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Imagining Africa: An Analysis of Tropes and Motifs in Turn of the Century Black Music

Shane Ortale

The Graduate Center, City University of New York

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IMAGINING AFRICA:
AN ANALYSIS OF TROPES AND MOTIFS IN TURN OF THE CENTURY BLACK MUSIC

by

SHANE ORTALE

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2019

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Imagining Africa : An Analysis of Tropes and Motifs in Turn of the Century

Black Music

by

Shane Ortale

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

Date

Karen R. Miller

Thesis Advisor

Date

Elizabeth Macaulay - Lewis

Executive Officer

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

ABSTRACT

Imagining Africa : An Analysis of Tropes and Motifs In Turn of the
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Shane Ortale

Advisor: Karen Miller

References to Africa exist in different forms in diasporic music from every country in the New World. In the case of the United States, an abundance of song lyrics of black writers and musicians from the turn of the twentieth century contain imaginings of the African continent. This thesis analyzes the many ways that these depictions were produced within the minstrel and vaudeville genres. While these artists faced many obstacles that limited the scope of their lyrical content, they used diverse strategies to undermine the racist world in which they lived. By juxtaposing and conflating tropes about black folks in America and Africa as a continent, these artists brought problematic and injurious worldviews to the surface, exposing them for their lack of insight and hypocritical nature. Following specific thematic threads, this paper will show how and why these tropes and motifs emerged, and how they were put to use.

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INTRODUCTION

In spring of 2010 Nas and Damian Marley released their much celebrated collaboration *Distant Relatives*. The coming together of the king of Queens and the son of Jamaica's most beloved meant that listeners around the world expected something that was not only moving and creative, but also laden with messages and questions regarding diasporic relations, Afro-identity, storytelling, and history. To viably represent the power, pedigree, and possibilities of the collaboration was no easy project. The complexities and multitude of thematic markers that the artists hope to cover would engage and encompass so many aspects of the connections of the United States, the Caribbean, Africa and beyond.¹ At the fifty first Grammy Awards Nas explained "Right now..I'm working on an album with Damian Marley, and we tryin' to build some schools in Africa with this one, and trying to build empowerment..to show love... So, the record's ... all about really the 'hood and Africa also as well."² In creating the collaboration with Damian and keeping their gaze towards Africa while contemplating their own upbringing, the duo would engage their topical interest and spiritual drive with an array of strategies. As they worked to build schools in Africa, they also incorporated samples and thematic input from African musicians from Mali to Somalia.³ At their concerts they swapped each others verses with different backing riddims, and on the record their lyrics explored imaginings of Africa and its connection to diasporic people across the world.⁴ While *Distant Relatives* is one of the most

¹ Damien Marley and Nasir Jones, *Distant Relatives*, Universal Republic / Def Jam, 1974, vinyl.

² Nasir Jones, quoted in Shaheed Reid, "Nas Confirms Kelis' Pregnancy, Talks New Album," *MTV News*, February 9, 2009.

³ "Distant Relatives," *Wikipedia*, last modified August 1, 2019.

⁴ Marley and Jones, *Distant Relatives*.

“topically African” hip-hop records of the last decade, it is just one of many examples of an engagement with the continent.

There are a multitude of ways that musicians and songwriters have referenced and imagined Africa in their music. Hip hop, with its tradition of emphasizing storytelling and lyricism, has had many artists discuss their connection to Africa in relation to their identities, life stories and influences. Clearly the ways that Africa is recalled or imagined can and does look different depending on eras, artists, and locales even within the same genre. Reaching back past hip hop towards its musical inspiration, funk, there are more avenues that artists took in recalling their ancestral past. New Orleans funk legends The Meters sang “Take me back, to the Motherland...Africa oh Africa.”⁵ Being that it was a former Spanish and French port city with deep connections to the Caribbean, New Orleans was always a special example of African American cultural and musical production. The particular laws that existed there, and the French method of colonial control over its free black, “creole”, and slave population allowed certain African connections and retentions to remain and develop.⁶

This is even more apparent in the case of Cuba. As opposed to the Protestant often Puritanical evangelism of North America, Catholicism and saint worship allowed for adaptive syncretization of Africa-based religious icons in Cuba. The Spanish style of colonialism and empire predicated its longevity on perpetuating ethnic divisions amongst people of African descent, and thus allowed for the proliferation of *cabildos* and *nacions*.⁷ As a by-product of this there existed a somewhat more openly tolerated disposition towards African drumming by the otherwise racist authorities. Furthermore, the “replenishment” of slaves during Cuba’s nineteenth

⁵ The Meters, George Porter Jr., Leo Nocentelli, Art Neville and Ziggy Modeliste, “Africa,” Track 9 on *Rejuvenation*, Sea-Saint Studios, 1974, vinyl.

⁶ Leroi Jones, *Blues People* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1963), 74-76.

⁷ Ned Sublette, *Cuba And It's Music* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2007), 180.

century sugar boom meant that an abundance of people born on the African continent brought with them musical, linguistic, and spiritual forms that would add to the culture of the island.⁸ Afro-Cuban influence on popular music was undeniable even by political conservatives, and by World War II *son cubano* was being celebrated as a national art form that could stand up against American Jazz.⁹ Hence, the *afrocubanismo* that exists in Cuban music embodies a special form of overt pronunciation. Because of Afro-Cuba's contribution to the genesis of *salsa*, *salseros* from Puerto Rico to New York City and beyond—even phenotypically white ones—frequently use references to African rituals, dances, and deities in their songs.¹⁰

In Jamaican reggae different references to Africa appear. Most scholars agree on the fact that the British Empire's Puritanical colonial apparatus did not allow for such a thing as a *cabildo* or *nation* to exist. What did exist was a healthy distribution of maroon societies that practiced "African drumming" and "African ritual."¹¹ Thus, musicologists such as Peter Manuel argue that there was not such an indigenous art form that evolved from generation to generation like *son cubano*. As the British abolished slavery and former enslaved peoples were emancipated from the gruesome bondage that limited their movement and spiritual livelihood they began to more openly practice Afro-derived spiritual rituals that involved drumming and call and response. Jamaicans heard American rhythm-and-blues and added their own "island" twists to the music.¹² As this proto-reggae began to expand, Rastafarianism developed as the most viable spiritual entity within the music community. Drawing on Marcus Garvey's emphasis of repatriation, this neo-Judeo-Christian religion posited Ethiopia as the true homeland of diasporic

⁸ Sublette, *Cuba And It's Music*, 126.

⁹ Robin Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), 127.

¹⁰ Willie Colon and Hector Lavoe, "Aguanile," Track 5 on *El Juicio*, Fania Records, 1972, vinyl.

¹¹ Peter Manuel, Kenneth Bilby, and Michael Largey, *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music From Rumba to Reggae* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 182.

¹² Manuel, et. al., *Caribbean Currents*, 187-193.

black folks while proclaiming Haile Selassie—the country’s Coptic Christian emperor—as God incarnate. Rastafarianism considered itself and its tenets as the antithesis of the capitalist, violent, present day Babylon in which Jamaicans (and really all New World black folks) lived. Through this cosmological vein, references to Africa are plentiful in Rastafarian reggae and, as the musical form blossomed, musicians expanded their lyrical topics to many regions and issues across the African continent.¹³

As for the United States, the most celebrated overt and explicit early references to Africa come from jazz. Having its roots in New Orleans, early jazz was colored with the rhythms of African-inspired funeral processions, and the blend of sounds in Congo Square, both of which resembled the cosmopolitan creolite of the port city.¹⁴ Some decades later prominent musicians such as Duke Ellington, John Coltrane, and Ron Carter would ornament their song titles and records with names referencing Africa. This phenomenon is analyzed in great detail in the book *A Night in Tunisia* by Norman C. Weinstein, who reveals that these musicians were inserting references for a multitude of reasons. Some were giving tribute to the origin of their ancestors, of their rhythms, of their imagination. Others had visited countries and were recording renditions encapsulating experiences they had there.¹⁵ While most of these songs are instrumental and do not include lyrics, their choice of African themes reveals much about the artists who chose them. One of the main concerns with Weinstein’s book is the way that jazz musicians used their imaginations to “deconstruct the fixed body of distorted African imagery that racists have historically disseminated in multitudinous forms.”¹⁶ By incorporating and reimagining African

¹³ Manuel, et. al., *Caribbean Currents*, 194-201.

¹⁴ Jones, *Blues People*, 74.

¹⁵ Norman C. Weinstein, *A Night In Tunisia: Imaginings of Africa in Jazz* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corporation, 1993).

¹⁶ Weinstein, *A Night In Tunisia*, 12.

themes into their music these jazz musicians such as Duke Ellington, “took the racist notion of Africa as a primitive jungle and deconstructed that stereotype through his music so that listeners could see a fresh Africa.”¹⁷ Where *A Night in Tunisia* sees many black jazz artists’ imaginings of Africa as vital to the ascendance of Afro-spirituality, the book asserts that “Ragtime and Early Jazz” provides essentially the opposite function. In this early period the music is laden with either “humorous, ironic references to Africa (often screening what was really music composed by whites)” or “an exotic and mysterious landscape, corresponding to the ignorance of African actuality.”¹⁸ While the accuracy of this statement cannot be denied, there are nonetheless an abundance of strategies that turn of the century black musicians used in dealing with African themes. Many of these artists included lyrical content about Africa in their songs, plenty of which still exist in either wax recording or sheet music. In fact the first song ever recorded by a black artists, George W. Johnsons “The Laughing Song” made more than a passing reference to the continent.¹⁹ Similarly, the first all-black Broadway production *In Dahomey*, dealt greatly with the topic of African colonization societies and would stage a scene in West Africa.²⁰ While there is not one way to categorize the portrayals that black musicians produced in regards to imagining their ancestral homeland, there is an abundance of lyrical evidence that they seriously pondered its meaning, both to them and their audiences.

Even proposing the importance of literally mentioning Africa is itself problematic. What is most vital to the “Black Atlantic” expression, to use Paul Gilroy’s terminology, is the fact that it relies on a “rather different hermeneutic focus [that] pushes towards the memetic, dramatic,

¹⁷ Weinstein, *A Night In Tunisia*, 12.

¹⁸ Weinstein, *A Night In Tunisia*, 30.

¹⁹ Tim Brooks, Richard Keith Spottswood, and Dick Spottswood. *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry, 1890-1919* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 31; See Appendix B.

²⁰ Will Marion Cook, Jesse Shipp, Alex Rogers, James Vaughan, John Leubrie Hill, and Paul Laurence Dunbar, “In Dahomey” in *The Music and Scripts of In Dahomey*, edited by Thomas L. Riis (Middleton, WI: AR Editions Inc, 1996).

and performative.”²¹ For Gilroy, privileging words as the central means of expression leads to a cosmological trap that is set by Western rationality. His focus on black musical expression is based off of the assertion that it is intrinsically both part of modernity while simultaneously crucial to a counter-modernity against the “occidental rationality” that was “cheerfully complicit” with “racial terror.”²² Echoing Edouard Glissant, Gilroy traces black oral tradition back to the plantation environment in which slaves were not allowed to read or write. Instead, slaves, descendents of slaves, and black “organic intellectuals” created an extra-historical, “enhanced mode of communication beyond the petty power of words-- spoken or written.”^{23 24} Part of living and working within the interior and anterior of modernity involves holding up Western democratic civilization to its supposed values. This creative aural community is inseparable from capitalism and western reason, and thought; yet, its essence and soul-force is its potency to ameliorate and call-out the oppressive hypocrisy of the world from which it emerges.²⁵ Utilizing its greatest assets, Black Atlantic music provides an alternative, a commentary, a counter-narrative, a criticism “from the point of view of its emancipatory transformation.”²⁶

Still, the formats and strategies that black musicians worked through relied heavily on “mystification of language in ways that projected communally derived techniques, while simultaneously protecting the organization sites of production and producers of such critiques.”

²⁷ These “covert”, “aural communities of resistance” developed a multitude of tactics to

²¹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 38.

²² Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 56.

²³ Edouard Glissant, *The Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

²⁴ Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 76.

²⁵ Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 48.

²⁶ Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 39.

²⁷ Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 38.

galvanize and cultivate African-American cultural production without necessarily mentioning Africa. These include diverse strategies in presenting black music such as Cannonball Adderly's recordings with live-audience cooperation, Aretha Franklin's African-style garb on her album covers, and James Brown's "Say it Loud."²⁸

Apart from these cognizant political aesthetics, basically all popular music contains embedded notation, voicing and rhythm that are in some way "African derived." What could be called "comparative African retentions" is a huge topic that touches on basically every aspect of ethnomusicology in the New World. Musicologists, historians, archivists, and social theorists have explored the complexities of identity production, acculturation vs transculturation, and retention vs imagination since the first plantations were set up and Africans from different locales, ethnic groups, and religions were forced to live together.²⁹ As for the US there are several factors that were especially central to explicit disconnections with Africa directly. First, by 1807, the federal government outlawed the importation of slaves from any foreign land.³⁰ This meant that ethnic replenishment of "fresh Africans" would be halted, a clear difference from the Portuguese and Spanish territories. Thus, as generations of enslaved peoples had lived in the New World, African "work songs" that referenced rivers, territories, and crops in Africa began to transform into using America as their reference point.³¹ While enslaved people continued to use these types of songs to perpetuate communal and spiritual meaning in surviving the brutality of chattel slavery, the essence of the song rather than the words encapsulated the African influence. As slavers and whip-wielders became aware of the many functions of African

²⁸ Mark Anthony Neal, *What The Music Said: Black Popular Music and Black Public Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

²⁹ Richard Cullen Rath, *How Early America Sounded* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); Jones, *Blues People*; Manuel, et. al., *Caribbean Currents*.

³⁰ "U.S. Bans Importation of Slaves." National Geographic Society, October 21, 2013.

³¹ Jones, *Blues People*, 18.

music and ritual they were quick to stifle the pronounced use of African words, forcing enslaved individuals to taper songs lyrical content to that which would allow them to survive while still retaining clear elements of Afro-derived form. In *Blues People*, Amiri Baraka contends that while specific “isolated songs, dances, and instruments” may not have been so easily transported and transposed in the American environment, “basic rhythmic, harmonic, and melodic devices” did.³² This was not only true in the case of secular music but also in church songs in which European hymns were transposed into “Negro Sprituals” by incorporating the aforementioned attributes. While black folks in the American colonies became Christians, their use of Africa as a reference drifted further away. Still, while these Afro-descendants conceived their promised land or deliverance as biblical, they continued to insert “Africanisms” into their worship practices by adding call and response, “rhythmic syncopation, polyphony, and shifted accents as well as the altered timbral qualities and diverse vibrato effects of African music.”³³ By the time the Civil War had ended and enslaved people had achieved emancipation, they began to imagine deliverance and self-determination not only through biblical imagery and salvation, but, more tangibly, through a “desire to be more in this country.”³⁴ As formerly unfree black folks left their plantation for migratory work they began to create the foundation of early blues music, transforming work songs into more individualized blues played on the harmonica and banjo.³⁵ As illustrated by Baraka, this emergence of black secular music would be dictated by the “social and psychological environment,” and, while these songs were undeniably “negro” songs,—and

³² Jones, *Blues People*, 27.

³³ Jones, *Blues People*, 47.

³⁴ Jones, *Blues People*, 64.

³⁵ Jones, *Blues People*, 69.

would be labeled as such by white mainstream society --"almost no classical blues song would, or could, make direct or *positive* reference of Africa." ³⁶

The first entry of black musicians from a "folk" environment to a "public" performative economy, or in other words in presentations for white audiences for money, would be in "black minstrel shows, travelling road shows, medicine shows, vaudeville shows, carnivals, and tiny circuses." ³⁷ Since the end of the Civil War, black minstrels had popped up across America mimicking, reinterpreting and "reinscripting" ³⁸ the same racist tropes that were employed by white performers who donned black face. Racial prejudice at the turn of the century was so embedded in the fabric of Western Civilization that it influenced every aspect of thought production and society.³⁹ Southern working class whites and wealthy former enslavers were retaliating against black advances during reconstruction by passing vagrancy laws, Jim Crow legislation, and producing literature portraying blacks as less than human.⁴⁰ Race riots and lynchings were rampant in almost all regions of the United States, including New York City. ⁴¹ The reality was that many African Americans did not know or could not imagine their place in postbellum United States. At the turn of the century ninety-percent of black folks living in the US were located in the South.⁴² To say that they faced difficulties is an understatement. This was literally an unprecedented time. Formerly enslaved people and their descendents did not know their future, they did not have a grasp on the economic possibilities ahead of them because there

³⁶ Jones, *Blues People*, 65.

³⁷ Jones, *Blues People*, 82.

³⁸ David Krasner, *Resistance, Parody, and Double-Consciousness in African American Theatre 1895-1910* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997); Louis Chude-Sokei, *The Last "Darky": Bert Williams, Black-On-Black Minstrelsy, and the African Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006) 26.

³⁹ Krasner, *Resistance, Parody, and Double-Consciousness in African American Theatre*, 5.

⁴⁰ Krasner, *Resistance, Parody, and Double-Consciousness in African American Theatre*, 19.

⁴¹ Krasner, *Resistance, Parody, and Double-Consciousness in African American Theatre*, 50.

⁴² U.S. Census Bureau. *Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, for the United States, Regions, Divisions, and States*, by Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, Washington, D.C., September 2002.

was no precedent for it. Therefore, when we discuss the choices that were made by migratory musicians and entertainers of the day we must keep in mind that they were carving out and space and pioneering the possibilities that they could. The emphasis that musicologists place on adaptive qualities in jazz and blues can be applied analogically to the strategies that emerging black entertainers used to survive and thrive in this era.

Institutional academic circles of this time period were instrumental in providing theoretical support for Eurocentric racism as Social Darwinism posited Africa as backwards, uncivilized and undeveloped. This theory placed the “Dark Continent” and, in turn, the “negro” at the lowest level of human development, with Anglo-Europeans at the highest stage. This flawed and evil interpretation of Darwin’s evolutionary theory in concert with all of the economic and social realities that black folks faced instilled an extremely harmful crisis of identity and sense of belonging amongst Afro-descended Americans.⁴³ Thus, black musicians of this time period were faced with immense challenges in regards to race prejudice, however as they worked for material fulfillment they strove to undermine this oppressive force. In his introduction to *Resistance, Parody and Double-Consciousness: African American Theatre 1895-1910*, theatre historian David Krasner employs a term that Edward Said derived from “Frantz Fanon’s interpretation of the hegelian dialectic: *reinscription*.”⁴⁴ Reinscription here refers to black minstrels employing the forms, tropes, and styles of “blackface caricature” while simultaneously inserting their own consciousness to change it into something of their own. This paradigm—that of the performer who embodies and takes on the shallow caricaturization of black stock characters while working to infiltrate and insinuate towards its demise—is the basis

⁴³ Krasner, *Resistance, Parody, and Double-Consciousness in African American Theatre*, 19.

⁴⁴ Krasner, *Resistance, Parody, and Double-Consciousness in African American Theatre*, 26.

for nearly every analysis of comedic black music and theater from this time period.⁴⁵ Black folks performed for racist white audiences who expected stereotyped depictions of “negro” characters and were not open to viewing serious themes from the black perspective --such as love, racism, familial struggles etc:

You haven't the faintest conception of the difficulties which must be overcome, of the prejudices which must be left slumbering, of the things, we must avoid whenever we write or sing a piece of music, put on a play or a sketch, walk out in the street or land in a new town... Every little thing we do must be thought out and arranged by Negroes, because they alone know how easy it is for a colored show to offend a white audience.⁴⁶

It was not as if this offense would lead only to bad reviews or financial constraints.

Actual death, murder, dismemberment, and mob-lynchings were commonplace in New York City at this time.⁴⁷ Thus, to secure the safety and longevity for their stage productions black vaudeville performers had to taper and condition their performances to audiences. Reinscription, however, did not mean that these performers would copy the same types of racist stereotypes without adding their own input, twists, diversions, and parodies. Writers and performers employed comedic nuance throughout their performances to redefine and satirize racial stereotypes.

Most importantly the format and medium through which many of these folks were working was comedy. To situate this argument deeper into the milieu of comedic performance, it could easily be posited that these scenes, dances, songs, and lyrics represent a more complicated version of the “cake walk.” Originating in plantation festivities, this tradition-- in which there was considerable interaction between the masters and the slaves—slaves danced and marched in

⁴⁵ Krasner *Resistance, Parody, and Double-Consciousness in African American Theatre*; Riis, *The Music and Scripts of In Dahomey*; Chude-Sokei. *The Last “Darky”*; Karen, Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

⁴⁶ Aida Overton Walker, interview, *Pittsburgh Leader*, May 11, 1906, quoted in Krasner, *Resistance, Parody, and Double-Consciousness in African American Theatre*, 51.

⁴⁷ Krasner, *Resistance, Parody, and Double-Consciousness in African American Theatre*, 50.

mocking mimicry of their masters European derived dances and struts.⁴⁸ Eventually, “white minstrel show performers attempted to imitate ‘slaves who dressed up in high fashion and mimicked the formal dances of their masters.’ White minstrel players, and later black minstrels, made the dance of the grand finale of the show...The cakewalk was being performed by blacks imitating whites who were imitating blacks imitating whites.”⁴⁹ This is reiterated by historian Shirley Basfield Dunlap in a short documentary about comedian Bert Williams: “After the civil war there was the opportunity for black, some blacks, to be able to perform on stage and they as black people having to blacken up to imitate white people who were blackening up to imitate black people, how crazy?”⁵⁰

Similarly, double meanings were often put to use. As audiences became increasingly mixed, black theatrical numbers included material that had multiple meanings at the same time, a comedic device left to be interpreted by the audience. For example in his analysis of the show *Abyssinia*, Krasner explores the function of the word “cracker” as a “linguistic inversion” that in the scene literally meant a wafer, but also called upon multiple interpretations: a contrast with the “minstrelsy tradition of *chicken* and *watermelon*”, the fact that cracker wafers were the “most undesirable food items...since they dry up, clinging to the roof of performers mouths”, and of course the *cracker* as in the cracker of the whip, a term for (especially southern poor) white people. Hence, depending on the audiences ear—a frequent theatre attendee, a fellow performer, black audiences --varied interpretations could take effect.⁵¹ This “coded message of resistance” also employed comedic situations of the ironic conflation of opposites, and recalling the cake-

⁴⁸ Jones, *Blues People*, 86.

⁴⁹ Eric Ledell Smith, *Bert Williams: A Biography of the Pioneer Black Comedian* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1992), 27.

⁵⁰ Shirley Basfield Dunlap, quoted in “Bert Williams: Pioneer Work,” YouTube Video, 21:10, posted by “David Warfield,” January 2, 2017.

⁵¹ Krasner, *Resistance, Parody, and Double-Consciousness in African American Theatre*, 104.

walk format, a regurgitation and mockery of racist tropes, as well as a parody of classist worldviews of the middle class black --especially Christian—community. This would be even more apparent and acute in song lyrics, especially those depicting Africa. Within these songs more extreme messages could be explored. Certain depictions and notions such as black romance and extensive themes of black royalty were dangerous to portray on stage.⁵² Hence, the concentration on lyrics is in some ways more revealing of the deeply encoded messages that were contained within these genres.

Still, focusing on song lyrics as a specific archival material demands that the analyzer and the reader realize that they are limiting, reducing, tunneling their vision. At the turn of the century there was already a thoroughly developed, highly heterogeneous, and increasingly ubiquitous black musical tradition throughout the United States, especially in the gin joints of Southern hamlets, of course in the back bayous of New Orleans, and even in spaces that the American psyche posits as white bucolia (such as frontier cow towns) there were plenty of travelling medicine shows.⁵³ What is certain is that black music was being created, interpreted, adapted, and celebrated in a multitude of ways, only some of which archival records account for. The songs selected for analysis are of particular popularity, and/or are historical markers for milestones in black musical production. In this regard, this study is not exhaustive in its scope of analyzing this eras music, nor does it attempt to assert that authenticity, Afrocentrism, Pan-Africanism, or Africanness is tied specifically to songs that use African names, places, people, rituals etc, in their lyrics. As expressed by the theorists and historians discussed in this

⁵² Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race*, 189.

⁵³ Dena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War* (Urbana Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Jones, *Blues People*.

introduction, there are an endless cache of ways that Afro-diasporic peoples have continued African traditions or generated their own understandings without naming Africa.

Furthermore, the fact that this paper privileges song-writing and lyrics renders a bias towards males. At this time period women were greatly involved with musical theatre production, however they were almost never listed as song writers. Other theorists and historians have covered at great length the contributions of dancers and singers such as Aida Overton Walker in this time period.⁵⁴ Their choreography and performances have their own vital history in regards to diasporic artistic expression. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study, the analysis will be centered around the focal point, the coming together, the awkward negotiation of the artists that produced lyrical depictions of Africa at the turn of the century. The lyrics represent questions of capitalism, identity or un-identity, burlesquing, racism, imagination, sexuality and most importantly civilization.

Many of the historians and commentators of this specific time period mention common tropes within these songs: capitalist western cultural references in a faunal setting, over-simplified jungle love, seemingly random references to African tribes and locales, and, most importantly, African royalty.⁵⁵ These themes derive from the many stimuli that occurred when artists and musicians created these musical pieces. Much of this writing seems to be influenced by an actual void of real historical knowledge or interest in Africans or African civilization, which rendered the imaginative landscape as void of humans or institutions only to be inhabited by wild creatures and lush tropical foliage. When ethnic groups and locales are mentioned, they are routed through caricatured, comedic tropes that prey on the American psyche that consumed

⁵⁴ Krasner, *Resistance, Parody, and Double-Consciousness in African American Theatre*, 75-98; Smith, *Bert Williams*.

⁵⁵ Krasner, *Resistance, Parody, and Double-Consciousness in African American Theatre*; Smith, *Bert Williams*; Riis, *The Music and Scripts of In Dahomey*.

exoticized and racist contemporary newspaper articles of their day.⁵⁶ These reports were worked into the travelling circus and variety shows where African-Americans often dressed up as “Zulus” and “Hottentots” to fulfill the desire of representations of savagery.⁵⁷ At the same time, the emerging appetite for primitivism in Western culture means that white audiences desired the inclusion of African chieftains and kings “authenticity.” For historian Louis Sodu-Chokei, in the primitivist desires of white audiences, where “authenticity was the primary fetish” representation of as “the prince” presented a symbol like “a rare piece of primitive African sculpture.”⁵⁸ This type of climate actually caused many Afro-diasporic people in the New World to impersonate kings from exotic countries in order to pass as something “more than just African American.”⁵⁹ The songs in this study encapsulate the coming together of these tropes into the jungle king. Appearing in some form in almost every song, this royal emphasis serves multiple comedic purposes, commenting not just on white perceptions but also on black cultural phenomena.

To be sure, there were certifiable slave narratives about kidnapped Africans who did in fact have royal blood such as Zamba Zembola.⁶⁰ Legends such as these must have informed the mythology of Afro-descendants across the New World. In addition, there are extensive historical accounts regarding celebrations, like the Pinkster festival, which revolved around “elected kings.”⁶¹ In an environment such as post-Reconstruction America, black political imaginations used the motif of royalty as a utopian function to counter the impossible reality in which democracy and republican government failed. Some black folks did look back to Africa to meet

⁵⁶ Dorothy Berry, “‘Evah Dahkey is a King:’ In Dahomey and the Commodification of Black Authenticity,” (Masters Thesis, Indiana University, 2016); Riis, *The Music and Scripts of In Dahomey*.

⁵⁷ Chude-Sokei, *The Last “Darkey”*, 123.

⁵⁸ Chude-Sokei, *The Last “Darkey”*, 121.

⁵⁹ Chude-Sokei, *The Last “Darkey”*, 121.

⁶⁰ Peter Neilson, *The Life and Adventures of Zamba: An African Negro King; and His Experience of Slavery in South Carolina* (London: Smith, Elder and Company, 1847).

⁶¹ Riis, *The Music and Scripts of In Dahomey*, xxxviii.

their aspirations for deliverance from the racist environment in which they lived. This was especially true in the case of middle and upper class black religious and civic leaders. Many of these folks --Crummel, Blyden, Turner—saw themselves as holders of a religious fortitude, a beacon of hope to bring the continent out of misguided, heathen darkness.⁶² This religious fervor worked in concert with Ethiopianism, which saw Christian Abyssinia as a shining example of African monotheistic power. As one of the only independent nations in Africa, Ethiopia represented a historical connection to biblical prophecies and deliverance.⁶³

Even those with more secularly framed orientations aimed to raise their social status by connecting their new economic success with some form of made-up Afro-Royalty in their lineage. What must be emphasized here is that the connection to Africa for many of these “uppity” blacks were laden with, and revolved around Western modes of thinking about civilization versus barbarity.⁶⁴ While it should not be argued that white perceptions of Africa at this time were “the same” as black perceptions, what could be proposed is that the desire for Afro-descendent people to bring Christian development to Africa, and/or to make claims to royalty in order to validate their social standing are inherently connected to them trying to mimic the ascendancy towards high (white) civilization that they saw as the marker for deliverance. For the lyricists, the jungle king conflation served as a cake-walk-esque device that satirized and undermined both black aspirations *and* white conceptions of these aspirations.

The song lyrics that are explored in this paper will reveal that music portraying African themes employ these comedic devices in a multitude of strategies to mock, “burlesque,”⁶⁵ and undermine systemic American worldviews. The writers of these songs were working through

⁶² Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race*, 130.

⁶³ Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race*, 148-149.

⁶⁴ Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race*, 130-162.

⁶⁵ Chude-Sokei, *The Last “Darky”*, 167.

multiple reference points to meet the demands of the capitalist system in which they worked, while infusing deeper meanings about themselves, their adversaries, and their world. They wrote songs with exoticized reference points while simultaneously making subtle claims about those reference points. Although these reference points were almost always derived from a mix of religio/historical tradition and current events from newspapers, they often conflated creative meeting points for subjects or places that did not necessarily geographically or culturally meet in the real world. This comedic device of conflation of disparate cultures or tropes would serve as a point of exoticism *and* as a coinciding inquisition into the true meaning and validity of these tropes, prejudices, and stereotypes.

What seem like whimsical, awkward marriages of civility and barbarism progress and develop over time into formidable commentaries about notions of Western Civilization. While the earliest example in this study is arguably the most racist and least complex, it contains the kernel from which all notions of the trope of the “jungle king” follow. Eventually the comedic prowess of these early black musicians helped provide a resistance to white Western domination that posited Africa as a backwards and uncivilized binary opposite. In doing so it questioned the supposed high brow civility of Anglo-Imperial civilization during the scramble for Africa. Therefore these minstrel shows were not simply an anomaly or bitter dark period in the ascendance of black cultural expression, but a vital plot point in the development of artistic forms of social commentary.

CHAPTER 1: GEORGE W. JOHNSON'S LAUGHING SONG

George W. Johnson's "The Laughing Song" is highly representative of the time and place in which it was recorded. As a street performer in Manhattan's lower west side, Johnson gained notoriety for his ability to whistle loudly and melodically. He was undoubtedly very familiar with the popular songs and minstrel acts of his day. The wax cylinder was invented just before the turn of the century and Johnson would be the first African-American musician to ever be recorded on it.¹ At this point in time the obscure vocation of record producer was exclusively controlled by white men whose audiences were also mostly white men. The first jukeboxes to play wax cylinders were put in bars and on street corners to be played through an earpiece for pennies. Technology of the time limited the type of performance that could sound good on cylinder, as well as the length of songs. Audiences who paid to listen to these recordings were accustomed to comedic minstrel style renditions, many of which were performed by white and black musicians portraying derogatory and demeaning caricatures of ethnic stereotypes. While they were considered by many to be low-brow forms of entertainment they were nonetheless extremely popular and seemingly ubiquitous. It is through this type of entertainment and reality that Johnson was enlisted to record his music.²

George W. Johnson was born in Wheatland Virginia, where his father Samuel Johnson was enslaved by farmer George L. Moore. Moore's son Samuel was born in 1845, one year before George W. Johnson, and the boys spent a considerable amount of time together growing up. While they were children, Sam Moore received flute lessons and although George Johnson did not have his own instrument to play with, he whistled the same tunes that Sam was assigned

¹ Brooks, et. al., *Lost Sounds*, 28.

² Brooks, et. al., *Lost Sounds*, 33-35.

to learn. From a very early age Johnson was keen to exercise his musical prowess regardless of what obstacles he faced. By 1853 Johnson had gained freedom through the manumission of his father, but he remained in Virginia until after the Civil War. Eventually making his way north, Johnson first appears in the New York Census in 1876. Before arriving in New York City Johnson appears to have performed on river boats, and within less than two decades he was a well known musician in lower Manhattan.³ Around 1890 Victor H. Emerson of the New Jersey Phonograph Company approached Johnson to record some of his whistling music. While Johnson was prepared to record popular street songs, Emerson demanded that he also perform some degrading “coon songs” that were known to be extremely popular as racist ethnic novelties for white audiences. The first one of these was *The Whistling Coon*, written by white minstrel showman Sam Devere.⁴ Within the lyrics of this song are numerous demeaning and racist epithets against black people including the invocation of “a cranium like a big baboon,” “a fat and greasy ham,” and “shaking like a monkey in a fit.”⁵ The fact that the first African-American recording artist would sing this racist piece, written by a white black-face minstrel, musician speaks volumes about the racial point of contact of the early recording industry and entertainment. The raw reality was that Johnson would be guaranteed much more financial security by recording with the nascent New Jersey Phonograph Company. Emerson saw Johnson’s blackness as an asset to authenticate and draw deeper curiosity into these minstrel-esque coon songs, he enlisted him to spend whole days at a time recording wax cylinders. These would prove to be extremely lucrative not just for Emerson but, in turn, for Johnson as well.⁶

³ Brooks, et. al., *Lost Sounds*, 18-25.

⁴ Sam Devere, “The Whistling Coon,” in *Daly Brothers K.H.K South Carolina Cloe Songster* no. 13, 1878, in Brooks, et. al., *Lost Sounds*, 28.

⁵ See Appendix A.

⁶ Brooks, et. al., *Lost Sounds*, 31-32.

When Johnson was offered a steady consistent income to record wax cylinders he entered a much different world of occupation and access. Having been born enslaved and living through the hardships of the Civil War and Reconstruction, being offered a job with much higher and more consistent pay allowed for increased economic freedom and agency. Here lies the interface between material well being, capitalism, minstrelsy, and identity. While Johnson was offered the opportunity to be the first black recording artist, this opportunity was constrained by the fact that Victor Emerson demanded Johnson sing “coon songs.”

“The Laughing Song,” Johnson’s second big hit broke another barrier, as he became the first black artist to record original material on record. “The Laughing Song” also includes the earliest evidence on recording of an African American artist referring to Africa. There are several factors to consider when analyzing the lyrics of this song. First, many musicians, showmen, and entertainers personify characters when they record songs or perform on stage or recording. That is, while musicians are clearly channeling their emotions, worldviews, and creativity into their songs they often develop performative personas to execute their artistic imagination. There’s no doubt Johnson was playing a character when he recorded “The Whistling Coon” and “The Laughing Song,” however; this brings up more complex questions of representation and identity. As an NYC street performer, Johnson’s worlds of in-character vs in-reality could not have been as binary as being on-stage vs off-stage. On the streets of New York there was not so clearly a fourth wall between him and his audience. Furthermore, he had been known to whistle his whole life and was patronized and celebrated by folks around him for personifying the whistling “country negro.”⁷

⁷ Brooks, et. al., *Lost Sounds*, 25.

All evidence points to the notion that Johnson did in fact write the lyrics to “The Laughing Song.”⁸ Ironically this evidence stems from the fact that there aren’t other credits to point to another composer. Nonetheless, records show that Johnson was literate, and at one point might have held a job as a school teacher. The lyrics of the songs are thematically relevant to the situation from which Johnson wrote. First, the perspective of the singer is downgraded to hearing other (presumably) white folks talking about him. This point of view is symbolic to the notion that the song writer was pressured by the limitations of who the intended audience was and *how* the intended audience thought. The “dandy darcy” is the butt end of the joke but plays along with his viewers and responds to their assessment with a laugh. From the beginning he is dehumanized, his body parts are described as ridiculous objects:

As I was coming ‘round the corner, I heard some people say,
Here comes the dandy darkey, here he comes this way...
His heel is like a snow plow, his mouth is like a trap,
And when he opens it gently you will see a fearful gap...
And then I laughed...

All of this sets up the second stanza which will be the central focus for the purpose of this paper:

They said his mother was a princess, his father was a prince,
And he’d been the apple of their eye if he had not been a quince...
But hell be the king of Africa in the sweet bye and bye,
And when I heard them say it, why I’d cry... And then I laughed...⁹

Playing into an exoticism that would surely entice the listener, Johnson describes the “Laughing Man” as coming from royal stock, but failing to become an “apple of their eye.” Instead he is the quince, shriveled up, deformed, a bitter representation of what used to be.

⁸ See Appendix B.

⁹ George W. Johnson, “The Laughing Song,” Ko-La’r Music, New York, lyrics transcribed from original recordings, in Brooks, et. al., *Lost Sounds*, 31.

Perhaps the lyrics represent a self awareness of the conditions in which George Johnson saw himself. Is he a quince because of the music he's making? Symbolically, Johnson could be working through the assertion that while his ancestors were princesses and princes in Africa, they were reduced to mockery and second-class existence in the racist inequality of the United States of America.

Johnsons invocation of Africa here is especially indicative of the mood of the time. The line "he'll be the king of Africa in the sweet bye and bye" is a sarcastic back-handed mockery against himself *and* white perceptions of black ascendancy. "Bye and bye" here refers to a far off, vaguely non-existent time. Johnson reveals so much about his identity, his understanding of his audience, and his connection with his homeland. The world of vaudeville, black faced minstrel and "coon songs" from which Johnson emerged did not come from a place of emphasizing the real contributions that African-derived musical traditions made to American music. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, the theories that dominated anthropological and historical circles of the time placed all things African as backwards, savage, and lower on the scale of civilizations evolutionary development. Johnson was aware that his ancestors came from Africa, but the problem space from which he recorded the "Laughing Song" reveal realities of his identity. It wasn't that he had "no connection to Africa", but that this connection to Africa could only be expressed as a distant land only to be filtered through musical ridicule as a place of exoticism and mockery. Still, there is some political clarity embedded in Johnsons notion that he will be "king of Africa" in some improbable far off future. African Americans must have been aware of the fact that black sovereignty hardly existed anywhere in the world at the time. From the Caribbean to the Eastern Shores of Madagascar and beyond, people of color were being threatened and marginalized by European imperial transgression. Johnson was simultaneously

working his self-deprecating charm into a song that actually spoke to what would be true for over more than half a century longer.

It is difficult to assess the meanings behind these lyrics through the current optic. Most of the “secular” songs that contained lyrics from this time period involved a great deal of humor, sarcasm and slap-stickery. Furthermore, the technology of the time allowed for recordings to be only three-minutes in length.¹⁰ In many regards, these forms were seen as low brow, entertainment for entertainment’s sake. In other words the idea of the musical artist, the singer-songwriter, and the respected bard or *griot* was not considered with the reverence of later eras. What is particularly interesting in assessing Johnsons lyrical reference to Africa is that it sets up a precedent for the other songs that will be analyzed in this paper. The theme of African royalty comes up again and again in relation to the African-American songwriters’ protagonists. George Johnsons’ version of Africa portrays an African-American protagonist that comes from royalty but will never reach their status in their lifetime. This reference plays on multiple levels of exoticism versus identity in the psyches of both black and white Americans. Johnson must have been aware of the traditional concept of royalty that existed within black imaginations as a means of supplanting social power in an otherwise racist and hypocritical “democratic” America. He was also aware of the white gaze’s appetite for consuming “burlesqued” versions of African-American folklore and performance. While Johnson’s imagining of Africa could be perceived as crude, self-deprecating, and (quite frankly) sad, it lays the foundation, or precedence, from which future comedic songwriters would respond. Pushing this further, it could be argued that Johnsons lyrics serve as especially potent and succinct crystallizations capturing the ubiquitous racism and prejudice of this time period in regards to Afro-descended people and the continent of Africa.

¹⁰ Brooks, et. al., *Lost Sounds*, 29.

Interestingly as time progresses these references develop and take on more complex meanings.

While they retain problematic racialized and stereotyped depictions, they present less morbid and fatalistic, and increasingly more imaginative and playful motifs and themes.

CHAPTER 2: BOB COLE & THE JOHNSON BROTHERS' "UNDER THE BAMBOO TREE"

Less than a decade after George W. Johnson began his recording career, African-American artists were instrumental in the growth of variety shows and minstrel-style stage productions across New York City. Many of these composers and lyricists were classically trained and wanted to produce operas and waltzes. However, even formally trained and educated musicians would find that their most viable option for financial security was in creating "coon" style "junge songs".¹ Still, while writers such as Bob Cole and the Johnson Brothers were working within these confines, they were beginning to deviate from the traditional pure racism that black faced minstrel plantation depictions.² James Weldon Johnson is best known for his leadership of the NAACP starting in 1920, but at the turn of the century he was composing music with his brother John Rosamond Johnson, and friend Bob Cole. The Johnson brothers were born in Jacksonville, Florida and both were well travelled. John Rosamond had trained at the New England Conservatory as well as London. James Weldon enrolled in Atlanta University at the age of sixteen and by 1904 was involved in Theodore Roosevelt's presidential campaign.³ Bob Cole was also from the South; originally from Athens Georgia, he would spend time involved in various variety shows in Atlanta, New Jersey, and Chicago before setting up a production company with the Johnson Brothers in New York City in 1900.⁴ What's clear from their life trajectories and careers is that even by 1901 they were equipped with more complex, nuanced, and politically engaged worldviews than their predecessor George W. Johnson. The

¹ Krasner, *Resistance, Parody, and Double-Consciousness in African American Theatre*, 55.

² Krasner, *Resistance, Parody, and Double-Consciousness in African American Theatre*, 33.

³ Herman Beavers, "James Weldon Johnson's Life and Career," *Modern Urban Poetry*, February 2000.

⁴ "Bob Cole, 1868-1911," The Library of Congress, 2015.

entertainment scene was changing rapidly and these young men were instrumental in continuing its development.

The trio had just finished a performance at the Winter Garden on the West side of midtown Manhattan when they came up for the idea for perhaps their most commercialized song “Under the Bamboo Tree.” While walking uptown drinking cocktails, they began humming the old spiritual “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen.” In an interview several decades later, John Rosamond Johnson recalls how it unfolded: “‘Wait a minute,’ says that scalawag Bob. ‘That’s the song we need for our act.’ ‘No you don’t,’ I said. ‘That is a sacred song, which is not to be desecrated on the vaudeville stage.’ ‘What kinder [sic] musician are you?’ says Bob. ‘Been to the Boston Conservatory and can’t change a little old tune around.’”⁵ In many ways the reworking of “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen” into “Under The Bamboo Tree” could be seen as a desecration. The song embodies all of the tropes of the “jungle songs” of the era. The transition from travelling minstrel shows to large production vaudevillian performances in Manhattan demanded more colorful, sexualized, and orientalized stage productions as well as topics and song lyrics. The setting of leafy, equatorial Africa meant to titillate the audience’s interest served as a delicious locale.⁶

The most well known version of the song is the Judy Garland and Margaret “Tootie” O’Brien rendition in the 1944 musical film *Meet Me in St. Louis*. Within the context of the movie, the song seems to be a novelty piece, paired with a mini-cake walk style dance by the two performers.⁷ “Under the Bamboo Tree,” which would be performed by mostly white singers and

⁵ John Rosamond Johnson, quoted in Michael Lasser, *Americas Songs: Songs from the 1890s to the Post-War Years* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 22.

⁶ Smith, *Bert Williams*, 14, 50.

⁷ “Under the Bamboo Tree,” *Meet Me In St. Louis*, directed by Vicente Minnelli (1944; New York: Loew’s Inc.), accessed on “Judy Garland and Margaret O’Brien – Under The Bamboo Tree (Meet Me in St. Louis, 1944),” YouTube Video, 2:09, posted by “ILoveJudyGarland,” April 1, 2017.

actors for years to come, seems to be written with a whimsical and playful disconnection to real life events, places, and deeper references, with a strong function of humor and exoticism. By 1903 the song had sold over 400,000 copies.⁸ Evidently, like many musicians of their day, Cole and the Johnson brothers considered their music to be directly descended from “Africa.” However, they saw ragtime and vaudeville as a more developed, Western influenced American musical form that, while employing Afro-inspired syncopation and encapsulating African motifs, was nevertheless still part of modern civilization.⁹ As members of the social and artistic milieu of their time and place, these song writers were contemplating an African environment that was both central to their musical identity, yet frozen in time, archaic, and largely occupied by savages. The complex representation of Africans in vaudeville and ragtime musical development would continue to ask questions of identity and progress. To be sure, by the time “Under the Bamboo Tree” was written, the trio had stopped using terms such as “coon” and “nigger” altogether.¹⁰ However, as we shall see, they still utilized highly exoticized and stereotyped depictions of the African continent.

The setting of the song “down in the jungle” locates the story in the imagined wilderness of sub-Saharan Africa.¹¹ There “lives the maid,” placing the female protagonist in almost animalistic nature. She doesn’t live in a village, a city, or any actual small town but inhabits the jungle.

Down in the jungles lived a maid,
Of royal blood though dusky shade,
A marked impression once she made,
Upon a Zulu from Matabooloo;¹²

⁸ Eugene Levy, *James Weldon Johnson: Black Leader, Black Voice* (University of Chicago Press, 1976), 86.

⁹ Edward Berlin, “Cole and the Johnson Brothers ‘The Evolution of ‘Ragtime,’”” *Current Musicology* 36 (1983).

¹⁰ Levy, *James Weldon Johnson*, 90.

¹¹ See Appendix C.

¹² Bob Cole and J. Rosamond Johnson, “Under The Bamboo Tree,” in Ann Charters, *The Ragtime Songbook* (New York: Oak Publications, 1965) 66-67.

This type of description seems as almost a preview to current day nature shows in which the camera men are embedded deep in the jungle to observe and capture the life of a tigress or panther. With the scramble for Africa and the prevalence of European explorers “discovering” and dividing up the continent, these lyrics also speak to the sexual desire of power that comes with conquering exotic places.

Once again we witness the trope of royalty as the maid is “of Royal blood though dusky shade.” The conflation of the jungle scenery with her royalty seems to be the central point of so much of the imaginings of Africa in this era. She is of “royal blood”, *though*, the audience must be reminded she is still of “dusky shade.” Continues the monarchical thread from George W. Johnsons “Laughing Song,” here we are given a less pessimistic viewpoint on African royalty, in this case the literal existence of a present day “royal blooded maid.” Nonetheless, we begin to see the emergence of a conflation of notions of royalty with jungle fauna. Locating African royalty “down in the jungle” served as a comedic device on many fronts. On the one hand it serves as an overly romanticized story to peak interest in audiences. On the other hand it simultaneously mocks and ridicules how Western civilization posits the African landscape.

Including exoticized names and locations with connections to relevant current events as well as classic myths about African subjects was crucial to this complex mix of maintaining audience interest while simultaneously asserting subtle comedic commentary. Hence, in this song we encounter two words that stem from actual ethnic groups in Africa. The first being “Zulu,” the South African tribe that had only recently been defeated by the British Empire in 1879.¹³ Certain ethnic groups and locations served as stand-ins and catch-alls for tribal Africa, routed through what was disseminated in the newspaper headlines and stories of the day.

¹³ Amy Mckenna, “Anglo-Zulu War | South African History,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2015.

Archivist Dorothy Berry explains that much of the American conscious or subconscious notions about Africa were tempered and shaped around the reports of encounters of colonial Europe's confrontation and subjugation of African peoples and their territories. Names of tribes, ethnic groups and political entities such as "Zulu," "Hottentot," and "Dahomey" were comfortably ensconced in the American vernacular at the turn of the 20th century, thanks to near daily news reports on colonial unrest between the British and the Zulu, the Germans and the Hottentots and the French and the Dahomeans."¹⁴ Numerous works of fiction, written by white authors about the barbarous and dangerous landscape of Africa perpetuate, stimulated, and revealed the consensus of the "Western colonial project" which worked hand in hand with theorists supporting scientific racism. At the same time that news reports and human-interest articles about exoticized Africans were being produced in the press, real life exhibitions were popping up in American cities with staged African villages for spectators to come and observe like human zoos. Also, the use of terms such as "Zulu" and "Hottentot" had been utilized as stand-ins for circus acts and variety shows meaning a "savage" character. Hence at the time of writing this song these terms were synonymous with an authentically exotic tribal African.¹⁵

Thus, many songs used references to actual places in Africa, although these places were stripped of their historical importance and mystified as to their meanings in order to please the listeners of the exotic jungle song. Here the lyricists of the song are following the lead of writers of "coon" and "jungle" songs of the day in which these kinds of references were used. Matabooloo is referred to without a real reference to the actual place, meanings, or historical importance at the time. Most importantly, the words Zulu and Matabooloo rhymed, since entertainment was key. The Zulu that we encounter in "Under the Bamboo" tree has several

¹⁴ Berry, "In Dahomey," 37.

¹⁵ Chude-Sokei, *The Last "Darky,"* 122.

interesting attributes. First, he comes from the land of—here lies our second reference to an African place—“Matooboloo”. “Matobooloo”, “matalooloo”, and “matooloo” seem to be mispronunciations, misnomers, and bastardizations of the tribal land of the northern Ndembele people of present day Zimbabwe, known as Matebeleland.¹⁶ At the same time this song was composed, these peoples were fighting in wars against British imperial aggression in both South Africa and what would soon become Southern Rhodesia.

The next verse seems to explain the chorus telling us that the Zulu woos his maiden “in this simple jungle way.” In the jungle scenery the Zulu continues this courtship of the royal maiden until finally one day she falls for him and she starts to sing the same song herself, partaking in the easy-going seduction of the love chant. This story of an imagined African jungle love speaks to several tropes about love and courtship amongst “native others.” By singing every day the Zulu eventually causes the maiden to capitulate to his love chant. This song serves two functions in the imagination of the writers and the audience. First it simplifies the courtship of African subjects into tropes of musical chants and songs in tropical places as being the only needed interactions for love to exist and courtship to be successful. At the same time as being reductive and placing a simplistic and “strange but true” story about native others, it serves as an exoticized psychological otherness that audiences yearned for in the complex classist society in which they lived. This love story occupied an imaginary place in which the lovers did not adhere to the formal rules of modern American society, instead taking the place of an imaginary that was both a repellent and an attraction to audiences. In other words, the strange foreignness of this “jungle love” symbolizes the black songwriters perception of the desires of the white audience.

¹⁶ Edward Marx, *The Idea of a Colony: Cross-Culturalism in Modern Poetry* (University of Toronto Press, 2004) 167.

American literary theorist Edward Marx's use of Jungian psychology is especially useful here. Marx interrogates Carl Jung's idea of the shadow, or the unconscious space of individual and collective psyche. Working through Jung's concept that "All consciousness perhaps without being aware of it, seeks its unconscious opposite, lacking which it is doomed to stagnation, congestion, and ossification,"¹⁷ Marx argues that the white Eurocentric psyche is both attracted to, and simultaneously repulsed by the primitive other. In this fashion, Africa serves as a landscape for the colonizer to imagine himself in relation to the colonial subject. These binary entities cannot exist without each other. Therefore, civilization, the sense of progress and place in the world, the identity of the white audience is constantly formulated in opposition to the idea of the untamed wilderness of the African jungle and the sexualized, romanticized tropes of the native. Marx includes Chinua Achebe's polemic against Joseph Conrad, where he sees *The Heart of Darkness* as "reducing Africa to props for the European mind," which echoes a great deal of the analysis of this paper.¹⁸

In regards to the genres discussed here, these psycho-analytical concepts about positing the other, attraction/repulsion, and binary identity production are further complicated by the fact that they were routed through the creative processes of hyper-capitalized black musicians and comedians. Thus, while they are evident in every song analyzed in this paper they are manifested through the imaginations of people of color, writing about Africans, while keeping in mind who their audience was. Especially as comedians, as people who had travelled all over the country, as business men and creators, these people were well aware of the stereotypes and desires of ticket holders and sheet music purchasers.

¹⁷ Carl Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, 157, quoted in Marx, 9.

¹⁸ Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," in *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 12, quoted in Marx, 8.

The African-American song-writers and performers were not *from* Africa, but they were Afro-descendants. They were using their music and stage as an contact point to negotiate the meanings of Africa not only for themselves, but even more so for their audiences. The “Zulu from Matabooloo” breaks into a patois slang that is reminiscent of black faced minstrel characters of the day:

If you lak-a-me lak I lak-a-you
And we lak-a-both the same,
I lak-a-say,
This very day,
I lak-a change your name;
'Cause I love-a-you and love-a you true
And if you-a love-a me.
One live as two, two live as one,
Under the bamboo tree.

The last line further locates the sound of the Zulu as connected to the space of the place of the music being performed.

Although the scene was miles away,
Right here at home I dare to say,
You'll hear some Zulu ev'ry day,
Gush out this soft refrain:

In this stanza the audience is reminded of their proximity to the themes of the song. Therefore, while they are enjoying a stage production, or reproducing the performance using sheet music at home, the exoticism of the singing Zulu is encapsulated within the patua of the chorus and can be accessed through this bite size lyrical snippet. Here the engagement with the African topic allows the audience a narrow window into an imagined Africa that is told through an African-American song-writing filter. In some ways this can be seen as multiple forms of imperialist gazing, both from the various perspectives of the African-American artists, African-American audiences, the white theatre-goers and home piano players.

This theme is dealt with greatly in the book *The Last "Darky"* by Boston University professor Louis Chude-Sokei. Sokei argues that African-Americans in America, being cursed with Du Boisean double-consciousness, were never able to enjoy the privilege of being the spectator.¹⁹ That is, Western logic, racialized power balance, and systematic oppression always placed the African-American as a "colonial/racial subject." African-American artists were no doubt cognizant of this power balance within the world of the performative arts and the capitalist entertainment industry. As they looked towards Africa as the subject of their lyrical topics they were forced to reconcile another layer of difference. In other words, these songwriters and performers were proxies or prisms through which multiple layers of contemplations of otherness, exoticism, marketing, and primitive attraction could function. These complex negotiations of representation, identity, articulation and otherness came to an even more potent form in the first all-black show on Broadway, the 1903 musical *In Dahomey*.²⁰

¹⁹ Chude-Sokei, *The Last "Darkey,"* 169.

²⁰ Riis, *The Music and Scripts of In Dahomey*, xiii.

CHAPTER 3: BERT WILLIAMS & GEORGE WALKER'S *IN DAHOMEY* & *ABYSSINIA*

While still continuing within the framework of minstrelsy, black music was evolving and changing as musical theatre continued to develop in New York City. In 1903 the first all-black musical cast on Broadway performed *In Dahomey* at the New York Theatre.¹ The show was a landmark in African American performative history, encompassing all of the complex meanings involved with performance art, show business, race relations, and minstrelsy. At the turn of the century before the great proliferation of at-home turntables and phonographs, theatre music was very much popular music. In fact many of the variety and vaudeville shows at the time incorporated interchanging and regurgitated versions of popular songs of the day.²

The creation and inspiration for *In Dahomey* reveals a much more complex and intertwined mix of actors, producers, writers, arrangers, and musicians than the two previous shows. Its inspiration and aesthetics involved the imaginations and life experiences, as well as interpretations of current events and history within the psyches of numerous leading figures in the black arts community. Analyzing the musical reveals that it cannot be thought of as existing in any static, canonical form. In fact, the show continued to change and morph each night it was performed, and at each location it visited. Nevertheless, in looking at the songs that make up the full array of music numbers from *In Dahomey* there is plenty of material to pull from in regards to imaginings and references to Africa.

First comes the story about Bert Williams and George Walker that originally stimulated their interest in *Dahomey* as a theatrical landscape. While working in small scale minstrel shows

¹ Riis, *The Music and Scripts of In Dahomey*, xiii.

² Riis, *The Music and Scripts of In Dahomey*; Brooks, et. al., *Lost Sounds*, 109.

in the Bay Area, Williams and Walker were afforded their first interaction with West Africans.

As George W. Walker explains in a 1906 article from *Theatre Magazine*:

In 1893, natives from Dahomey, Africa were imported to San Francisco to be exhibited at the Midwinter Fair. They were late in arriving in time for the opening of the fair, and Afro-Americans were employed and exhibited for native Dahomians. After the arrival of the native Africans, Afro-Americans were dismissed. Having free access to the Fair grounds, we were permitted to visit the natives from Africa. It was there, for the first time, that we were brought into close touch with the native Africans, and the study of those natives interested us very much. We were not long in deciding that if we ever reached the point of having a show of our own, we would delineate and feature native African characters as far as we could, and still remain American, and make our acting interesting and entertaining to American audiences.³

According to the article this interaction had a profound influence on how the duo would proceed in the creative process of producing their content. The ways in which the duo viewed, experienced, and interpreted their exposure to the “Dahomean natives” is in itself microcosmic of the complex relationship between African-Americans and Africa. Clearly whatever pageantry and performance the exhibition displayed was in itself controlled by factors of entertainment, racism, orientalism, and domination. Hence, the exhibit of Africans behind a fence exposed Williams and Walker to a vivid racialized, dehumanized presentation of what was supposed to be “authentic Africans,” purely for the white consumers gaze. Interestingly, the duo had been surrogates for the “Dahomeans” before they eventually arrived to take occupy their fake village. The complex interface between African-American versus African, and spectator versus subject must have been especially influential on their future work. In the same article, Walker explains his interest in incorporating “African characters as far as we could” while making sure to make sure the show will “remain American” and “interesting and entertaining to American audiences.”

⁴ This statement from Walker captures the notion of a constant negotiation between

³ George R. Walker, “The Real ‘Coon’ on the American Stage,” *The Theatre Magazine*, 1906, accessed on Google Books.

⁴ Walker, “The Real ‘Coon’ on the American Stage.”

representation, imagination, identity and material success that was at play in the production of these shows. From the initial point of contact that the duo had with the Dahomeans from the exhibition, they seemed to be contemplating what boundaries they could push as far as settings, characters, and themes while still appealing to theatre-goers.

Part of their appeal, and what made them stand out was the fact that while they were constrained by the vaudeville aesthetics of their day, they were not white minstrel performers but were actually black. This continuous negotiation of authenticity was complicated by many layers of representation. Bert Williams was a biracial Bahamian immigrant, performing in black-face while conjuring up and vocalizing lyrical representations of an imagined and exoticized Africa. Williams' biographer Louis Chude-Sokei fleshes out the nuances of representation and difference; Williams and Walker were doing many things at once as they imagined Africa: "To mimic and appropriate the gestures, sounds, and clothing of Dahomeyans was a way for Williams and Walker to wage war with the racist stereotypes that were celebrated and disseminated by the colonial expositions and that were rampant throughout wider society. These stereotypes and symbols .. had filtered down into the African American self-image. Through minstrelsy they could critique ethnography and anthropology in the realm of theater and vaudeville: science here was deconstructed in the realm of black popular culture. Williams and Walker were also able to burlesque the Afro-diasporic power called 'Africa.'" ⁵ Chude-Sokei goes on to explain that through their portrayal of Africans, the duo shifted their perspective from objects to be observed, to spectators doing the observing. In what he refers to as the spectator function of racist dehumanization, the "colonial/racial subject" always exists within a metaphorical cage to be viewed by the white colonizer from the outside. By focusing on and

⁵ Chude-Sokei, *The Last "Darky"*, 169.

imagining Africa from the multi-perspectives of the African-Americans involved in the creation of *In Dahomey*, “one could elude and evade that gaze by silently supplanting its meanings with one’s own.”⁶ But because claims about Africa were “embedded in memory and dream, and because they were already masked by a deep black ambivalence toward Africa and its meanings, they were in turn best addressed via metaphor and masquerade.”⁷ Again this reiterates the awkward fault line of not just Afro-Americans gaze towards Africa, but the capitalist demands from investors and audiences, a simultaneous mockery of those very people, and, notably, the fact that the people writing the play were individuals from diverse backgrounds with feelings, dreams, and creative imaginations of their own. Thus, “By the opening of *In Dahomey*, Africa had already been fed through the diaspora simulacrum, its multiple meanings already refracted and doubled and redoubled so that it could only function as a dream-fiction of masklessness, as something external to representation.”⁸ Continuing the comedic legacy, Walker and Williams insinuated multiple meanings when they presented motifs within their imagined African landscapes.

Williams and Walker’s *In Dahomey* is a crucial example of the complexities of double-consciousness, or for the purposes of this analysis multi-consciousness. The choice of lyrics and performances that were included in the show speaks to the artists utilization of mockery and subversion towards not just white societies exotic consumption, but also upper crust African American Ethiopianism and pageantry. Walker, Williams, and their writing team understood what white audiences wanted to see and hear, and they used these types of jungle king imaginations in order to mimic while covertly satirizing what Western Civilization thought about

⁶ Chude-Sokei, *The Last “Darky”*, 169.

⁷ Chude-Sokei, *The Last “Darky”*, 174.

⁸ Chude-Sokei, *The Last “Darky”*, 174.

people of African descent and of Black Africa. These lyrics represent a sarcastic regurgitation of the hollowness of white minstrels' portrayal of African American folk culture mixed with the racist and dismissive White attitude towards African civilization and sovereignty, as well as a mockery of uppity black folks who tried to mimic white claims to ancestry through seemingly made up African royal-descendancy. In her book *Staging Race*, history professor Karen Sotripoulis argues that authors such as Paul Laurence Dunbar were purposely mocking high class African-Americans for multiple reasons that are all related to the music and story of *In Dahomey*. They saw uppity black folks as trying to imitate white society in putting down common black folks. Utilizing membership in lodges, fraternal organizations, and church groups, these upper class black folks not only pushed for a re-christianization of Africa through Afro-American spiritual and civilizational leadership, they also strove to outdo each other in claiming royal descendancy from Africa in order to shore up social status.⁹ At the time of this stage production, the US had just begun to gain momentum in its nascent global imperial reach as it defeated the Spanish in the Philippines and toppled the Hawaiian monarchy. At the same time the European powers were continuing to stretch their dominance over the African continent. As the song lyrics will reveal, these authors concerned with mocking every aspect of the American gaze towards Africa in relation to global current events and deeply embedded mythologies.

African landscapes would appear in shows as early as September 1898, when Walker and Williams were premiering their "Senegambian Carnival," a cake-walk presentation on the rooftop of the Casino Roof Garden in Manhattan.¹⁰ In 1902, Walker and Williams would continue

⁹ Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race*, 130.

¹⁰ "Senegambian Carnival," Advertisement, New York Journal, September 4, 1898, accessed on Library of Congress.

their interest in the exotic landscape of Africa with their recording of the song “My Little Zulu Babe,” with lyrics written by W.S. Estren.¹¹

Down in sunny Africa,
'Mong the jungle and the burr
There lives a Zulu gal close by the Nile.
And I've named her Sadie Lee,

In the song the duo seem to ignore obvious geographical facts at the expense of titillating the orientalist mind of the American listener. The meeting point of Zulus, being from Southern Africa, and the Nile, stretching from the Egyptian Mediterranean coast to the Ethiopian highlands, speaks to the reference points that Americans had in relation to their imaginative landscapes. On the one hand the song could be ridiculed for its lack of historical accuracy. On the other hand, however, the condensing of these seemingly unrelated origin points—the Zulu and the Nile—works as a device to further tease at and ask questions of the relational dynamics between Biblical locales and tribal savagery. These seemingly disparate themes came together in the song to conflate the “savage” individual with the “sacred” river.

In the next stanza we see a version of Africa from the imagination of the author that reflects a prism of the complex stimuli of American newspapers, black ambivalence, and white consumption. There exists a landscape of jungles inhabited by royalty and servants. The first person narrative of the singer tells of his coming royal wedding with the “Zulu babe”.

And the wedding will be in the Zulu style.
Now the kings and queens will celebrate this ostentatious fete,
'Twill be the grandest meet
Of Africa's elite;
There'll be no gorgeous costumes, but the leaves worn will be fine
The day I make this little Zulu mine.

¹¹ See Appendix D.

There will be a meeting of “the grandest meet of Africa’s elite”, however as royal as all of these folks are the wedding will be adorned with “fine leaves”. This conflation is reiterated in the last verse of the song, where the singer proclaims

And when I marry her, I'll be the king,
Then you'll hear the people say:
“Been a ruler made today,”
And in Africa I'll be the only thing.
Then when I sit upon the throne up in a coconut tree,¹²

Another image reappears in that of the throne which sits on top of a coconut tree. As previously revealed, the duo wanted to speak about Africa but what they could say was still being determined by the confines of the racist, Eurocentric, and Social Darwinist theories of the day. In conjuring up images of African royalty the song is made to be sexy, romanticized, and exoticized while perpetuating stereotypes of the backwardness of Africa. For even the richest most powerful leaders of the African society lived within a jungle setting, adorned with leaves, and sat upon coconut trees. The theme of the coconut tree could be seen as a continuation of the “Bamboo Tree.” While we are again given a depiction of royalty enveloped in foliage, this time the king is above the tree. He can see his subjects, he is mounted high above the imagined jungle landscape. Here, the thematic thread that we saw in the Johnson/Cole song is developed further, and actually begins to open up the visual imagination to different more complex imagery regarding African power.

As they gained increased notoriety and success as comedians, the duo continued to work through their themes all while incubating an artistic studio in Manhattan. Walker recalls how the “the Williams and Walker flat soon became the headquarters of all artistic young men of our race

¹² W.C. Estren and Jas Brymn, “My Little Zulu Babe,” 1900, accessed on Jim Dixon, *The Mudcat Café* (blog), January 16, 2010.

who were stage struck. Among those who frequented our home were: Messrs Will Marion Cook, Harry T. Burleigh, Bob Cole and Billy Johnson, J.A. Shipp...and many others. We also entertained the late Paul Lawrence Dunbar, the negro poet, who wrote lyrics for us.”¹³ All of these individuals helped in writing and producing the songs, dialogue, dances and and plotlines *In Dahomey*. Like many of the performances of its time, *In Dahomey*, served as a sort of more developed variety show, incorporating many aspects of musical theatre to captivate the audience and generate buzz and sales. Many critics would admit that the show had little in the way of plot line.¹⁴ The main story seemed to change at least once throughout its performance run. In one story line, two Boston con-men find a pot of gold and hope to take poor black folks over to Africa with the help of the leader of a Florida-based Colonization Society. One con-man tries to swindle the other, and when the truth comes out there is a cake-walk in Dahomey. The other plotline involves the leader of the Florida-based colonization society enlisting two Boston detectives to find his missing trinket. They do not find the trinket, but do accompany the colonists to Dahomey. There, the detectives bestow the Dahomean king with liquor and gain his favor, becoming “caboceers” or governors, while the colonization society falls out of favor with the royal establishment. Finally, the Boston detectives gift the king with enough liquor to secure amnesty for the colonization society.¹⁵

The reference to the history of black Americans going back to Africa is layered on top as the storyline deals with the theme of colonization societies. While the American Colonization Society is the most prominently remembered entity in regards to the relocation of former slaves to Africa, its influence and logistical impact had waned since the Civil War. In fact, in the period

¹³ Walker, “The Real ‘Coon’ on the American Stage.”

¹⁴ Smith, *Bert Williams*, 51.

¹⁵ Riis, *The Music and Scripts of In Dahomey*.

following the Civil War through the turn of the century most of the colonization societies were led by African-Americans themselves. The Post-Reconstruction South environment was unbelievably challenging for black folks. Many blacks and whites alike could not imagine a foreseeable future in which descendents of slaves would be integrated into American society. Political violence, disenfranchisement, lynchings, and morbid economic opportunity left many southern African-Americans with little option but migration.¹⁶ For many this meant later migration to the burgeoning industrial northern cities of Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit and New York.¹⁷ Others would turn to Africa as a promised land for repatriation. Thus emerged “Benjamin Gaston and the Congo Company,” “Bishop Turner’s Emigration Campaign,” and the “Migration Society.”¹⁸ Many of these groups “used extravagant advertising,” and, as many of these expeditions would turn out to be disastrous, their unfortunate fates were sensationalized in newspaper articles.¹⁹ Walker and Williams worked the public perception of these stories into *In Dahomey*, turning the tragic reality of the failure of colonization societies and their conceptual absurdity into comedy.

Black ambivalence towards Africa at this time was extremely complicated—and arguably always was/is. Portraying the continent was risky and controversial. In a kind of inversion of later decades, references to Africa in the vaudeville context were considered by many black folks as purely existing for white audiences entertainment.²⁰ While there was a small percentage of Ethiopianist/colonizationist Christians, and some financially successful black folks that claimed royal African blood, most African - Americans were actively trying to disassociate themselves

¹⁶ Edwin S. Redkey, *Black Exodus: Black Nationalist and Back-to-Africa Movements, 1890-1910* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1969).

¹⁷ Stephanie Christensen, “The Great Migration (1915-1960),” *Black Past*, December 6, 2007.

¹⁸ Redkey, *Black Exodus*.

¹⁹ Smith, *Bert Williams*, 50.

²⁰ Smith, *Bert Williams*, 50.

with using Africa as a racial or cultural signifier. This time period was well in advance of the Harlem Renaissance, before Marcus Garvey had left Jamaica to meet diasporic communities in the New World, and just at the budding nascence of the Pan-African movement. Therefore, Walker and Williams were working in uncharted territory to the scale of the performance and representation they were attempting. They were experimental and daring. Perhaps they knew their audiences, their movements, and their limits better than they did the realities of an African homeland. Nevertheless, their representations—misrepresentations?—are tempered by and filtered through their experiences, memory, travels, and education. Again, here is multiple levels of interpretation of otherness, belonging, masking, and exoticism. First, while these song-writers and performers were African-American, most had never actually been to these African locales and were thus using specific information and stimuli to imagine this African landscape. These stimuli came from a range of rerouted racial tropes from blacks and whites alike. Their audiences were a mix of black and white New Yorkers who were accustomed to comedic representations of the time. Many of the acts of the day revolved around poking fun of specific ethnic groups and immigrants.²¹ While these black folks were interested in and were experimenting with their depictions of Africa, they understood that they were factually of African decent. Part of Bert Williams marketing strategy and appeal was that he presented himself as an “authentic” black minstrel. What is especially interesting here is that Williams was born in the Bahamas and was of mixed race. Thus his phenotypic appearance off stage was inherently different than his on stage black face character.

The very nature of the organization—or disorganization—of the musical speaks to the embedded ambivalence that is encapsulated within *In Dahomey*. First there is the contrasting

²¹ Riis, *The Music and Scripts of In Dahomey*, xx.

existence of the concept of the Dahomean state. As historian Thomas L. Riis explains in his exploration of the show that the authors of the play, especially Paul Laurence Dunbar who was a renowned and learned poet, would have known about the real life existence of Dahomey. The African kingdom was a central locale and entity in the system of transportation of slaves in the early nineteenth century, and had been in the press in the late nineteenth century because of its military might, centralized political power, and war with the French. Furthermore, stories were abundant about “alleged..human sacrifice and cannibalism” in which the locale “might have symbolized for Europeans and Americans the depths of what was believed to be the ferocious savagery of Africa.”²² Formulations of what the Dahomean state symbolized were clearly in complex contention within the production and selection of songs and scenes for *In Dahomey*. The stimuli with which to imagine a Dahomey were exceedingly complex, convoluted, and contradictory. Considering the juxtaposition of those Dahomeans that were on display at the world fair, with the idea of a “strong centralized” African king, one can begin to feel a seemingly antithetical perspective towards the place.

Political themes and monarchy are central to *In Dahomey*'s “Evah Darkey is a King.” Playing on comedic satire, the song contains two different notions towards black political power. First it encapsulates the fact that Black folks traditionally used the motif of monarchical lineage and royal aspirations in the face of their subalternity in “Democratic” America. Secondly, it burlesques the idea of going back to Africa to become powerful. The first verse suggests that attempts of “yankees” and “democratit people” to raise themselves up to higher status is not working. These folks see themselves are still “untitled”, that is they are without social status, unsatisfactorily respected in America. What does it take to become a king once more? Here we

²² Riis, *The Music and Scripts of In Dahomey*, xix.

see the theme of going back to “the jungle” as what is necessary for black folks to be delivered to their royal providence.²³

Evah dahkey is a king!
Royalty is jes’ de ting
Ef yo’ social life’s a bungle
Jes’ you’ go back to yo jungle
An’ remember dat a yo’ daddy was a King.²⁴

Clearly rhyme and rhythm are very important here, perhaps important enough to strongly influence the selection of the lyrics for the chorus. Nevertheless, we are presented with a similar imaginary space of Africa that we saw in the “Bamboo Tree.” The theme of an American simply entering the vacant jungle speaks to many aspects of the contemporaneous imagination. It shows the relative disconnection with the song writers and the real life situations of African royalty of the time. While these writers were aware of the existence of African royalty, they limit their scope away from to historical events that were taking place in the European colonization of Africa. The lyrics seem to be playing on American societal notions of how Africa can be approached. Again, this harks on the naivete of colonization societies attempts to colonize Africa with black Americans. Parallely, it plays on the imagination of white audiences. This dual pronged mystique of Africa conflateds themes into that of the “jungle king,” as if to suggest that all that exists is a romanticized version of peculiar exotic tribal customs amongst a backdrop of deep foliage and dangerous animals. But here’s where we see an evolving thread of thematic depictions. While the writers and entertainers were clearly capitalizing on, and commanding audiences through these overtly exoticized and arguably ahistorical songs, they were slowly infusing more complex and almost proto-Pan-African stanzas into their lines:

Evah dahkey has a lineage dat de white folks can’t compete wid

²³ See Appendix E.

²⁴ E.P. Moran, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and John H. Cook, “Evah Dahkey is a King,” in Riis, *The Music and Scripts of In Dahomey*. 47.

An' a title, such as duke or earl, why we wouldn't wipe our feet wid
Fa a kingdom is our station, an' we's each a rightful ruler
When we's crowned we don't wear satins, Kase de way we dress is cooler. Ho!
But our power's jest as mighty, nevah judge kings by deir cloes
You could nevah tell a porter wid a ring stuck through his nose...²⁵

It's hard to determine what exactly the writers and performers were doing here. What we can ascertain from reading about each of the members of the Walker and Williams troupe is that there were multiple viewpoints at play. Again in order to secure financial longevity while captivating a mixed race audience, the players and writers had to consider conflicting and contradictory viewpoints from their audience members. This involves double-meanings galore. For example, African kings don't wear satins could be interpreted through the literal, that is, African chiefs and leaders do literally wear an array of different dress that do not resemble that of Europeans. On the next line, however, we are told to "nevah judge kings by deir cloes, you could never tell a porter wid a ring stuck through his nose," reiterating the song's title. In this regard we are also supposed to contemplate the idea that in fact all-black folks have royalty in them regardless of their social standing. The fact that these ideas and tropes are fused together and portrayed in multi-layered meanings reveals the intentions of the production team to introduce insinuations and innuendo to undermine the flat and racist misrepresentations of the time. Through utilizing the same mythologized, exoticized, and stereotyped tropes that white audiences yearned for and expected, the *In Dahomey* production crew doubled-up meanings, convoluted lyrics and, through comedy, talent, nuance, and creativity, began to slowly change the meanings of how they saw Africa and their place in it. The last verse of the song seems to tie together all of these convoluted themes:

Scriptures say dat Ham was de first black man. Ham's de father of our nation
All de black folks, to dis very day, B'longs right in de Ham creation
Ham he was a King, in ancient days, An' he reigned in all his glory

²⁵ Moran, et. al., "Evah Dahkey is a King," 47.

Den ef we is all de Sons of Ham, nachelly dat tells de story. Ho!
White fo'ks what's got dahkey servants try an give dem ev'ry ting
An' doan' nevah speak insulting, fo dat coon may be a king.²⁶

Here there is a final re-clarification of the songs theme. In regards to the problem of elitism in richer black Americans claiming royal African-descendence, the song locates the monarchical bloodlines in every person of color in the New World, even porters and servants. If all-black folks originally derive from Ham and Ham was king, then “nachelly dat tells de story”, servants and nose pierced porters alike could be royalty. The song seems to be experimental in its portrayal of African themes. It plays on the imagination of both black and white audiences through the secondary re-routing of the African-American authors while simultaneously injecting more developed themes about Africa and belonging. Thus, while the song stays within the confines of the vaudeville system we can begin to see more complex assertions from these performers as they gained performative power. The duality of the lyrics speaks to the negotiation of multiple individuals and groups that were involved with a night out at the theatre and the eventual printing of the lyrics for the sale of sheet music.

Another Cole and Johnson song is used in the show. “My Castle on the Nile,” explores more imaginings of the possibilities of going back to Africa to occupy a royal position.²⁷ Again we have a coming together of the vacant jungle space of the Africa landscape colliding with the idea of not just nobility and monarchical civilization, but biblical settings. The song quite literally tells the audience that there is no point in trying to elevate yourself socially, instead you are better off proving that you have ancestral blood from a chief, in order to turn your red blood into blue blood. The use of “negro folk speech” is revelatoy as to the position from which the

²⁶ Moran, et. al., “Evah Dahkey is a King,” 47.

²⁷ See Appendix F.

singer is occupying. And when the protagonist finds out that he his great grandfather was African royalty he sailed back across the sea to “occupy my castle on the Nile.”²⁸ The motif of royalty here serves multiple meanings and must have been interpreted in a gradient of disparate ways by the audience and performers. The true reality was that black folks in America at this time could not easily climb the social scale. Even as successful stars, they were constantly living in fear of being beat up in random anti-black and “negrophobic explosions in urban America during the progressive era.”²⁹ Thus, the imagination of the song in which the lowly black protagonist is delivered to nobility and royal treatment exposes both the bleak reality of the social situations of black folks as well as the imaginations of those who dreamed of and searched for a royal thread in their lineage.

When the protagonist's blood turns from red to blue and he is delivered to his castle he is tended to by “a baboon butler” and “a monkey for my valet.” In “On Broadway in Dahomey Bye and Bye” another development of conflation of the occidental civilization and the jungle emerges.³⁰ This particular song, written by Alex Rogers, imagines what Manhattan’s Broadway would look like in an African landscape. Bizarre and exoticized fusions of the uncivilized jungle with imagery of Western capitalist modernity reach a climax in this song. With a “crocko-dial” for a clock, banyan tree department stores, bamboo railways, gorilla police, and a “Hippopotamus for Justice of the Peace,” there is no shortage of comedic awkwardness. Locating Manhattan-eque imagery within the jungle setting clearly does much for the bizarre comedic novelty that Walker and Williams were utilizing.³¹ They seem to be taking both

²⁸ J.W. Johnson, Bob Cole, and Rosamond Johnson, “My Castle on the Nile,” in Riis, *The Music and Scripts of In Dahomey*, 94.

²⁹ Alessandra Lorini Alessandra, *Rituals of Race: American Public Culture and the Search for Racial Democracy* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 173.

³⁰ See Appendix G.

³¹ Alex Rogers and Al Johns, “On Broadway in Dahomey Bye and By,” in Riis, *The Music and Scripts of In Dahomey*, 111-114.

extremes of locale, that of the overdeveloped and urbanized Manhattan and that of the lush faunal landscape of the African jungle and collapsing them into a big parody. The question of satirizing imagined locales and attributes of cultures would continue in the next Williams and Walker production called *Abyssinia*.

Abyssinia would take place almost entirely in the horn of Africa kingdom that is now called Ethiopia. Its creation recalls the story of the battle of Adwa in which Ethiopian forces defeated the invading imperial Italian troops. The basic storyline involves a newly wealthy African-American Kansas man who brings his Baptist congregation to Paris and then to Ethiopia in order to learn Astronomy. *Abyssinia* actually presents Abyssinians as more intelligent and praiseworthy than many of the African American tourists that are visiting them. In this regard the show expands the theme of ridiculing the idea of America bringing civilization to backwards Africans. However the unstatic, revolving, interchangeability of the tropes of civility versus barbarism take on even deeper critical meaning. King Menelik is presented as a powerful African leader who often has to resort to draconian bloody punishments against dissenters. At the time, Ethiopia as seen as a kind of between space of heathens and Christians, black and white, civilized monarchical control and despotic chieftaincy.³² The writers of *Abyssinia* used this symbolic fulcrum to assert increasingly aggressive commentary about the hypocrisy of the civilized world. As they contemplated the violence and barbarity of the civilized world of reason, the legacy of the Enlightenment and Western Development they questioned its supposed contrast with the “backwards peoples” of the world. They did this under the noses of their audiences and producers. In *Abyssinia* the lack of clarity in the plot that leads to the thematic disconnection between songs and settings is used for political commentary. The most revealing use of this

³² Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race*, 148.

device occurs in the song from Abyssinia is titled “Jolly Jungle Boys” and is performed by King Menelik’s royal guard.³³ The song involves a multitude of African references: locations, ethnic groups, recent conflicts, and zoologica.³⁴ But who is the author is really referring to? “Teasing the tiger” and “kid the kangaroo” seem to muster up comedic indictments against the British Empire in India and Australia. In the chorus the jungle boys proclaim: “Kiddy come kick the cocoanut and kick it to Konokree / That’s the college cheer we learned at Congo by the sea.”³⁵ Again we have a Walker and Williams song that is located in one part of Africa referencing another location thousands of miles away. Infusing names of exotic locales into these songs to tantalize the listeners appetite was always essential. The song has little with Menelik’s Ethiopian, and takes liberty at serving as a social commentary on the brutal wars that were taking place in Southern Africa. The reference to the college that was attended at “Congo by the sea” seems to reveal another comedic device along the lines of the conflation of Western social practices and African geography. The lyrics attempt to confuse the listener as to whom the “jungle boys” really refer when they describe themselves. In these couple stanzas the lyrics focus completely towards a crude recollection of the atrocities committed by the Boers and English in Southern Africa

When we grow up to man’s estate and fight the Zulu clan (Oh oh oh oh)
 Well murder every mother’s son thats darker than a tan (Oh oh oh)
 Well kill their sacred cattle and well carry off their gals (Oh oh oh oh)
 Then if there isn’t blood enough we’ll fight among our pals.³⁶

³³ Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race*, 157.

³⁴ See Appendix H.

³⁵ Earle C. Jones and Bert Williams, “The Jolly Jungle Boys,” In *Abyssinia*, by J.A. Shipp, Alex Rogers, and Will Marion Cook (New York: Gotham Attucks Music Co, 1906), accessed on Frances G. Spencer Collection of American Popular Sheet Music. Baylor University - Crouch Fine Arts Library.

³⁶ Jones and Williams, “The Jolly Jungle Boys.”

Commenting directly on racial ideologies that existed across white imperial ideologies of the day, and reflecting on the news reports that were coming out of South Africa at the time, this song is clearly a twisted comedic polemic against the barbaric lack of civility of imperial entities. When the “jungle boys” “grow up to man’s estate,” meaning when the jungle boys become, English land-owning class, they will commit genocidal ethnic cleansing, destroy spiritual nature, and steal local women.³⁷ The last line “fight among our pals,” is a direct reference to the Second Boer War between the English and the Dutch in South Africa. They boast that they “kill the cruel Kaffirs and hate the hottentots,” recalling the contemporaneous wars that had been/were occurring in Southern Africa.³⁸ Here the continuation of the conflation of tropes Western modernity versus the backwards jungle becomes a ridicule of the idea of civility versus barbarism. Using the setting of the not-quite-Negro Christian civilization that was attributed to the Ethiopian royal court as a launching pad the musicians used lyrics that asked the question: How can we really measure civility against barbarism? The folks that are assumed to be the royal warriors of the most respected monarchy in Africa are surrogates for a description of mocking the micro-history of the exploits of White imperialism in Southern Africa. Thematically the song confuses the audience as to who exactly these jungle boys were, which sets up the overarching problem; how can we begin to define what should be referred to as backwards or barbarous when the civilization that carries the torch of Western progress are the ones carrying out blood thirsty atrocities against people across the whole earth.

³⁷Henry French and Mark Rothery, *Man's Estate: Landed Gentry Masculinities, 1660-1900* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

³⁸ Jones and Williams, “Jolly Jungle Boys.”

CONCLUSION

Tracing black song lyrics with themes about Africa from 1890 through 1906 reveals a thread of tropes and motifs that shift and morph but provide more than a viable pattern of development. What starts out as self-deprecation and detachment, and confusing exoticized reference points develop into polemical social commentaries that question the foundations of stereotyped, reductionist, and misguided understandings about Africa and Afro-descended peoples. By the time Walker and Williams were composing and performing *Abysinnia*, they had begun to utilize the randomness of vaudeville shows and to use them at their disposal. In other words, part of the criticism that could be lodged against the shows of this time period was the fact that their songs, themes, and plots were seemingly disconnected. Folks whom attended less musically inclined stage productions were certainly accustomed to a deeper emphasis on story lines. However, as these artists continued evolving, they turned this relative thematic looseness as a launching point to insert exceedingly political polemics that were tangential to the specific plot, locale, and characters of the show. By using comedy and parody, these artists produced a social commentary that was vital and revelatory regardless of the difficult social milieu of their time and place.

While much of this music has been forgotten about by most of mainstream society, the efforts made by these musicians must be considered as viable historic markers in the study of conceptions of identity production, imagination, and the function of social commentary in art. They are extremely potent in encapsulating the notion that musical production in capitalist society is a constant negotiation between many factors like materialism, consumerism, technology, and caricaturization. This is true for any genre of music from any ethnic group in just about every country. Within these negotiations is the fact that many music projects involve

multiple actors, cosmologies, and reference points that connect diasporic people with their conceptualization of Africa. The scope of this study does not intend to evaluate or measure the works of these individuals based off of their “impact” or “influence,” so to speak. The fact that these artists strove to produce and perform potent historical and artistic commentaries speaks for itself, and the cathartic value it must have provided for some of them should not be overlooked.

Still, looking deeper into the time period following these musical pieces reveals that they did have a profound effect on many individuals. There’s no doubt that at least some of the songs in this analysis influenced the creation of *The Star of Ethiopia*, a historical pageant written by W.E.B Du Bois. In 1911, enlisting the help of John Rosamond Johnson, Du Bois created the highly touted performance which aimed to set history right in regards to the historical development of Afro-descended peoples in the continent as well as in the United States. Du Bois was continuing the tradition of the aforementioned musicians while adding enhanced historical input.¹

With the coming of the war of 1914-1917, the invention of radio, and the great migrations of African-Americans from the South to industrial cities in the north, music, vaudeville, and audiences were changing. Minstrel type acts still persisted for far too long, however, the emergence of the Harlem Renaissance and the popularity of jazz meant that Afro-descended folks were creating art for different reasons and for different audiences. While the emergence of Africa-inspired references in music after this period are certainly “deviations” from the genre in this study, they are also inevitably “responses” to them. This would prove to be true not just for musicians but for many writers and thinkers in the Harlem Renaissance, many of whom were directly involved with early black music and theatre. Although the next generation

¹ Bean, Annemarie, “Playwrights and Plays of the Harlem Renaissance,” in *A Companion to Twentieth-Century American Drama*, edited by David Krasner (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 95.

of black poets, social theorists, and political leaders certainly did not employ self-ridicule, black-face, and burlesque, they used new innovative strategies to continue to question static tropes about Africa and its relationship with Western Civilization.

Appendix A

The Whistling Coon

Written by Sam Devere
Performed by George W. Johnson

Oh, I've seen in my time some very funny folks,
But the funniest of all I know,
Is a colored individual as sure as you're alive,
He's as black as any black crow...
You May talk until you're tired, but you'll never get a word
From this very funny queer old coon...
He's a knock-kneed, double jointed, hunky-plunky moke
But he's happy when he whistles this tune
(Whistles refrain)

He's got a pair of lips, like a pound of liver split,
And a nose like an injun rubber shoe,
He's a limpy, happy, chuckle headed huckleberry nig,
And he whistles like a happy killy loo...
He's an independent, free and easy, fat and greasy ham,
With a cranium like a big baboon...
Say! I never heard him talk to anybody in my life
But he's happy when he whistles this tune...

He'd whistle in the morning, thro' the day and thro' the night,
And he'd whistle like the devil going to bed...
Why he'd whistle like the locomotive engine in his sleep,
And he whistled when his wife was dead...
One day a fellow hit him with a brick upon the mouth,
AND his jaw swelled like a balloon...
Now he goes along shaking like a monkey in a fit,
And this is how he whistles that tune...
(Whistles unsteadily)¹

¹ Sam Devere, "The Whistling Coon," in Brooks, *Lost Sounds*, 43.

Appendix B

The Laughing Song

Written and Performed by George W. Johnson

As I was coming 'round the corner, I heard some people say,
Here comes the dandy darkey, here he comes this way...
His heel is like a snow plow, his mouth is like a trap,
And when he opens it gently you will see a fearful gap...
And then I laughed...

They said his mother was a princess, his father was a prince,
And he'd been the apple of their eye if he had not been a quince...
But hell be the king of Africa in the sweet bye and bye,
And when I heard them say it, why I'd cry... And then I laughed...

So now kind friends just listen, to what I'm going to say,
I've tried my best to please you with my simple little lay...
Now whether you think it funny or a quiet bit of chaff,
Why all I'm going to do is just end it with a laugh...
And then I laughed...²

² George W. Johnson, "The Laughing Song," in Brooks, *Lost Sounds*, 31.

Appendix C

Under The Bamboo Tree

Words by Bob Cole and James Weldon Johnson

Music by John Rosamond Johnson

Down in the jungles lived a maid,
Of royal blood though dusky shade,
A marked impression once she made,
Upon a Zulu from Matabooloo;
And ev'ry morning he would be
Down underneath the bamboo tree,
Awaiting there his love to see
And then to her he'd sing:

CHORUS

If you lak-a-me lak I lak-a-you
And we lak-a-both the same,
I lak-a-say,
This very day,
I lak-a change your name;
'Cause I love-a-you and love-a you true
And if you-a love-a me.
One live as two, two live as one,
Under the bamboo tree.

CHORUS

And in this simple jungle way,
He wooed the maiden ev'ry day,
By singing what he had to say;
One day he seized her
And gently squeezed her.
And then beneath the bamboo green,
He begged her to become his queen;
The dusky maiden blushed unseen
And joined him in his song.

CHORUS

Appendix C (Continued)

This little story strange but true,
Is often told in Mataboo,
Of how this Zulu tried to woo
His jungle lady
In tropics shady;
Although the scene was miles away,
Right here at home I dare to say,
You'll hear some Zulu ev'ry day,
Gush out this soft refrain:

CHORUS³

³ Bob Cole and J. Rosamond Johnson, "Under the Bamboo Tree," in Charters, *Ragtime Songbook*, 66-67.

Appendix D

My Little Zulu Babe

Words by W. S. Estren
Music by Jas. T. Brymn
Performed by Walker and Williams

Down in sunny Africa,
'Mong the jungle and the burr
There lives a Zulu gal close by the Nile.
And I've named her Sadie Lee,
'Cause she's goin' to marry me,
And the wedding will be in the Zulu style.
Now the kings and queens will celebrate this ostentatious fete,
'Twill be the grandest meet
Of Africa's elite;
There'll be no gorgeous costumes, but the leaves worn will be fine
The day I make this little Zulu mine.

CHORUS

She is my little Zulu baby,
A perfect lady.
Although she's shady,
Fresh from the jungle is my Sadie.
A full-fledged foreign gal is she,
My little Zulu babe.

CHORUS

She's the Princess Talmajoes,
Sports the royal blood, you knows,
And when I marry her, I'll be the king,
Then you'll hear the people say:
"Been a ruler made today,"
And in Africa I'll be the only thing.
Then when I sit upon the throne up in a coconut tree,
'Twill be a sight to see
My babe make love to me.
I know there'll be an awful time down in that Zulu land
The day my babe and I will take command. ⁴

⁴ W. S. Estren and Jas. T. Brymn, "My Little Zulu Babe," on *The Mudcat Café* (blog).

Appendix E

Evah Dahkey Is A King

Words by E.P. Moran and Paul Laurence Dunbar

Music by John H. Cook

Performed by Walker and Williams

Dar's a mighty curious circumstanced Dat's a-botherin' all de nation
All de Yankees is dissatisfied wid a deir untitled station
Dey is huntin' after titles wid a golden net to snare 'em
An' de democratit people, Dey's mos' mighty glad to wear 'em, Ho!
But dey ain't got all de title, fu it is a 'culiar ting,
When a dahkey starts to huntin' he is sho to prove a king

CHORUS

Evah dahkey is a king!
Royalty is jes' de ting
Ef yo' social life's a bungle
Jes' you' go back to yo jungle
An' remember dat a yo' daddy was a King!

CHORUS

Evah dahkey has a lineage dat de white folks can't compete wid
An' a title, such as duke or earl, why we wouldn't wipe our feet wid
Fa a kingdom is our station, an' we's each a rightful ruler
When we's crowned we don't wear satins, Kase de way we dress is cooler. Ho!
But our power's jest as mighty, nevah judge kings by deir cloes
You could nevah tell a porter wid a ring stuck through his nose

CHORUS

Scriptures say dat Ham was de first black man. Ham's de father of our nation
All de black folks, to dis very day, B'longs right in de Ham creation
Ham he was a King, in ancient days, An' he reigned in all his glory
Den ef we is all de Sons of Ham, nachelly dat tells de story. Ho!
White fo'ks what's got dahkey servants try an give dem ev'ry ting
An' doan' nevah speak insulting, fo dat coon may be a king ⁵

⁵ E.P. Moran, Paul Laurence Dunbar and John H. Cook, "Evah Dahkey is a King," in Riis, *The Music and Scripts of In Dahomey*, 47-50.

Appendix F

My Castle On The Nile

Words by J.W. Johnson and Bob Cole

Music by Rosamond Johnson

Performed by Walker and Williams

Dere ain't no use in try'n to rise up in the social scale,
 'Less you kin trace yo' name back to de flood.
You got to have ancestral halls an' den you mus'n't fail,
 To prove dere's indigo mixed in yo' blood.
I done foun' out dat I come down from ole chief Bungalowoo
 My great-gran'-daddy was his great gran' chile.
An' so I'm gwin' ter sail away across the waters blue,
 To occupy my castle on de Nile. In my

CHORUS

Castle on de river Nile
I am gwin' ter live in elegant style;
 Inlaid diamonds on de flo',
 A Baboon butler at my do'
When I wed dat princess Anna Mazoo,
Den my blood will change from red to blue,
 Entertaining royalty all de while
 In my castle on de Nile.

CHORUS

I'm goin' where I kin eat de bes' an' live on foreign game
 Where chickens grow dey tell me six feet tall.
De natives call dem ostriches no matter 'bout de name,
 De flavor of de meat's de same, dat's all.
I'll form a royal party an' I'll hunt for elephant,
 An' when I fish I'll fish for crocodile
A monkey for my valet, Oh I'll live extravagant,
 In my ancestral castle on de Nile ⁶

⁶ J.W. Johnson, Bob Cole, and Rosamond Johnson, "My Castle on the Nile," in Riis, *The Music and Scripts of In Dahomey*, 94-97.

Appendix G

On Broadway in Dahomey Bye and Bye

Words by Alex Rogers

Music by Al Johns

Performed by Walker and Williams

If we went to Dahomey suppose the king would say
We want a Broadway built for us, we want it right away
Wed git a bunch of natives say ten thousand or more
Wid banyan trees build a big department store
Wed sell big Georgia possums some watermelons too
To get the coin for other things wed like to do

If we couldn't have real horse cars wed use zebras for a while
On the face of the Broadway clock usa a crocko dial

:

On Broadway in Dahomey bye and bye
On Broadway in Dahomey bye and bye

Will build a bamboo railway to the sky
You'll see on the sides of the rocks an hills
"Use Carters Little Liver pills"

On Broadway in Dahomey bye and bye

Wed git some large Gorillas and wed use them for police
Then git a Hippopotamus for Justice of the Peace
Wd build a nice roof garden somewhere along the line
Serve Giraffes High Balls and real Cokenut wine
We'd use Montana Diamonds to make Electric light
And then have Wagner sung by parrots every night
We would have a savage festival serve Rhinoserous stew
Have pork chops and U-need-a biscuit too

On Broadway in Dahomey bye and bye
On Broadway in Dahomey bye and bye

None but the Royal blood can qualify
Mister Noah wid de ask and all his guests
Will P'rade each night sixteen a breast.⁷

⁷ Alex Rogers and Al Johns, "On Broadway in Dahomey Bye and Bye," in Riis, *The Music and Scripts of In Dahomey*, 111-114.

Appendix H

The Jolly Jungle Boys

Written by Earle C. Jones

Music by Bert A Williams

Performed by Walked and Williams

Oh we're the jolly jungle boys and happy little chaps (Oh oh oh oh)
We're known in every country that is marked upon the maps (Oh oh oh)
We love to tease the tiger and to kid the kangaroo (Oh oh oh oh)
For we're the happy snappy chappies savage through and through (Oh oh oh)

CHORUS

Kiddy come kick the cocoanut and kick it to Konokree
That's the college cheer we learned at Congo by the sea
We led our class in cussedness and took the cake for noise
For we're the handy dandy um um jungle boys jungle boys

CHORUS

We kill the cruel kaffirs and we hate the hottentots (Oh oh oh oh)
And when the leopard sees us he is sure to change his spots (Oh oh oh)
The big gorilla loves us and we monkey with the monk (Oh oh oh oh)
The elephant will let us put our colors in his trunk (Oh oh oh)

CHORUS

Oh when the sun is setting and the sky is filled with stars (Oh oh oh oh)
We smoke the serpents from their holes with pipes and black cigars ((Oh oh oh)
The lazy lizard loves to listen to our jokes and noise (Oh oh oh oh)
The big giraffe is sure to laugh to see our jungle joys (Oh oh oh)

CHORUS

When we grow up to man's estate and fight the Zulu clan (Oh oh oh oh)
Well murder every mother's son that's darker than a tan (Oh oh oh)
Well kill their sacred cattle and well carry off their gals (Oh oh oh oh)
Then if there isn't blood enough we'll fight among our pals (Oh oh oh)

CHORUS

Our chief is king of savages and cuts a lot of ice (Oh oh oh oh)
But fears the jolly jungle boys and treats us mighty nice (Oh oh oh)
He always asks advice of us to carry on his wars (Oh oh oh oh)
And we'd have whipped the English if we'd fought among the Boers (Oh oh oh)

CHORUS

Appendix H (Continued)

We hunt the hippopotamus and “con” the crocodile (Oh oh oh oh)
We shoot the snapping turtles and the rapids of the Nile (Oh oh oh)
We’re cruel little cusses and we love to start a fuss (Oh oh oh oh)
And we’re so full of sand the dessert seems to envy us. (Oh oh oh)

CHORUS ⁸

⁸ Earl C. Jones and Bert Williams, “The Jolly Jungle Boys.”

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