the country on the coast. It did

> not take long, according to our rabbis, for the natives on the east and west of us to find our snug little place. They surrounded us and wrested from us the village that our people had made, and set up their own rule. We were never a fighting people, and we were easily subjugated. But we lived on in that same place, and we have seen many changes, but we have remained always the same, preserving our law and guarding our sacred Torah with our very lives.[47]

Traveling to Africa after the destruction of the Temple in Judea, the "strange people" migrated to Morocco only to leave after encountering even greater persecution. From there they migrated to Timbuktu, where they "were not treated badly, but we were not content to live under the rule of desert tribes any longer than was necessary."[48] After so many of them died from impure water, they decided to stay in a "bush" that had good water despite being surrounded by "wild beasts, elephants, leopards, lions, monkeys, and reptiles, the horned viper and the boa constrictor, and thousands upon thousands of hook lizards. This was the place we decided to make our home, because we were free when we came upon it."[49] This depiction of LoBagola's "bush" is in marked and spectacular contrast to Equiano's highly romanticized description of the "charming fruitful vale" of Essaka.[50] Ibn LoBagola, unfortunately, says nothing about the evolving and mutating racial character of this migrant people; he says nothing about their skin color and what happens to it as they travel for so long and for so far and for generations engage and encounter radically distinct cultural and ethnic groups. He tells nothing of the politics of passing as survival/subterfuge, which is nothing new to the Jewish Diaspora, although he does claim that "purity in blood" is the root of their nobility.[51] What is important here is that this description of his authentic identity, which he maintained throughout his life even up until his famous conversion to Roman Catholicism, establishes Ibn LoBagola's ethnography as being produced already by dislocation, from a marginalized, migrant not-quite African perspective there in the heart of savagery. Despite his attempt to cloak himself in an authenticity that was eventually revealed as false, it is important to note that this "African-ness" in his own telling is ultimately not "African" at all.

It is obvious that these earlier sections of *An African Savage's Own Story* borrowed heavily from the numerous travel narratives and popularized adventure tales of the time in which the African background is rendered as pure fantasy. Where Equiano spends much of his time attempting to rationalize and demystify "primitive" Africa, Ibn LoBagola seems to often revel in its

savagery to emphasize his own personal narrative of transcendence in the context of a general civilizing. Because these earlier and contemporary adventure tales were about dark and mysterious Africa, even the most outlandish representations could be accepted as authentic, or at least believable. "Africa" stood for literary fantasy, for an utter fiction of romance, exploration, and escape—in short, as a landscape it was always already a literary forgery that contained and helped to control the administration and domination of "the real." No two writers express this better than H. Rider Haggard in England and Edgar Rice Burroughs in America. In terms of cultural impact and iconic influence, their respective "Africas" have been much more significant than those of Sir Richard Burton, John Speke, or even Joseph Conrad's favorite, E. D. Morel, and LoBagola's favorite, David Livingston.

One could easily read Burroughs's *Tarzan of the Apes* series as not just the extension of a Haggardian vision but the American appropriation of that colonial envisioning of Africa to signal a discursive if not formal colonial control as one empire succeeds the other. The "Africans" in *Tarzan of the Apes*—many of whom are literally lynched in this novel after Tarzan learns how to use a lasso—are very clearly African Americans who, now free, are depicted as reverting to wildness and savagery. Ibn LoBagola's Dahomey borrows heavily from the traditions of colonial travel narratives and colonial adventure fiction, just as his performance of African identity borrowed heavily from the science of ethnography and the art of popular fiction. To his credit there is a good amount of ethnographic detail and quasi-anthropological investigation in the autobiography along with the very obvious elements of adventure melodrama. But the words "savage" and "horrible" appear far too often in this narrative for it to be anything more than pulp fiction; moreover, there are just too many titillating and overexaggerated descriptions simply to impress the 1920s audience.

Ibn LoBagola's racial politics, however, is clearly at work in those sections in which he observes that the native traditions and local cultures are far superior to those he would later encounter in the West. For example, after comparing African polygamy with Western monogamy, he concludes, "one wife with divorce and alimony is not so wholesome as twenty wives with neither divorce or alimony. The wild men in my country do not know anything about alimony; it seems to me, alimony is making a lot of civilised men wild."[52] Also, "You could not blame me for the habit of telling the truth; I was on the way to becoming civilised, but I was not yet quite civilised enough to tell lies."[53] One is reminded here of one of Du Bois's darkest statements

in *The Souls of Black Folk*, where double-consciousness is linked directly to double-dealing: "The Price of Culture is a lie."[54] There are many such observations in LoBagola's narrative, though they are perhaps less moralistic than the ones that proliferate throughout the anti-slavery polemic of *Equiano's Travels*. Another such moment of relativism comes when he describes how white men were seen and imagined in the Ondo bush, in a passage similar to Equiano's description of the European slavers who he is initially convinced are cannibals. Ibn LoBagola writes:

> As for me, I never saw a white man in my country. When I was a child, as far back as I can remember, and that must be when I was about four years old, I heard talk of white people, but it was never clear whether white people actually lived, or whether they had become extinct. I welcomed the thought that they had died out. All I could hear my mother say was that if white men should come across us, they would eat us raw. She said they fed themselves only twice in the year, and that then they ate their young if they could not get the young of other people. My mother said that white people came like witches, from no one knew where; they just appeared and disappeared. They were formed much differently from our own men; every white man had only one of everything: one eye, in the middle of the forehead, one leg, with a great wide foot, fan-shaped, so that when he lay down, the foot acted as a sunshade. A white man had no visible nose, and his mouth was large and could be made much larger at will. He lived on raw human flesh and could be seen in the bush just before and just after the rainy season.[55]

Obviously Ibn LoBagola is very much aware of the politics of myth and fantasy and how much myth and fantasy came to bear on the white colonial view of Africa and Africans. Africa as a site of fantasy, darkness, a continent of monsters is here overturned in a relativistic gesture where the European reader encounters himself through the eyes of an authentic savage—or, a black persona masquerading as an authentic African savage who uses that masquerade as a strategic, critical position. Just to make it clear that he is quite aware of this gesture and of his reversal of the tropes and topoi of colonial narratives of African monstrosity, LoBagola writes:

> Now, what could you expect us children to see, when our parents told us such things? Especially when they were supported in their stories by men who had been accustomed to going away to different trading markets? Some of these men had seen white men, but they knew nothing about them. That is reasonable, because I know even in these Western countries, where everyone

> is supposed to be wise, some provincial folk know that wild black people exist, and many have seen them, but they do not know much about them. I venture to say that they talk to their children in no uncertain terms of "niggers," as the black men are called here.[56]

This politicized pseudoethnography must be situated in relationship to LoBagola's own description of his work as an "itinerant entertainer and vaudeville artiste, informant to anthropologists, lecturer on African 'culture,' convict, and soldier in both the United States and Britain."[57] His perspective and its political impact are produced by a life in which race is encountered and experienced in multiple ways and in a panoramic social landscape that few African Americans of his time and generation could have had access to. Not only was he a native informant; on his way to West Africa he actually described himself as an anthropologist as well as a "British Colonial Subject."[58] Later on in his narrative he would confess, "To tell the truth, I had no idea what I was saying . . . So I followed instructions and simply played to the gallery."[59] Talk about plural masking and double voiced signifyin(g): Ibn LoBagola was an even more multiple mask-in-motion than Bert Williams and used the mask to make much more noise, escaping perhaps much deeper into the strategic fiction of African identity.

Bert Williams's only experience in Dahomey was onstage. Although it is not described in his "autobiography," LoBagola did spend some time in West Africa. He told the Naturalization Service in 1934, "I went to London and was there several months and went to Dahomey, West Africa. I stayed there and traveled in the bush north of Dahomey until 1912, when I returned to Scotland in May, 1912."[60] The autobiography states that he was advised to emphasize for his audiences that he was not from any specific part of Africa but from "Dahomey" simply because in the world of vaudeville, as in the world of minstrel theater, it was a well-known topos : "people would not believe me if they did not know where the place was. I got thorough instructions."[61] In tracing LoBagola's life, Killingray and Henderson write that he "followed the path of many traveling 'Africans,' to be found performing and struggling in every corner of the world, and at times being 'studied' and exhibited as creatures of exotic, and often imaginary, cultures."[62] He was an example of how a "purveyor of ethnographic data and popular entertainment blended into one."[63] For Ibn LoBagola scientific knowledge of race and vaudeville performance were no different from each other. To be a cultural informant was literally to be a performer. To be a native was to be onstage; to be an African was to wear (multiple) masks. To lie was to entertain, but given Ibn

LoBagola's constant critiques of racism, colonialism, and white supremacy, it was also to return the white ethnographic gaze by opting to *only seem* like its product in order to safely gaze back. As Curtis M. Hinsley writes in his study of the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, "Where the gaze can be returned, specular commerce becomes uneasy."[64]

In line with this relation between ethnography and intra-racial masquerade, Shane Peacock explores the display of Zulus by P. T. Barnum and others during the late 1800s after the Anglo-Zulu wars in Southern Africa. This sets the stage for LoBagola and for Bert Williams and George Walker, who in 1894 would do exactly the same thing as the notorious "African Savage" and take on the personae of exhibition Zulus years before becoming successful on the vaudeville stage. Peacock writes, "it was not uncommon for Victorian promoters to exhibit 'exotic Africans' who were really from places like Hoboken or the Bronx."[65] His wonderful essay "Africa Meets the Great Farini" tells the story of an African American from North Carolina who was over seven feet tall. After approaching a museum in circa 1882, he was remade into a "Dahomeyan Giant" by a theatrical costumer and coached to forget his ability to speak or understand the English language. This masquerade was so successful that he was then passed on to a sideshow where for many seasons he "posed as a Dahomey giant, a Maori from New Zealand, an Australian aborigine and a Kaffir. This man's success was the initiative for a score of other Negroes, who posed as representatives of any foreign races the sideshow proprietor wished to exhibit."[66] Bert Williams's own penchant for playing other kinds of nonwhite ethnicities in his minstrel performances is very much a part of this much larger tendency in American sideshows (and perhaps cultural discourse) to collapse all forms of subordinate otherness into one.

LoBagola's masquerade is thus merely a part of a long tradition of both black-on-black minstrelsy and a commercial form of ethnic altercasting. Black performers participated in this form of racial commodification simply because the white market for extreme racial and cultural difference was lucrative in an era in which those spaces and people once located as "exotic" and "distant" to the white imagination were becoming dangerously banal and easily accessible. Not only were these performances a sign of American imperial provenance; they represented a colonial consumer malaise at the root of American "produce imperialism." It was the white gaze that was being exploited by these commercial displays, a gaze so overdetermined and conclusive in its knowledge of otherness that it was simply begging and paying to

be deceived. For example, when "The Great Farini" premiered his "Friendly Zulus" in England before bringing them to America, he did so at a theater well known for blackface shows and minstrel vaudeville—the site of racial fraud and impersonation.[67] At the end of his long career displaying exotics, The Great Farini took charge of England's widely popular Moore and Burgess Minstrels. During this period, the line between blackface and the display of "real" Africans was therefore porous and fluctuating, maintained by the increasingly ill-fitting garb of race and exploited by the pseudo-coherence of the category which maintained itself in two primary ways: by the overwhelming desire for it to fit and by the frisson produced by the possibilities of deception.

By the time of Ibn LoBagola's stint in England there were already many African-themed or black shows in popular theater, where the legacy and memory of the Williams and Walker troupe was still very much alive. According to Killingray and Henderson, *In Dahomey* had become the name of a popular troupe and LoBagola did perform on the vaudeville stage as "The Fire King of Dahomey."[68] *An African Savage's Own Story* describes Ibn LoBagola's first encounter with "other" blacks as a spectator at a French colonial exhibition:

> During the whole time that I had lived in Scotland and in England, I had never seen another black man. I remembered seeing blacks from Dahomey on exhibition in the Dahomey village in Paris when my young master had run away with me; but before then, and since then up to the time that I am speaking of, no one had ever mentioned to me that there were black people living in the world outside my own land, Africa.[69]

Although this confessional autobiography is largely a fiction, it is important to note that the transatlantic encounter of black intra-racial, cross-cultural differences is here mediated by colonial exhibitions. It is curious that this fact is conveyed a mere page after LoBagola writes of his entrance, however innocent, into the world of ethnographic show business and racial display/performance while in England:

> In New Brighton I met a woman, a Mrs. Collins, who traveled in a show. She owned a traveling cinematograph show and induced me to go with her to attract people to see her show. I did not see why I should not do as she asked and, in fact, I thought it would be fine sport; so I went along. Her people taught me how to dance, and then they dressed me up in a white suit and made me dance on a platform outside the show. By traveling with the show I saw many towns in England.[70]

But it is in America that he supposedly becomes much more dependent on that form of performance for his living. It is in America that ethnographic show business makes him famous as performer and ultimately as a lecturer on the university circuit—a distinct form of vaudeville: "I secured many engagements on the vaudeville stage. My picture appeared in a motion-picture weekly and I was heralded far and wide as 'The Fire-proof Man.' A vaudeville circuit gave me bookings through theatres all over the eastern part of the United States, and it seemed as if my star were in the ascendant."[71] LoBagola claims to have danced and performed in an early silent film and to have become the darling of the media; he went from performance to performance shifting his stories and his costumes to suit the crowd and their interests. From America to Europe to Africa to vaudeville to the University of Pennsylvania; from the department of anthropology at Oxford to dressing in feathers, playing with fire, and landing in prison; from accusations of fraud to multiple charges of pedophilia and child molestation: this was the trajectory. And he never removed the mask.

It is during this period working in America that he claims to have first encountered racism: "Now I was confronted for the first time in my life with the problem of colour. Up to that time no one had ever mentioned my blackness to me; it had not been thought of, so far as I knew, except as a curiosity. The thing that puzzled me now was that I was not spoken of in the new country as a black man; I was called a 'coloured' man."[72] He avows that he went to America partly out of an eagerness to "help civilise the people there."[73] But his first encounter with the problem of color? What does it mean for this African American performer, wearing a complex ethnofictional African mask, to tell us that it is in America that he first encountered racism and the color line? And this especially after he has described his relationship with his "master" as a young boy in Scotland, seemingly without irony: "We loved each other, just as a master loves his pet dog, and the dog loves the master."[74] This statement comes in the chapter entitled "Taming Begins," in which LoBagola perversely romanticizes the process by which he is transformed from a jungle "monkey" into a semi-civilized Scottish lad. When as a young boy he returned to the Ondo bush from Scotland he was scolded by his native father for his affection for his "white father" and his confusion about his racial persona: "Don't you know that you cannot be white and black at the same time?"[75]

The text is full of such race and color tensions, far in advance of LoBagola's fictional landfall in segregation-era America. An awareness of Ameri-

can race-relations in fact suffuses the text and informs and motivates its sometimes powerful and oftentimes bizarre take on early-twentieth-century racism and colonialism. It seems clear that the narrative ultimately saves its ire for the racism of Ibn LoBagola's "authentic" home, for America: this was the place where he was most scarred by not only racism but also relentless allegations about his sexuality and his inappropriate relationships with underage white boys. Early in the narrative he exclaims, "I love my native country, I love my savage people; but at the same time I am forced to hate my own customs, the customs of my father. I am neither white nor black, I am a misfit in a white mans country, and a stranger to my own land."[76] Which native country? Which savage people? What kind of stranger? What customs? What kind of misfit? Here the levels of doubling, alienation, and marginalization seem far too extensive to be contained without some form of ruthless and relentless masking. Some form of intra-racial passing is absolutely necessary as a tortured psyche folds in upon its own fictions.

Like Equiano and Prince Kogo, LoBagola was hounded by accusations of his inauthenticity, accusations that his story was a fraud and his specialist's knowledge of Africa purely fiction. Not that it mattered much to the exhibitors and those who engaged him for lectures; many of them knew that to an audience hungry for the exotic, the mask was as good as flesh, provided it was costumed, painted, and situated in an ersatz natural (or authorial academic) setting. Not that it mattered much to LoBagola, who at times seemed much less interested in racial or cultural fidelity than were his contemporaries in the Harlem Renaissance. Yet LoBagola, like Equiano and Prince Kojo, protested vociferously, knowing that in an intensely racist climate the mask was much safer than flesh and allowed much more freedom: "People all over the country try to show that I am deceiving people in this story of my life. They have told me to my face that I never saw Africa; that I was born somewhere in western Pennsylvania or in some place in the South."[77]

The introduction to *An African Savage's Own Story* echoes the controversies surrounding *Equiano's Travels* as encountered in Caretta's edition. It also reminds one of Ras Makonnen's description of the subversive politics of the "fez": "Ibn LoBagola's costume is usually the costume of any well-dressed American, but on occasion he wears a red fez and sometimes a loose robe, neither one of which, he says frankly, has anything whatever to do with his native land . . . he wears fez and robe merely for effect."[78] After all, says the introduction, here reminiscent of the various descriptions of Bert Williams, "He is a born mimic and delights in entertaining."[79] The introduction asks,

"Is the Story True?," primarily for reasons of the disbelief that attended Ibn LoBagola and the publication of *An African Savage's Own Story*. This disbelief derived in part from the racism of the time, which was still unsure about the literary ability of blacks—especially untutored blacks from a ferocious and savage bush. And that is precisely what Ibn LoBagola exploited: that racist disbelief, which, though still rooted in ethnic pseudoscience, was nevertheless hungry for that science to entertain:

> From a scientific point of view, attention is attracted to this African savage's life story for two reasons: his unequalled presentation of authentic African folk-lore and tribal customs; and the remarkable development, psychologically, of a naked bushman into a man of ability in civilization. That a naked bushman should develop into an author is certainly remarkable; it is a long step from being an unclad savage in the Ondo bush to being a professional writer.[80]

To make his case and respond to his critics, the African savage, like Equiano, provided "a great number of letters, recommendations, official records of military service, and photographs of himself at various ages and by giving the names and addresses of people who corroborate what he says."[81] Of course, these were all forgeries.

After unveiling Ibn LoBagola as Joseph Howard Lee, born in Baltimore in 1887, Killingray and Henderson suggest that for this poor African American to play "the alien African prince" enabled him to "thumb his nose at 'Jim Crow' laws."[82] This is the same point made earlier by Ras Makonnen and Ralph Ellison; though for West Indians in an African American city and renaissance, passing as African Americans would be their way of thumbing their noses also at Afro-Yankee parochialism while simultaneously maintaining their own problematic sense of cultural superiority. In this way African otherness enabled one to maintain pride of culture while simultaneously accepting the anti–African American racism of the time and the attendant logic of white supremacy. The "uneasiness" that Curtis Hinsley describes in relation to "specular commerce" is an uneasiness with regard to the specular racial categorization upon which both racism and African American nationalisms depend. It is a dis-ease akin to the "category crisis" that Marjorie Garber describes in the politics of drag and cross-gender performance because it fragments the racial category and its supposed political affiliations along cultural, linguistic, and national lines. It is more complex here, however, because the poles of difference in Garber's theorizing—male and female—

begin from the assumption of essential difference. This category crisis is rooted in a fundamentally assumed sameness: African and Negro.

Killingray and Henderson conclude their "outing" of LoBagola by locating a politics in this masquerade, one vastly different from that allowed by Afrocentric or even pan-African appropriations of African identity, which almost always imply a transnational if not essentialist solidarity:

> By adopting an African identity LoBagola was able to exploit his blackness in a way that opened doors that would otherwise have been closed to an African American. In the process he was able to fool a whole range of professional people in the white establishment. Undoubtedly he was exploited, but he also exploited others by his talent for imitation and presentation. As such he entertained at a high standard before large, appreciative, and sometimes critical audiences.
>
> LoBagola's African persona, while both flawed and frequently challenged, was successfully maintained . . . his African "mask" represents an imaginative flight, an escape into a fantasy world, lived out as real. His attempt to justify his own deep-seated confusions and inner tensions by claiming to be a "savage" outsider has pathetic appeal. In one powerful image he can gather together the various fragments of his life in a way which both asserts his dignity and shifts the blame: a fractured and disturbed life made coherent, but not healed, by an appeal to an African identity. . . . LoBagola's autobiography well illustrates his ability to entertain and to charm, as well as to manipulate.
>
> . . . LoBagola played the African prince, a fire-eater, a savage bewildered by modernization, the clown, and much else, but he could also turn his hand to the straight act as singer, Scottish comic, or if necessary, the urbane and disciplined speaker who entranced high school students and well-heeled members of smart bourgeois clubs and confraternities. . . . For an African American to do this consistently in his own country while pretending to be an African says a great deal about his talent. LoBagola did come up against racial hostility and abuse, but he met this by boldly maintaining his stage life and by claiming that he was an African and not a black American.[83]

The description of all of the personae that LoBagola/Lee had at his disposal only emphasizes how much of a strategy ethnic altercasting was for this man for whom racial performance was life. Bert Williams at least tried to maintain a difference between the personae on and off the stage. Indeed, he went so far as to publicly acknowledge that even the name Bert Williams was a fiction:

"Nobody in America knows my real name and, if I can prevent it, nobody ever will. That was the only promise I made to my father."[84] Eric Ledell Smith guesses that this reticence might have involved a family secret. However, Marjorie Garber notes in *Vested Interests* that historical records reveal that it was almost a common practice for cross-dressers to conceal their "true" identities up until their deaths and beyond.[85] What this suggests is that the secret of Bert Williams's persona was more than just the fact of his masked West Indian identity and suppressed vernacular. The absence of a real name was a statement of control over his history and identity in a culture where he rose to stardom but was never ever quite at home; where he achieved success via a persona that he could profit by but which was not his own. The absence of the name—the concealment of the name—functions to keep alive the fracture between race and culture, his distance from the African American community alongside his commitment to a more abstract racial uplift. To be nameless is to keep the masks in play far beyond his era, his generation, and his time on stage: it is to control his own invisibility and to stage his own disappearance.

LoBagola, on the other hand, can be named, identified, and psychoanalyzed. What can be discovered in the story of Joseph Lee is a politics of racial inauthenticity, one of masquerade in which the knowledge of how hegemonic racial categorization works allowed this strategy of self-erasure, of disappearance through and as performance. In other words, like so many others before him and so many others who worked in the interstices between vaudeville and "ethnological show business," Joseph Lee was a minstrel, but one who worked outside of the bichromatism that had come to define the form. As such, he and the countless others who wore the African mask for a variety of purposes showed how global the impact of that American cultural form was and how far blacks from all over the world could go in implementing it for strategic purposes in the shadow of race. Lee, however, was not interested in the moment of contrast enabled and emphasized by the ritual of "wiping off," or in this case revealing the culture beneath the race. That he could follow the trajectory of the Jewish minstrels in their strategic use of blackface to attain a form of social whiteness was impossible, as it was for Bert Williams. LoBagola was trapped because the only thing close to whiteness was in keeping the mask on, in hiding the "ordinary nigger" behind the performance of regal African identity and allowing the tropes of exotica to free him of the restrictions placed on African Americans. Defending his "stage life" while offstage was a way of extending the performance, expanding it so that its norms and conceits could be employed to supersede the extreme social and political limitations of the "real" world.

Globalizing Blackface: Mimicry, Countermimicry, Carnival

That minstrel theater, vaudeville, world fairs, colonial expositions, and the early circus were very much a part of the same cultural and political complex only broadens and enriches historical conceptions of minstrelsy. And that the black mask and the black voice both function within the growing global sprawl of American imperial influence as a complex sign of the "authentic" and of American cultural, technological, and economic power only emphasizes the scope of racialized masking during the era known as modernism. Yet the space behind the mask was always contested because it was forced to contend with differences within as well as differences without, hierarchies behind the mask as well as institutionalized racism and racial terror out there. Minstrelsy was globalized because of the increasing influence of American culture on nations such as imperial Britain, where the discourses of American slavery and British colonialism were conflated by way of the ritualistically staged representation of the Negro. It was also globalized by the appropriation of the form by colonized black nations and communities eager to engage and construct a transatlantic conversation between and among different black populations. This conversation was one in which they could re-present themselves through a transnational language of race and a tradition of performance that, although based on bichromatism and the racial psychoses of slavery, did not limit them to merely the negation of whiteness.

Minstrelsy and its dramatizing of the various meanings of race were, then, not a set of concerns limited to the coteries of Harlem's renaissance or even to those who preceded Harlem and made its cultural explosion possible. Nor was minstrelsy a popular cultural phenomenon only in the United States and England. Because the aesthetic of minstrelsy could so spill off the stage and become prominent both on the periphery of these various sites of performance/exhibition/containment as well as within privileged sites of black resistance, it is impossible to not see and hear the tension of black skin under black mask as in fact constitutive of another kind of black modernism. This was a modernism that was international but saw itself within a self-generated simulacrum where race signified identity as much as it did disguise and where the stage became ultimately a metaphor for the diaspora itself. Minstrelsy became a virtual space that connected various black communities throughout the diaspora who spoke to and of each other via blackface performance. However, what links minstrel theater, vaudeville, world fairs, colonial exhibitions, and circuses and carnivals is ultimately the politics of colonial specularity in which the white gaze constructs its subjects according to the

various needs of American imperialism and its rising tides of power. The critique of that specularity by the technique of fraud, impersonation, and invisibility is also the secret history of black minstrel theater and of a politics that even Black Nationalism could not represent or contain or dare to acknowledge.

As Anne McClintock, Jeffrey Richards, and others have argued, colonial forms of specularity produce and are in turn produced by a particularly modernist commercial gaze which transforms "the other" into postslavery commodity and the rational Western self into consumer. In other words, it marks the transformation from the direct colonial rule of the British and other imperialists to the cultural colonialism of the United States in which representation, reproduction, and symbolic meanings accomplish much more than territorial domination could. The use of race in this context of display and performance was no doubt a graphic example of just how wide-ranging the new world market was and how many objects, subjects, sounds, and differences it could contain within its field while maintaining the comfortable, traditional power dynamic in which the white consumer was guaranteed symbolic if not literal control. The black use of blackface or an ersatz Africanity is a direct response to that specularity and establishes a break from it and the kind of knowledge it produces and maintains. However, this very same black-on-black masking and the levels of cross-cultural impersonation it requires and implies produces a distinct form of black global spectatorship that exists alongside, under, and against that colonial specularity in complex ways.

A passage from Veit Erlmann's "Spectatorial Lust: The African Choir in England, 1891–1893" is worth quoting at length since it articulates these tensions of representation and discusses them in South Africa—the home of real Zulus who themselves appropriated the blackface tradition. After so much consideration of representations of Zulus and "real" Africans, it is fitting to begin a discussion tracing the African and Caribbean use of the minstrel mask here, with a nation that took bichromatism to its most tragic and absurd legal ends in its practice of apartheid:

> Needless to say, Africans in South Africa, too, had acquired detailed knowledge about Europeans, given the latter's long-standing presence and dominance in South Africa itself. And ironically, it was again minstrelsy that served as the principal medium of cross-cultural imagination and self-definition. English and American minstrel troupes had been touring South Africa from as early as the 1850s, and throughout the latter half of the century

> most South African towns . . . had a thriving minstrel scene. Blacks soon absorbed the format and the aesthetic of the minstrel stage so that by the 1890s most mission schools . . . sponsored their own minstrel performances. Thus, the aesthetics of the minstrel stage not only enabled whites to fantasize about blacks, but in turn also helped blacks to define themselves in opposition to whites. Because the constrained conditions of imperial rule restricted black parody of white behavior to more hidden means of expression, Africans often had few alternatives other than manipulating the representations whites had created of them. Although much of this cross-cultural trafficking of images and fictions of race remains obscure at this stage, one figure of the minstrel stage seems to have been particularly crucial in providing a template for such re-inscriptions. In one of the many ironic twists of the global, interracial imagination, black South Africans transformed the "coon," the fashion-conscious, urban, emancipated black male, into a hero. Beginning in the 1920s urbanizing Zulu-speaking migrant workers reworked the songs and dances associated with the minstrel stage into their own distinct blend of modern "town" music called isikhunzi. As crucial and counterhegemonic as such African attempts at the definition of a positive self-identity may have been, it is this promiscuous mix of mirror images that made up the consolidated symbolic world of the empire. And it was this peculiar racial unconscious of the world's fair, the exotic show, and the minstrel stage that not only formulated their own grammar, but also produced new modes of perception, new regimes of visuality.[86]

To briefly contemporize this material, it must be noted that the legacy of this global cross-pollination of minstrelsy is still alive in post-apartheid South Africa. The well-known and explicitly touristic "Cape Town Coon Carnival" is a New Year's celebration that explicitly conflates blackface (or, more accurately, the use of whiteface) with a carnival aesthetic. One point must be made concerning Erlmann's observations, as it helps strengthen the more general point about the black indigenization of minstrelsy and adds more prisms to the promiscuous mix of black polyvalent signifyin(g) through blackface masking. It is even more promiscuous than represented by Erlmann through an all-too-local reading of South African minstrelsy, especially since the new regime of visuality he historicizes and theorizes was based on deception, fraud, and multiple layers of impersonation. The "symbolic world of the empire," since it was being enacted and performed through blackface, was broad enough to include not just the local binaries of black and white, Zulu and Afrikaaner. Minstrelsy was a symbolic picture of the world itself and

its power relationships, particularly for those on the fringes of a modernism that was defining itself more and more within the all-too-narrow shores of the Atlantic.

In the case of South Africa, minstrelsy was also about Europeans (as opposed to Afrikaaners), Americans, and African Americans who were symbolically inseparable from even the worst of racist characterizations. Knowing how culturally polyglot black South Africa was, the Zulu claim on the reinvented "coon" must have had some impact on other black ethnicities also crouching in the shadows of that era before formal apartheid. Obviously these other black ethnic groups had to negotiate their relationships with the Zulu's while simultaneously struggling against both Afrikaaners and European whites. The "new regimes of visuality" as a by-product of the "peculiar racial unconscious of the world's fair, the exotic show, and the minstrel stage" must be defined, then, not simply by the white construction of the black other or the black subversion of that construction. It should account for the layers of cross-cultural, intra-racial impersonation endemic to the local claim on the global form. The "scopic regime" of this "ethnographic modernism," as James Clifford would call it, includes also a black-on-black specularity that depends on its formal invisibility (the invisibility of black mask on black skin) in order to explore transnational, intra-racial relationships also mediated by the structures of power that make colonial specularity possible. It allows one group of blacks to pretend to be another group of blacks and in so doing to attempt to remove themselves from a regime of knowledge that constructs and contains them simply by their relationship to whites.

It is this "other" specularity that is of primary concern in the remainder of this chapter. To return to the colonial exhibition or exotic shows: those African Americans who found themselves staring at Africans on stages, in cages, or in pseudoauthentic recreations of a "natural habitat" were engaged in a complex and much less stable discourse of history, self, culture, and position. Obviously, this is not to say that they all read the African other in the same way, nor is it to argue simplistically that the black gaze is inherently subversive or political or anti-colonial—the complexities of LoBagola are merely one example of the impossible liberties of black minstrel masking. Instead it is to identify and historicize a different form of specularity that becomes much clearer (though not much simpler) during the Harlem Renaissance and the urban primitivism of the African American and Afro-Caribbean intelligentsia, to say nothing of French Negritude. But even if African Americans did read this African other in exactly the same way as did most modern

white Americans—as exotic, alien, degraded, or desirable bodies—this sameness was unwieldy with historical difference. For an African American viewer to occupy the space of white colonial specularity would require a good deal of positioning. The African American "self" here in question is directly in conflict with the pleasures of a white bourgeois spectatorship predicated on its not being black or African; this, of course, is akin to the pleasures of white minstrelsy, pleasures formally ritualized in the moment of "wiping off." But here the caged African other intrudes on the social constructions of that African American "self" in a racist society by threatening it with similitude and the specter of a lost authenticity and perhaps a strong sense of moral responsibility. Indeed, the presence of that African "blackness" threatens the African American spectator's construction of self since that construction is in part and at that time rooted in a desire to distinguish itself from that which is caged and on display. Even if that kinship or phenotypic resemblance were denied by the African American spectator, the strength of that denial would be the excess that differentiates the black viewer from the white.

Despite and because of these contradictions and tensions, minstrelsy's strategic potential for the global black community at the turn of the century and beyond is illuminated by the various types of blacks who embraced the black mask for so many different reasons. This blackface strategy could be deployed due to the fact that the very notion of Africa was by the turn of the century both a sign of the "authentic" and a synonym for masking, or intraracial, cross-cultural masquerade. With all of this in mind, one wonders about the time LoBagola spent "in Dahomey." One wonders about the time he spent wandering through colonial West Africa with only his wits and his penchant for performance to guide and feed him. One wonders these things because not too long after LoBagola claims to have left "Dahomey" and its environs to return to Europe, a form of West African minstrelsy became popular with the arrival of the recorded black voice by way of the phonograph and "race records." Now, there is no proof that LoBagola directly influenced comedians like the Ga minstrel performers Williams and Marbel who worked in Accra in the mid-1920s and the Sierra Leonese comic troupe Collingwood-Williams and Nichols.[87] It is, however, documented that LoBagola performed in Lagos, Nigeria, in 1911–12 to rave reviews. There is also no proof that Bert Williams directly influenced the West African minstrels as he did the Trinidadians; however, the presence of the name "Williams" in both of these prominent West African black blackface troupes is more than a little tantalizing. One wonders if the name "Williams" had attained the kind

of iconic and commercial significance that a name like "Smith" would in the era of black women's blues singers ushered in after Mamie Smith's "Crazy Blues." Certainly after the arrival of the "Empress of the Blues" herself, Bessie Smith, and the success of Clara Smith, Trixie Smith, and others, many so-called Smiths suddenly popped up in vaudeville and on blues recordings. Nick Tosches makes the same point about the name "Emmett," which was adopted by turn-of-the century white minstrels in homage to the great Dan Emmett, the founder of the very first American minstrel troupe.[88]

It is, however, worth thinking about the presence of continental African minstrelsy as well as Caribbean minstrelsy at the turn of the century, since the form as argued thus far speaks not simply to the bichromatism of American or British race relations but also to the interactions of various black colonial subjects with each other throughout the African dispersal. Minstrelsy functions as an emergent site of a black, transnational discourse which ranges from direct appeals to a solidarity beyond cultural distinctions or divergent histories, to an assertion of difference in which the mask emphasizes the performance of race within the specific dialects of culture. According to the work of the scholar/musician Edmund John Collins:

> Black minstrelsy, which appeared in America during the 1840s and later became incorporated into vaudeville and burlesque, found its way to Africa by the end of the nineteenth century. According to David Coplan, writing about South Africa, "the final development of coloured street music into a professionally performed accompaniment to urban dancing took place under the influence of black American minstrel styles heard in nineteenth century Cape Town and the Eastern Cape."[89]

Before even the coming of the phonograph or of recorded song, the apparatus of blackface had made it to an Africa still struggling under European colonial rule and its rigidly Manichean racial hierarchies. Indeed, it becomes the ground source of an indigenous musical culture. Ragtime music was hugely popular in the streets of West and South Africa during this period and its cultural influence was profound. Many local bands began to perform ragtime and early jazz music and began to incorporate instruments typical of minstrel theater into their music. Instruments like the musical saw and the swanee whistle were appropriated by West African orchestras and early recording artists. Closer to the "Dahomey" of black Western mythologies, black minstrelsy in Ghana made a powerful impression on the local culture still struggling with and against formal colonial domination. The African American vaudeville team of Glass and Grant was brought to Accra in 1924

and then moved on to Lagos in 1926 and was the primary influence on the aforementioned local performance troupes.[90]

Performing minstrel classics like "Nothing Could Be Finer than to Be in Carolina," "The Gold Diggers of Broadway," and "Alexander's Ragtime Band" in cities like Lagos and Accra, these performers brought and translated the mythic theatricality of America's Harlem Renaissance to the space that had always been a myth in the African American community. Here in "Dahomey," Harlem and black Americans were all the rage—and it was assumed that blackface was in fact a representation of actual African Americans, not necessarily white fantasies of race and sex. Because of this understanding or creative misrecognition of minstrel theater, blackface could easily be appropriated into the realm of West African fantasies of liberation. In this prismatic context, America could ironically signify liberation via the black mask—a mask that was connected to African American music, the presence of Garvey's *Negro World*, and other bits of information about the burgeoning New Negro movement and black "first world" success stories. The fact of translation is important to emphasize. Blackface operated outside the specifics of American race relations and plantation/Jim Crow cultural economies, so it was made to address and signify upon the specifics of colonial Ghana. For example, "Black minstrelsy had its rural Jim Crow and Jumbo Chaff in contrast to the slick urban Zip Coon and Dandy Jim. Likewise Ghanaian concern has its urbane Kofi Sharp and Tommy Fire in contrast to the rural 'bushman.' "[91] But because these local meanings and double-meanings were being directly produced by a West African specularity in which African Americans were the imagined site of performative authenticity, cultural power, and ideological resistance, there is embedded in the specifics of Ghanaian minstrelsy the traces of a simultaneous conversation with the United States and its own racial economies.

In the Caribbean we can witness how this transnational movement of minstrelsy leads to a carnivalizing of the minstrel tradition. In his wonderful *Calypso Callaloo*, Donald Hill writes:

> Minstrel shows toured the United States, and some traveled to South America and the Caribbean, where they were very popular. Although there had been blackface routines throughout the Americas before, the arrival of blackface minstrels from the United States in the late nineteenth century gave the stereotypes renewed popularity and focus. Vaudeville troupes, in which the blackface characters were only a part of a larger cast of entertainers, also toured the Caribbean.

> In Trinidad, American-style blackface routines were added to Carnival and were called minstrels or the Yankee band. There mask was part black, part white. This Carnival masquerade was accompanied by a band consisting of guitar, vera, bones, and banjo that played American folk or popular tunes.[92]

The "part black, part white" politics of Trinidadian masquerade will be discussed later; but to flesh out this transnational appropriation/translation of American minstrelsy, Hollis "Chalkdust" Liverpool's *Rituals of Power and Rebellion* is very helpful. During the early period of the urban masquerade tradition in Trinidad, the presence of American blackface was prominent *alongside* the African masking themes and motifs which were popular during the late nineteenth century:

> The period was also marked by the introduction of the "minstrel" masquerade, as revelers copied the Yankee minstrel shows that were popular in the United States at the turn of the century. In the United States during the first half of the 19th century, black-faced White performers as minstrels, using the African-American dialects, portrayed comical images of Africans. In order to appear authentic in their presentations, they sang the songs of the enslaved people, used the humour of African Americans and absorbed African rhythms and dances. Minstrelsy then symbolized White superiority by "emphasizing the peculiarities and inferiority" of Africans. By 1865, African-American minstrels began to make modifications to their images: by the late 19th century, they developed distinctive features of their own. They resurrected the songs of the enslaved as well as the "Negro Spirituals," mocked White planters and focused on the joys of freedom.
>
> The Trinidad revelers imitated these American minstrels, but instead of blackened faces, they whitened theirs over a black charcoal base, laced red spots on their cheeks and wore the "Uncle Sam costume of scissor-tailed coat, tight striped trousers, white gloves, and tall beaver hat.[93]

The year 1865 proved significant for the presence and practice of minstrelsy in Jamaica. That it is the same year in which Liverpool located the black appropriation and modification of minstrelsy that allowed the black mask to focus on "the joys of freedom" is too eerie to be coincidental, considering the events in the Anglophone Caribbean at that time. Here the minstrelsy being imitated in Trinidad—the African American countermimicry being mimicked—is linked explicitly to an African American politics of subversion and resistance. This "freedom" is clearly not intended to be the ludic and libidinal freedom

typically associated with what Houston Baker calls "the psychodrama of the minstrel mask"; it is a freedom linked to political emancipation and racial deliverance, but it was masked in the discourse of the ludic.[94]

Liverpool also discusses those many minstrels in carnival for whom blackface was an explicit act of pan-African solidarity: "in the 1920s and 1930s, minstrels identified with the resistance movement of African Americans in the U.S., and with race pride. . . . It was a way of reaching out to the African Americans in urban North America who, like the lower class in Trinidad, were deprived of voting rights. It was to remind the Africans in Trinidad that 'despite our tribal or ethnic differences and localities, we all belong to one race—the human race.' "[95] Yet despite this final gesture toward racelessness and toward the transcendental category of the "human," these minstrels "sang 'slave songs' from the plantation and painted their faces white in mockery of white Americans who were darkening theirs."[96] It is interesting to note that rather than simply place a white mask on their black faces they would first lay down the burnt-cork mask and then add the white makeup. This suggests that they were aware of the details of the convention, one that demanded blackface before they could erase it by adding another layer of color. This ritual was almost the opposite of the "wiping off" ritual described by Rogin in *Blackface, White Noise,* which emphasized the visual and thereby cultural contrast that would allow Jews to become "white." In this case, the foundational layer of black was seemingly there only to emphasize the presence of that which was being erased or critiqued or perhaps politically emphasized. Invisibility by application and an erasure by addition, by supplementation; reversal by layering and the emphasis by the revelation of an antecedent mask: at work here are the poetics and politics of Bert Williams.

Considering that the culture of carnival was steadily feeding immigrants to New York's own Harlem carnival, it is amazing to witness how the blackface stereotype could transmute into Uncle Sam. This is a stunning example of the subversive appropriation of a racist appropriation. And that Uncle Sam would be the target of Trinidad's satirical ire only reaffirms the global presence of an American empire that would station military troops there during World War II and remain there until the nationalist fervor of the early 1960s led to independence in 1962. However, despite the critique of "whiteness" and the political affiliation with an Americanized "blackness" visible in Caribbean and West African minstrelsy, African Americans still did and do signify the utopian space at the end of black immigrant dreaming: America. Blackface here functions as an interruption of the discourse and symbolic

power of the British Empire while "America" becomes reduced to two things: its racism, but also its promise of freedom by way of the iconic presence of African Americans whose journey to claim the space behind the mask is metaphorized as a journey toward freedom and a greater visibility. From the black diaspora, the black mask functioned as a sign of cultural power, with America signifying a carnival wherein such reversals could seriously come to pass.

A few things should be emphasized about blackface in Trinidad. Again, the appropriation of the form occurred after African American minstrels had already begun to modify and distinguish minstrelsy and themselves through it. It was the black minstrels who added to the subversive mix of colors and costumes that were a colonial carnival. Second, this use of blackface occurred during an intense period of Caribbean out-migration, which brought Trinidadian performers to New York and back, thereby cross-pollinating both carnival and calypso and the performance and political culture of black New York. Third, this is the era in which calypso had already become a recorded form, with much of the recording done in New York City and sent back to Trinidad with touring musicians and itinerant calypsonians. The "Jazz Age" was not without the sound of calypso simultaneously transforming the transnational social spaces of Harlem. Finally, this critique of white American blackface performers was simultaneously a critique of American racism and the pigmentocracies of Trinidad itself. The mask was made to signify transnationally and cross-culturally. It was as much about American race relations as about the colonial Caribbean, as much about the declining British Empire as it engaged the rising imperial ambitions of America. In the shadow of this polyvalent signifying, the mask addresses and contains an emergent pan-African sensibility that transcended, critiqued, and supplemented the fetishized space of Harlem by refracting the black gaze within its own racial and transcultural frame of reference.

In the way that the vernacular blues and jazz culture of the Harlem Renaissance enabled its literary and artistic efforts, the presence of calypso, carnival, and Caribbean vernacular culture impacted the "little Renaissance" of Trinidad's modernism. This small but not minor modernist movement is an example of the process by which, as Edouard Glissant describes, writer-intellectuals were forced to contend with the "language of the street" being "forced back down our throats."[97] In light of the increasingly dominant culture of carnival and calypso in the early part of the twentieth century, these scions of nationalism threw in their lot with the urban masses and in doing so

defined a new form of radicalism not predicated on the colonial-nationalist fear of any soundings that promoted an indigenous self-perception. These so-called Jacket Men for the most part made up the small cadre of writer/intellectuals of the Trinidadian renaissance of the late 1920s and early 1930s, suddenly empowered by vernacular soundings. This group most notably included C. L. R. James, Alfred Mendes, and Alfred Gomes, the editor of their journal *The Beacon*, which consistently argued for both the validation of a distinct West Indian culture through carnival and calypso and for a general indigenization of culture through a synthesis with these new vernacular forms. As Reinhard Sander describes, the *Beacon* group advocated writing

> which utilized West Indian setting, speech, characters, situations and conflicts. It warned against the imitation of foreign literature, especially against the imitation of foreign popular literature. Local colour, however, was not regarded as a virtue by itself. A mere occupation with the enchanted landscape of the tropics did not fulfill the group's emphasis on realism and verisimilitude in writing. Realism combined with and supported by the Trinidadians' social and political ideology resulted in fiction that focused on West Indian characters belonging to the lower classes. The group around Trinidad and *The Beacon* consisted essentially of middle-class people, with a slight racial preponderance of white Creoles and expatriates; but they as well as those middle-class members who were of African or Asian descent, or what is more likely in Trinidad a mixture of any of the major races, "made contact" with Trinidad's lower classes in the pages of their magazines.[98]

Calypso, carnival, and steel bands were all major obsessions of *The Beacon*'s writers and intellectuals. And as was the case for the New Negro movement which inspired them, it was the vernacular that linked these writers to the products of Trinidadian working-class culture and which underpinned all attendant cultural phenomena. In their assault on the "intellectual dropsy" of the colonial middle class, dialect was the primary weapon.[99] Of course the notion that authenticity either resided in or emerged from "the folk" or the working class was not exclusive to this small modernism. And although Africa is not explicitly articulated here as embodied by the folk and made audible in its language, there is still some trace of countermimicry in that the performance of the vernacular is here an antidote to the "aping" of the foreign. This use of "the folk" is one of the things that links this modernism to global currents of literary and political thought in the twentieth century along with incessant Caribbean out-migration throughout this period. Hazel

Carby points out, for example, that the Trinidadian renaissance is and must be connected to both the Harlem Renaissance and international proletarian literary movements for which "realism" was also a question of "folk speech" and folk/popular culture.[100]

But as Glissant suggests, this appropriation of the vernacular voice on the part of the "little Renaissance" wasn't an obvious step in their evolution as artists and activists, nor was it the eruption of authenticity that later critics would describe. It was a response to the pressure of the suddenly dominant urbanized folk culture. C. L. R. James himself admits in *Beyond a Boundary* that he "was fascinated by the calypso singers and the sometimes ribald ditties they sang in their tents during carnival time. But, like many of the black middle class. . . . I was made to understand that the road to the calypso tent was the road to hell."[101] Derek Walcott is even more critical of this process of "appropriating" calypso and the carnival complex for the sake of an Afro-Caribbean literary modernism: "But carnival was as meaningless as the art of the actor confined to mimicry. And now the intellectuals, courting and fearing the mass, found values in it that they had formerly despised. They apotheosized the folk form, insisting that calypsos were poems."[102] His is the language of the apostate, for whom the religion of the vernacular could never ease a consciousness committed to fragmentation as poetic and political strategy. His is the language of the aesthete, whose politics is ultimately produced by the rootlessness of trickster promiscuity rather than its nemesis: nationalist orthodoxy and its fetish for place. Again, there is little talk of Africa in the work of this movement. For them the vernacular with its cultural apparatus was prized for its potential for newness, which made it less a product of the indigenous—fixed in time and easily identifiable as romanticized or vilified other. Instead it was a mode or a practice of indigenization, a product of a new authenticity resistant to colonial representations and systems of value and meaning.

One of *The Beacon*'s editorials from 1933 makes clear how the vernacular would lead *from* mimicry to the indigenous. The very notion that mimicry could produce the indigenous and was merely a transitional stage is the primary point here:

> The day will come when we, like America, will produce our Walt Whitman; then, and only then will the movement towards an art and language indigenous to our spirit and environment commence. One has only to glance through the various periodicals published in this and the other islands to see what slaves we still are to English culture and tradition. There are some who

> lay great store by this conscious aping of another man's culture, but to us it seems merely a sign of the immaturity of our spirit. It is an ailment that is, however, only temporary, and we look forward to the day when it will be no more.[103]

Despite that lack of direct interest in Africa in the *Beacon* group, for Walcott this primary gesture toward the folk is linked to nationalism by virtue of its dependence on a countermimicry in which the elite (nationalist, bohemian, or otherwise) mask themselves in the vernacular. What Walcott sees in the nationalist claim on the folk as the direct conduit to Africa is a similarity to the claim on carnival as a sign of direct access to the folk—this even though the latter is often depicted as the ultimate anathema to the essentialism of the former. In "What the Twilight Says" (1970), Walcott writes: "The romantic darkness which they celebrate is thus another treachery, this time perpetuated by the intellectual. The result is not one's own thing but another minstrel show."[104] In this reading, the black-on-black minstrelsy first articulated as a political gesture by the *Beacon* group is one which consciously apes the folk rather than the European in order to reinvent the native. It is then deconstructed as minstrelsy by Walcott a generation later for its dependence on the falsely mimetic and the appropriations and fantasies of class privilege. Walcott seems indifferent to the very possibility of a counterpolitics of minstrelsy *within* the language of minstrelsy/mimicry itself. An even more class-conscious description and dismissal of *The Beacon*'s intellectuals and their relationship to carnival comes from the great calypsonian Attila himself:

> And now the cultural resurgence which the early post-depression years were witnessing, bringing into being *The Beacon* literary magazine, had drawn the native intellectual, chafing under his yoke, to the kaiso as a moth to a flame. All barriers were down and inhibitions forgotten as middle-class society filled the tent to hear Tiger sing "Money Is King."[105]

Attila suggests here that perhaps it was the "carnival complex" that ultimately appropriated and assimilated the Trinidadian literary renaissance—as it could be argued that minstrelsy ultimately usurped African American modernism from within, becoming so prevalent as a strategy, a sign, and a gesture that the mask disappeared into flesh. Attila triumphantly claims that the "chafing" which describes Walcott's well-known poetics of division and doubt—preceded of course by Countee Cullen's "Heritage" and Paul Laurence Dunbar's "We Wear the Mask" or perhaps even Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*—could be transcended or contained by the din of the carnival.

So by the time of this minor but not insignificant Caribbean renaissance, carnival, calypso, and the vernacular were no longer marginal elements in a colonial anticolonialist coming of age. Those colonial forms had triumphed from the bottom up and were well on their way to becoming postcolonial national institutions. In Gomes's words:

> It is as if these native minstrels have preserved a flair for what is basic in humour which their more sophisticated brothers and sisters have lost somewhere along the path of becoming educated. We have only been educated to the point of not being eager to recognize our surroundings: we have yet to reach the point where our education will suggest to us that it is not complete without recognition of the roots from which we have come.[106]

As seen here, the struggle to claim vernacular culture in the Caribbean revolves around the definitional tensions of the minstrel figure: as naive producer of native song and sound, and as comic blackface stereotype in a global economy of racial masquerade in which vaudeville, burnt cork, American racial spectacle, and carnival become linked through a transnational movement of black dialects. As noted earlier, Donald Hill points out something that contextualizes the latter: "In Trinidad, American-style blackface routines were added to Carnival and were called minstrels or the Yankee band. Their mask was part black, part white."[107] He also isolates the most important influence on the Caribbean minstrel tradition: Bert Williams, who "influenced many Caribbean vaudevillians including Sam Manning, Bill Rogers, Phil Madison, Johnny Walker, and Ralph Fitz-Scott," though there is no evidence that he ever toured there.[108]

Because of its dependence on the African American use of the minstrel mask, the "part black, part white" sign of the Caribbean minstrel is remapped. It is part black because of Bert Williams and other black minstrels from the American stage, and part white because its racial politics is not the same as that which produces American minstrelsy. The sound here is different, having been refracted through the African American use of blackface in the context of white racism and the Trinidadian use of black- and whiteface explicitly in the context of carnival. Some of these performers like Sam Manning, Phil Madison, and Bill Rogers were as well known in Port of Spain or Guyana as they were in New York City, having recorded and performed there. It is safe to say that their minstrelsy was directly informed by a study of performances in the United States as well as by performances of touring minstrel shows. So it should not be surprising to have found certain vernacu-

lar trademarks of African American minstrel sound in one of the carnival tents some loud early-twentieth-century *J'ouvert* morning.

Among the Caribbean vaudevillians working in both the United States and in Trinidad, and significantly influenced by Bert Williams, were Johnny Walker and Ralph Fitz-Scott. The aforementioned Sam Manning was one of the—if not the—first American calypsonians who "introduced Caribbean comedy and calypso to Harlem audiences."[109] Although born in Trinidad, Manning was never known to work in the calypso tents. His fame came from Harlem and his audience was largely Caribbean-born Americans for whom calypso music was as much the sound of a global modernism and cultural countersignifyin(g) as were jazz and the blues. According to Roaring Lion in his *Calypso*, Phil Madison was actually the first to bring vaudeville theater to Trinidad during a time when calypso was struggling for local recognition and respect. Ironically, vaudeville arrived from America via a much more circuitous routing. Because "carnival was tabooed by the upper classes since emancipation," vaudeville was accepted, coming "all the way from what was then British Guiana, and took over the shows throughout the island."[110] Madison was himself a Guinean who arrived in Trinidad in 1908 and returned in 1912. After Madison teamed up with the local performers Johnny Walker and Berkely, vaudeville became the dominant form of Trinidadian popular theater; and it became unwittingly the tool of the middle class that had worked hard to suppress the indigenous forces of carnival by way of a celebration of the racialized performance traditions of an imperial America in blackface.

These Caribbean performers also toured throughout the Caribbean during the early years of the twentieth century, further spreading the poetics and politics of blackface performance as it arose in plantation America and began to incorporate the local inflections of its colonial vernaculars. But before the widespread success/appropriation of carnival in colonial Trinidad, it was the vaudeville/minstrelsy complex that claimed precedence in Trinidadian popular culture. As Roaring Lion tells it: "Before that the center of attraction was vaudeville, Black and White Minstrels that became known during the two days of carnival as the 'Yankee Band.' Even certain popular musicians with well established bands refused to accompany calypsonians in those days."[111] Here in colonial Trinidad the mimicry of an imported racial discourse and performance tradition was employed to suppress a local racial discourse and performance tradition. Lion even argues that it wasn't until island musicians were sent to record in the United States and their songs became hits on

Broadway that local musicians and middle-class patrons began to socialize with or take seriously the calypsonians.[112] Because masking is the common strategy of both traditions of racial performance and because each tradition can be used to signify the other, a necessary blending was quickly enabled. Lion assesses the relationship between vaudeville and carnival this way: "at one point in time, both had to work together, the calypso being at a disadvantage, and hoping to use the vaudeville in order to get a stronger foothold in the theatres."[113] Both had to "work together," meaning simply that both wore each other's mask in order to occupy each other's space while simultaneously maintaining their own.

In his redoubtable *Calypso and Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad,* Gordon Rohlehr further blurs the line between the calypsonian and the black vaudevillian and minstrel. Since "American vaudeville had become popular in the second decade of this century . . . calypsonians of the twenties would either . . . function as both calypsonians and vaudeville entertainers, or have to compete with the extremely popular vaudeville shows which were staged in cinemas. It would be a decade before these same cinemas allowed the staging of calypso shows."[114] Interestingly enough, it was the phonograph that allowed calypso to displace American-style vaudeville from Trinidadian popular culture: "It became necessary to team up with the vaudeville in order to present the calypso throughout the year. But after Sa Gomes took over the calypso recording business it was no longer necessary to do so. Our records did the trick for us, and the calypso quickly replaced all other shows in Trinidad."[115] Eduardo Sa Gomes was one of the major patrons of calypso during the 1920s and 1930s. He owned one of the earliest Trinidadian recording studios and became a dominant figure in nationalizing the commercial potential of calypso and in marketing it internationally. It was he who, before opening his own studio in Port of Spain, had financed the travels of calypsonians and Caribbean musicians to New York to perform and record gramophone discs to be shipped back to Trinidad for carnival.

Beyond his significance to the Caribbean American community, Sam Manning was notorious for being the traveling companion of Ashwood Garvey after she had left Marcus Garvey under charges of infidelity. The two of them would eventually collaborate on the successful play *Hey, Hey,* which premiered in New York in 1926 and was performed in Caribbean dialect. This play could be read as an interesting riposte to both Williams's and Walker's *In Dahomey* and Marcus Garvey's "Back to Africa" in that it concerns, in the words of Irma Watkins-Owens, "two dissatisfied husbands who divorce their

wives and are determined to find their true soul mates in Africa. After much adventure and searching, the men locate two women who have the necessary qualifications, only to discover they are their ex-wives, who have preceded them to Africa."[116] Harlem theater reviews did in fact celebrate *Hey, Hey* as a sendup of Marcus Garvey and the UNIA. Manning and Ashwood Garvey continued to integrate Caribbean themes and vernaculars into Harlem popular theater until they migrated to London, where they opened a successful nightclub and restaurant. To further seal the connections between minstrelsy, vaudeville, carnival, and pan-Africanism, their restaurant became well known as a gathering place for numerous pan-African intellectuals, including C. L. R. James, George Padmore, and Kwame Nkrumah.[117]

Minstrelsy in Jamaica has an even more dramatic history. It was exported to Jamaica during a key historical moment of extreme racial tension, one where the races were polarized, where the metropole/colony relationship was threatened, and where violence was common. It was a climate so volatile and violent that it even managed to infect the attitudes of the Victorian intelligentsia and further add to the growing insecurity over the management and maintenance of the colonies. In his *The Jamaican Stage, 1655–1900*, Errol Hill describes the presence and impact of blackface minstrelsy in colonial Jamaica. Because of the year in question, minstrelsy and British colonial domination are clearly much more intimate than what has been shown via the theaters and street culture of late Victorian England earlier in this analysis:

> A new dimension in popular entertainment was introduced when the first quartet of minstrels to visit Jamaica arrived from New York in July 1865. . . . Although the so-called Negro Songs had in the past been rendered as supporting items to dramatic plays, this quartet was the first professional group to introduce Jamaica to the blackface minstrelsy that had become immensely popular in America during the second half of the nineteenth century. Other troupes would soon follow: the Original Georgia Minstrels in 1869, the Christ Minstrels in 1872, and Edwin Browne's Minstrel and Novelty Company in 1884. They established a tradition of blacking-up to portray comic stereotypes of the black man that Jamaican comedians of the populist theatre adopted and maintained into the Bim and Bam era of the 1950s and 1960s.[118]

Blackface minstrel songs had already appeared on the Jamaican concert stage by 1849, when local musicians and music professors presented at the New Court House in Kingston a locally produced version of "Ethiopian songs and

glees."[119] Considering the impact of the radically pan-Africanist Rastafarian movement in Jamaica a few generations later, the use of the term "Ethiopian" is more than a little interesting. This movement, as is well known, is noted for appropriating and ultimately performing a romanticized and essentialist "Ethiopian" identity. This identity initially functioned as a militant critique of colonial and neocolonial Jamaican race relations before unraveling into a hazy parody of itself via its appropriation by an island tourist industry that, like its music industry, would eventually become indistinguishable from its nationalism. As Robert Hill points out in "Dread History," his seminal essay on the early Rastafarian movement in Jamaica, although it reached full flower in the late 1920s and 1930s, the broader currents of "Ethiopianism" which preceded both Garveyism and Rastafarianism had been present in Jamaica from the turn of the century.[120] The overlap between "Ethiopian" as a sign of political affirmation and "Ethiopian" as a sign of Afrocentric mimicry is as important here as it is in the context of "Dahomeyan" or "Congo" or "Zulu" in the United States and Britain.

But it wasn't until the fateful year of 1865 that an American blackface performance "of the true Ethiopian minstrel style" was given in Spanish Town.[121] Errol Hill writes that it would take twenty-three more years, with the arrival of "the Tennessee Jubilee Singers" 1888, for Jamaicans to be introduced to "authentic American blacks who had no need for the blackface makeup."[122] That the appearance of this new form of theater and performance was in 1865 is remarkable considering that it was the year of the Morant Bay Rebellion, known also in America and Britain as the "Governor Eyre Controversy." This rebellion or controversy politically split the Victorian intelligentsia and in many ways signified the movement toward formal independence in Jamaica that came almost a century later. Briefly, this controversy concerned the response of Edward John Eyre, the temporary governor of Jamaica appointed in 1862, to the challenging of colonial authority by emancipated blacks. These challenges to colonial authority were largely over questions of taxation, poverty, land reform, and racism as the newly freed Jamaican blacks aggressively claimed equality in an island where they vastly outnumbered whites. These were organized challenges, and blacks made their case against the planters and local magistrates alongside members of the local mulatto elite such as George William Gordon, a highly regarded critic of Governor Eyre and a deacon who had long sided with the black peasantry.

The violence erupted most viciously in the town of Morant Bay, where hundreds of blacks clashed with volunteer guards, killing dozens of mostly white

men. In reprisal, Eyre instituted martial law and his men killed more than 400 Jamaicans, wounded 34, flogged hundreds more, and thoroughly devastated local villages. Gordon was found guilty of high treason and promptly hanged. In England the "Eyre Defense Committee" was initially chaired by Thomas Carlyle, author of the notorious 1849 broadside "On the Negro Question," which was later reprinted as "Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question" (1853). In this particular polemic, the author of the great *Sartor Resartus* seems deeply indebted to some form of minstrel representation of blacks that could be traced back perhaps to the figure of the harlequin, since it would be some time before actual American minstrelsy reached England:

> Do I, then, hate the Negro? No; except when the soul is killed out of him, I decidedly like poor Quashee; and find him a pretty kind of man. With a pennyworth of oil, you can make a handsome glossy thing of Quashee, when the soul is not killed in him! A swift, supple fellow; a merry-hearted, grinning, dancing, singing, affectionate kind of creature, with a great deal of melody and amenability in his composition.[123]

It must be said that this representation is quite culturally specific in its use of "Quashee," that being a term used to signify Caribbean blacks, despite Carlyle's overwhelmingly generalized racism. However, it is also worth noting that in Carlyle the category of "soul" and the notion of performance are both deployed in an explicit attempt to politically disempower Caribbean blacks. The "soul" of Quashee is musical and merry, and his essence is performance and entertainment—not self-governance or independence. In response to the overreactive violence of Governor Eyre and the support of the British government for his actions, the "Jamaica Committee" was formed led by John Stuart Mill, whose "The Negro Question" had been published soon thereafter and in response to Carlyle's travesty. The Jamaica Committee was able to get Eyre removed from office though no charges of murder were ever leveled against him or his men. He in fact received a generous pension and had his legal fees paid by the British government.

One can only wonder what the responses to minstrelsy were among the polyglot audience in colonial Jamaica during this period of severe colonial and racial tension. Unlike the minstrel theater of the United States, which operated largely in the context of legal segregation, minstrelsy in the Caribbean played to mixed audiences who were separated in terms of seating but who all watched the same shows simultaneously. But of course what they watched may have been the same, but what they saw was notably different. West African minstrels also performed for a polyglot audience, not only a

racially diverse one but also one comprising multiple local African ethnicities. Minstrelsy in this context was partially a way to create a unifying discussion and symbolic discourse of race where the imagined African American presence could mediate the multiple local black ethnicities. After all, the carnival complex manifests various social, historical, and cultural contradictions and conflicts ritualized through masking and theater simultaneously. Each experience of carnival differs based on the social and political register within which each experience or subculture functions. This is what Richard Burton means when he asserts in *Afro-Creole* that in carnival there are many mini-carnivals.

Minstrelsy, then, especially when separated from the bichromatic cultural politics of the United States, registers on multiple levels within a polyglot community still under formal colonial control. The same of "ethnological show business." Clearly the white spectator makes something much different of the African "specimen" than does the African American spectator, who experiences a distinct form of spectatorship given his or her position in the hierarchies of race and power. Whether their response is one of outrage or humiliation, scorn and/or psychic distancing, that gaze and its products are as important to American "produce imperialism" as they are to African American nationalism and what were the growing discourses of pan-Africanism.