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Nation Drag: Uses of the Exotic

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1. Introducing: Jones

In his 1919 *As Nature Leads: An Informal Discussion of the Reason Why Negro and Caucasian Are Mixing in Spite of Opposition*, the erudite anti-racist philosopher and historian Joel Augustus Rogers introduced readers to his friend “Jones,” no first name given. Jones, it seems, was quite adept with the ladies. He struck up a telephone flirtation with a young woman, and “soon she wanted to meet him. Jones objected that she might not wish to meet him as he was a Brazilian and rather dark. If Jones has ever been to Brazil, it must have been that in Indiana. Jones then learnt that she had a violent antipathy for Negroes, why it was she did not know, but she hated them, and would never sit by one in a car—but, of course, according to American notions, Africans from Brazil and the West Indies are not Negroes, only those of the United States are.”¹ Rogers went on to relate the successful progression of this romance through the couple’s meeting, and a few steps beyond.

Rogers was happy to report that among the other results of their relationship, the lady’s “antipathy for the Negro race is quite gone.”² Few observers today still think of interracial romance as a route out of racial thinking, and most would probably take Rogers’s moral as just that, and apocryphal. But the dynamic at play is noteworthy. Jones played to the woman’s yearning to engage the prohibitions that simultaneously shaped her desire and denied its fulfillment. His profession of Brazilian darkness was not a simple detour around his interlocutor’s racism, but a deft way to pique her romantic curiosity. A late-nineteenth-century innovation in communication technology, the telephone, framed a meeting ground unencumbered by the body, where the woman’s projections could find free rein. In that space Jones nimbly manipulated desire, its deferral, and the bewildering

intermediacy of a foreign racial system. Freed from familiar bearings, the woman reeled in Jones's subterfuge, his eager partner in their improvised dance.

Jones's strategy reveals one of the facets of Brazil's usefulness to anti-racist argument in the United States: the aura of sensuality it mustered in North Atlantic imaginations, as one of any number of ill-distinguished exotic, peripheral places. The seductions of its exotic *sexuality* number among the reasons Brazilian *racial* categories did not fit the black-white schema supposedly prevailing in the United States. This sort of statement should increasingly be losing any sense of paradox as consensus accumulates around the insight that social categories make meaning in conjunction with each other. What has not been as fully articulated is the other buttress of this strategy: the multiple racial schemas that exist alongside each other, in tension and contradiction, all the time. Then as now, people constantly threaded their way from dichotomous to plural racial schemas and back again.³ To mollify the black-white dichotomy of his lady's expressed hatred, Jones conjured up and superimposed a multi-category system. Such a system was clearly in the air: for all that "Brazilian" was not supposed to be a meaningful category in the woman's world, she understood it immediately. The mismatches between the two schemas revealed the fissures in both; Jones did not so much substitute his vision for hers as invite her into its liminal space. She apparently found that quite . . . comfortable.

Jones may be a figment of Rogers's bountiful, eclectic imagination, but truth is more wonderful than fiction. Many real people act in ways that dramatize the ill fit of racial categories, those untenable attempts to classify and contain the infinite gamut of human difference. Some people "pass" from one to another, or repeatedly back and forth between them, or achieve recognition for an intermediate category such as "mulatto" or "biracial," and many people fall perilously, tragically through the cracks. Others are quite content to occupy the uncharted gaps between categories, among systems. The historical record is full of resourceful people who, like Jones, have invoked the fluidity of race by pointing to its variation elsewhere, especially those elsewheres with as generously sensual connotations as Brazil. In a fascinating and ill-understood move, closer in some ways to drag than passing, they have animated and occupied an eroticized, quasi-racial national category that at times escaped the confines of the starker category "black."

This chapter explores the multiple permutations of this strategy as deployed by a handful of early-twentieth-century figures, mostly African American vaudevillians, musicians, and dancers, who operated within the exoticist culture of empire. That is, as chapter 2 set forth, at the turn to and during the early twentieth century, an apex of formal U.S. imperialism, popular culture engaged widely and joyously with "exotic" cultural forms. North Atlantic audiences gobbled up the music and dance of colonized places, homogenized and ill distinguished, reveling in their supposed primitiveness, spirituality, and sensuality.

Mainstream North American performers of the exotic largely invoked the familiar rubric of Orientalism that Edward Said and subsequent exegetes have so

deftly interpreted.⁴ African American performers, however, were not always afforded the distance necessary to sustain that condescending relationship. As objects of exoticist projections within the United States, as well as subjects of an imperial state in relation to the world, African Americans navigated the riptides of internal colonialism.⁵ For the most part these were dangerous currents; the fetishization of Afro-primitivism worked primarily to demean and diminish Afro-diasporic art of all sorts. It helped disfranchise African Americans and undermine black commercial and intellectual ventures, ideologically and materially. But that is not the end of the story. Black performers also found ways to ride the waves of the jazz age's global primitivist vogue. Some played (along) with exoticization by performing foreign cultural forms such as tango, hula, or "Brazilian dance"; some claimed identity with far-flung nations and peoples, pretending to "be" from places in which they had never set foot.⁶ Some steamed across the Atlantic to entertain other imperial powers fascinated by the cultural production of colonial subjects, revealing another reason exoticist culture was compelling in the United States: it was beloved in Europe. Ah, Europe, still the site of the citadels of culture for North American elites! Echoing Afro-Brazilians' citation of European, particularly Parisian, love for their cultural production, African American performers capitalized on primitivist and jazz adulation in London, Paris, and other European centers. In mindful performative gestures, travelers trumpeted their warm receptions or demonstrated their acquired skills. Tacking between exoticism and Europe, individuals sampled and mixed these strategies as their contexts and talents allowed.

Historians of African American performance in this period have documented the ways black performers worked to refuse the exoticism projected onto them, focusing on the dangers of this ideological landscape. As one such observer writes, "Because of the rising interest in 'primitivism' (the so-called link between black people and subconscious nature), black artists and performers had to walk the tightrope bridging the mainstream and the 'exotic.'"⁷ Certainly the dangers were real, as this chapter encounters again and again, but many performers nonetheless jumped willingly off the rope and into the realm of the exotic, reaping meaningful, if often fleeting, personal and collective gain. Those scholars who find advantages for black performers in negotiations of primitivist-exoticist terrain (often in terms of the power of black female sexuality) have rarely considered the ways African Americans performing the exotic invoked foreign national or cultural categories.⁸ For the most part they pay little heed to the transnational context of imperialism and the exoticist culture it spawned in the United States, portraying black eroticization as a purely domestic tradition. They have understood what Caribbean postcolonial intellectual and poet Audre Lorde called the "uses of the erotic" but not the related "uses of the exotic," as this chapter is therefore subtitled.⁹

African American exoticist performance was heterogeneous in every way. Given variations in class, region, gender, sexuality, looks, talent, field, and so much more, African Americans held no single relationship to the exotic, just as they

espoused no predictable politics on the issue of U.S. imperialism. On that question some endorsed the notion that a “badge of color” united subjects of formal and internal colonialism, while others rejected any suggestion of similarity, claiming a full and simple “American” identity.¹⁰ Politics on that level, in any case, only roughly translate into stage or bandstand practice. Some performers had no political goals in mind at all. Jones and his Gepetto demonstrate two points along this range. Jones’s performance of Brazil was fairly straightforward: he aimed to get the girl. Rogers’s performance of Jones, in contrast, was profoundly political; this explicitly activist and anti-racist scholar ventriloquized his clever “friend” to build momentum for social transformation.

The uses of exoticist performance, as Jones and Rogers show, begin with the mundane and run the gamut to the radical. Performers put on the exotic to get hired, get paid, and get famous. Sometimes exoticist performance chipped away at racist expectations, as when it allowed performers to cross the color line and perform in segregated venues or to perform genres previously deemed inappropriate for black artists. Evidence presented below will suggest that exoticist performance, including the performance of European love for the exotic, was part of what allowed black performers to expand beyond minstrelsy. This was a shift of no little political import, for minstrelsy was the reigning paradigm of popular entertainment until the end of the nineteenth century.¹¹ In the 1880s, the multigenre, skit-based form of vaudeville emerged. Vaudeville staged the debate over cultural hierarchy that by the end of the century would confirm distinctions between “high” and “low,” distancing opera, for example, from slapstick.¹² Vaudeville’s star would eclipse minstrelsy in the new century before fading in turn in the stronger glare of motion pictures. The 1920s, one researcher argues, were the “golden era of African American vaudeville.”¹³ Is it merely coincidence that this exoticist decade elevated vaudeville to such heights? Historians of minstrelsy and vaudeville rarely gaze beyond U.S. borders, despite the fact of the two genres’ convergence at a moment of great and public controversy over U.S. empire.¹⁴ This chapter argues that the 1920s were gilded for black vaudevillians in part because exoticism offered such tantalizing and delicious performative opportunities. Wielded by savvy performers, the exotic provided tools with which to renegotiate the valence of black popular performance.

Still more overtly political reasons motivated some performers, such as those who launched cultural ventures to nurture black artists, prove the worth of black art, promote black self-esteem, or forge coalition with African or other Afro-diasporic communities. These performances could be mindfully anti-Orientalist, but black exoticism was not automatically so. African Americans were not immune from Orientalist seductions. As cultural producers in an affluent nation, African American performers could also be authors in exoticist fields, reproducing some of the elements of their own and others’ subordination.

This chapter explores the phenomenon of black exoticist performance over the (long) 1920s. The first part considers the uses popular entertainers found in the transnational cultural currents suffusing their local worlds, particularly the conjoined streams of the exotic and Europe. Surveying a number of cultural workers, each rather briefly, this section compiles the ways they used those currents: they pointed out foreign opinions of U.S. affairs, drew on the prestige of foreign recognition, and engaged in exoticist performance. It closes with reflections on the ways black performances of the exotic and of Europe complicate notions of “passing” and “drag,” discussions of which tend not to take the two concepts’ complex relationship into sufficient account. This excerpt for the *Journal of Transnational American Studies* omits the chapter’s presentation of the scintillating Olive Burgoyne, specialist in “the Brazilian dance,” and her contemporary, the musicologist and performance artist Elsie Houston, whom readers may meet, if they wish, in the full published version.

2. Exotic Affairs

In the late nineteenth century and turn to the twentieth, North Atlantic audiences “discovered” the exotics in their midst. The African American opera and concert singer Matilda Sissieretta Joyner Jones, known as “Black Patti,” was one unwitting object of such revelation. Jones was cause for epiphany for a reporter for the *Toronto Empire*. “As she stands before her audience,” the writer revealed, “we understand *for the first time* something of the fascinations of the dark-hued women of the Orient.”¹⁵ This backhanded compliment clearly conveys the context of empire and its implications for African Americans’ (self-) representations onstage. The remark, one of the many impositions of exoticist representation with which Jones was forced to wrestle in her public life, was probably made on the occasion of her performance at the Toronto World’s Fair in 1892, one of at least four international fair engagements Jones would accept.¹⁶ Jones likely found herself the object of similarly exoticizing gazes at all of them, for world’s fairs in this period were potent lenses for the conceptualization of empire. They spread panoramas of exotic and civilized peoples before eager visitors, offering comparative vistas that near-invariably resolved into imperial perspectives.¹⁷ In such a frame, even Jones, with a signal demonstration of African American accomplishments in the arts (by every measure—at the Pittsburgh fair she was paid \$2,000, the highest salary earned to that date by an African American artist) could be reconciled, in the pages of a paper entitled *Empire*, into a naïf, sensual exotic.¹⁸ The reporter’s praise of Jones as Oriental, the representational logic of the fairs, and even the newspaper’s title all faithfully reflected the emerging tenor of the times.

Jones also encountered other, more welcome aspects of the imperial era’s transnational cultural circuits, such as the enthusiasm for black artists abroad. On several tours of the Americas and Europe, including an appearance for the Prince of

Wales, her breathtaking voice earned great kudos, helping to establish the reputation that would secure her world's fairs showcases, earn her star billing at Madison Square Garden during a "Grand Negro Jubilee" in 1892, and provoke an invitation to perform for the President and Mrs. Harrison at the White House that same year.¹⁹ There is no question that her European fame was the underpinning to her U.S. success. Indeed, as it was that success that made the *Empire* reporter notice her in the first place, this exotic was constituted by Europe. The exotic and Europe were not opposites, save as sides of a single coin.

Jones used her European experience to undergird a modest activist intervention. Perhaps racial hatred was not completely necessary, she chided her fellow citizens with gentle decorum. "I of course enjoy singing in this country more than any other," she graciously assured the *Pittsburgh Post* when she returned from England in 1896. "But outside of America I think England and the English provinces of India and Australia and South Africa are the places I would prefer visiting were I to start on another world-girding tour. There is not the slightest antipathy in the matter of color in England or in the provinces."²⁰ This anti-racist lesson hinged on the authority of Jones's travels, especially to Europe; she used her own movement over the global currents of black performance to challenge social relations at home.

As her beautiful elocution makes clear, Jones did not want the role of black exotic, primitive and sensual. She attempted to refuse those imposed frames and choose only Europe's shadow, but as exoticist tastes spread after 1898 and as the century turned, such an evasion grew more difficult. Despite her success and acclaim as a concert soprano abroad, in the United States Jones could not confine her career to the "high" musical arts. She turned to vaudeville, first in 1896, when she briefly joined the cast of manager John Isham's "Oriental America," and later as leader of her own "Black Patti's Troubadours." That mix of comedy and classical music, reports Henry Sampson, was the "first successful black road show to tour the East and South."²¹ Jones would mentor and support black performers for nearly twenty years, retiring to her hometown of Providence, Rhode Island, around 1920. In a bleak illustration of the meager fruits of stage success for African American performers, any savings she might have had melted during the Depression; Jones died in 1933 in poverty and obscurity.²² In the 1890s, however, the arc of her fame cleaved to the Orientalist surge.

From its very name, Oriental America (1896–1899), one of several similarly named companies at the time, signaled the vogue for Orientalist performance.²³ It was also a landmark in the evolution of black performance, opening new locations to and shifting prevailing standards for African Americans onstage. The pioneer historian of black music, Eileen Southern, credits the company's 1896 production with being "the first show with an all-Negro cast to play Broadway and the first all-Negro show to make a definite break with minstrel traditions and the burlesque theaters where minstrel shows were customarily presented."²⁴

This was a critical break, given the status of minstrelsy at the outset of the imperial era. Why was Oriental America able to buck its reins? The answer lies in its gentle substitution of exotic performances. The troupe did not refuse blackface entirely and retained a minstrel pattern, layering exoticisms over that base: “a Japanese dance, cleverly rendered” by four women (perhaps the famous quartet of Dora Dean, Mattie Wilkes, Ollie Burgoyne, and Belle Davis); a piece billed as “the maids of the Oriental Huzzars”; and then—strikingly—an operatic medley as finale, likely the showcase for Sissieretta Jones.²⁵ The show progressed from Orientalisms to opera as if the expansion into exoticist terrain generated the momentum to fuel that daring step and, most important, the departure from minstrelsy. Exotic skits and scenes provided entertaining alternatives to the expected slavish jester figures, while still meeting and catering to projections of African Americans’ shared cultural legacies with other “uncivilized” peoples.

The extent to which performers of exotic forms understood themselves as like their objects is unclear. Jones may not have wanted the role of black exotic, but clearly other performers did, and it is important not to jump to anachronistic conclusions. Eric Lott’s wonderful work complicating the racism behind minstrelsy is useful to remember here.²⁶ Just as white minstrels and their white audiences held complicated relationships to the forms and people they impersonated, mocked, envied, desired, and understood themselves as profoundly *like*, so black exoticisms may have involved identification, self-projection, and desire. The radical seeds in this stance would grow later, after the First World War, when struggles for racial justice and self-determination for colonized peoples both intensified and converged. The career of the dramatic actress Laura Bowman, for example, began with exoticism and proceeded to a mindful forging of Pan-Africanist solidarity.

During the war, Bowman and her husband, fellow actor Sidney Kirkpatrick, performed as a “Hawaiian” duet in Indianapolis. In 1923 they moved to New York City with the Chicago-based “Ethiopian Art Players,” presenting Wilde’s *Salomé* and a jazz version of *The Comedy of Errors*. Bowman organized a drama school in Harlem, the National Art School, and did *Salomé* there again in 1928.³⁵ After Kirkpatrick’s death and Bowman’s remarriage to Haitian actor LeRoi Antoine, Bowman traveled to Haiti, bringing back drums and music for a 1938 production at the Lafayette Theatre in Harlem.³⁶ Bowman’s career phased through exoticism (Hawaii, *Salomé*), primitivism (jazz Shakespeare), assimilationist didacticism (the “National” art school in Harlem), and Pan-Africanism in practice. Exoticism grounded both the explicitly activist, black-oriented theater work in the late 1920s and her Afro-diasporic community building in the decades to follow.

African American engagement with exoticism could also move in the opposite direction, rejecting the Afro-diasporic commonalities embraced by Bowman through her Haitian drums. Until well after the Second World War, after all, many more people agreed with E. Franklin Frazier’s rejection of Africa in America than with Melville Herskovits’s defense of African cultural continuities.³⁸ The debate, like other

controversies about exoticism and empire, received its literal stagings. A series of black-cast shows in the late twenties and thirties, for example, wrestled with the relationship African Americans ought to hold to the exotic or to primitivism. *Earth* (New York, 1927); *Savage Rhythm* (New York, 1931); *Run, Little Chillun!* (New York, 1933); *Louisiana* (Brooklyn, 1933), which became a movie, *Drums of Voodoo* (1934); and *Conjur* (New York, 1938) are probably part of a longer list.³⁹ The much-publicized *Run, Little Chillun!* gives a sense of these collective workings-out. The play explored a conflict between two black groups in the U.S. South, one a nomadic pagan cult, the other a stable but poor agricultural community, more or less faithful to the Christian church. As its stage directions specified, the set was to give an impression of “something approaching voodoo—not too directly African, but with a strong African flavor. . . . The whole betokens and partly expresses a religious attitude of joy and freedom toward life, in sharp contrast to the well-known spiritual joy in suffering which characterizes the more orthodox religious services of Negroes.”⁴⁰ The plot unfolds when the proselytizing travelers conscript members of the struggling rural community, threatening to decimate its already thin ranks. In the dramatic climax, the primitive pagan princess is killed off, and the preacher’s prodigal son, whom she had tempted, returns to the fold. Foregoing any critique of the forces that impoverished rural black hamlets, the play ended by handing a clear win to the traditional authorities of church, family, and state.

The other shows on this list apparently featured a similar conflict between Christianity and “voodoo,” confirming that black thespians repeatedly chose to stage this sort of conflict and resolution in a black public sphere visible to many whites. All the plays resolved the question with an affirmation of distance from pagan barbarity, perhaps after pausing for a moment to relish the possibility of proximity in the acts before the final resolution. That moment would have provided different pleasures to white and black audience members, as African American producers, actors, and directors well knew.

Staging exoticism was only one part of the performative politics made possible by the transnational currents present in North Americans’ local worlds during the imperial era. The other transformative performance, as noted, involved Europe. European desire for the exotic and the primitive, which extended to the African American arts, was a critical spark to the jazz age. Performers drew actively and strategically on European recognition, spinning it several ways.

When Sissieretta Jones proclaimed the supposed lack of racism in the United Kingdom (“not the slightest antipathy in the matter of color in England or in the provinces”), she was working to denaturalize racism—to show that racial antipathy was not a natural or necessary facet of social relations in heterogeneous societies. This attempt to convince, cajole, and shame North Americans into better behavior by gesturing to a place supposedly racism-free is a time-tested strategy.⁴¹ In this chapter I am less interested in such logical arguments than in performative and cultural politics, but it is worthy of note that cultural workers not only made the point but

seem also to have brought it to the attention of activists in more traditionally political arenas. That makes sense, since it was mostly cultural workers for whom primitivism generated steamship and railway passage. Josephine Baker's reception in Paris, for example, provided terrific evidence for the *Chicago Defender* to argue that "the narrow customs which prevail in America are known and condemned everywhere."⁴²

Another useful figure in this regard was Sissieretta Jones's slightly younger colleague, the coloratura soprano Anita Patti Brown, who toured the Americas during the First World War. The *Chicago Defender* made a special arrangement with Brown for her Brazilian stay, so that covering her travels became an occasion to present Brazil as a site for African American emigration.⁴³ A "special correspondent" writing during Brown's engagement in Brazil (perhaps Brown herself?) called the South American country the "elysian field of the Black people," where black men owned the wealthiest corporations, governed the country, and lived in harmony with their white fellow citizens. A week later the *Defender* proclaimed in two-inch-high block letters across the top of its weekend-edition front page, "Brazil Wants Educated Black Men."⁴⁴ The *Defender* would make Brazil the centerpiece of a long-running anti-racist campaign in the years to come, as the next two chapters of this book will elaborate; Anita Patti Brown deserves pride of place in the history of that campaign.

The strategy of pointing to foreigners' embrace of African American artists, in addition to denaturalizing racism and shaming U.S. racists, also simply conferred prestige. The *Defender* clearly put stock in recognition from abroad. In its ongoing campaign to get phonograph companies to sign "race artists," the paper spotlighted global interest. "Reports have come to this office that records of race artists are in demand at British West Indies, South America, and other foreign countries," it wrote.⁴⁵ Something in the strategy worked, for soon after Brown's "triumphant" tour, Victrola and Edison contracted her to record.⁴⁶

Artists acted on the prestige bestowed by European success—literally. The full extent of Europe's potential as performance is evident in the work of Rufus Greenlee and Thaddeus Drayton, two vaudeville dancers who formed a team around 1909. This "big-time vaudeville act" used their experiences in both exotic and European forms to choreograph a radical innovation in black performance. Departing from the conventions of African American dance teams made up of a straight man and a blackface comedian, Greenlee and Drayton both sported immaculate black tie, forming a "class act" (precise, graceful dancing in formation). Pointing proudly to the space carved out by his "pioneering team," Greenlee claimed that following their example, "everybody washed off the burnt cork and tried to do a *neat* act—we paved the way for the class act."⁴⁷

Greenlee and Drayton's innovative performance of "class" in a European inflection relied on the interlinked transnational currents of the exoticist culture of empire in the Western hemisphere and jazz-age primitivism across the Atlantic. Born

in the South, both went to New York as children with their relatively well-off families. Drayton worked in white acts as a “pick,” the stock role for African American child dancers.⁴⁸ “Pick” is short for “pickaninny,” from the Portuguese or Spanish words for small fry, *pequenininho* and *pequeniño*.⁴⁹ The word’s ugly derogatory implications in the United States have clouded its derivation and hid the phenomena it indexes: cultural contact, borrowing, and the conflation of African America and Latin America. These dancers were agents of continued cultural synthesis, bringing together local and transnational trends in spirited, crazy-quilt collage. They would juxtapose folk traditions of the United States and elsewhere over steps that sounded out the rhythms of the industrial age. As another self-described former “pick” remembered, “We’d go from plantation to Russian to the time step.” What mattered to audiences was that it be fast. The “stereotype of rhythm and speed was expected of [these young] black performers, regardless of the style and category of their work.”⁵⁰ This combination of freedom and limit, especially imposed on young dancers, practically ensured innovation.

This simmering mixture of minstrelsy and the exotic was part of Drayton’s training when he teamed up with Greenlee for a European tour. Returning to the United States at the outset of the First World War, Greenlee and Drayton used what they had learned abroad—particularly the remarkable fluency Greenlee had gained in over half a dozen languages—to angle for bookings. “We spend days walking up and down Broadway, all dressed up and twirling our canes,” Drayton related, “and Green asking me questions loudly in different foreign languages.’ . . . Told that they had just arrived from Europe—were they famous foreigners?—[Al Jolson] sent them to Shapiro and Bernstein, who had them booked.”⁵¹ The agents were probably not convinced that they had a pair of “famous foreigners” on their ticket, but it was clear that this was an act capable of stirring up quite a buzz with its intriguing masquerades.

Once booked, Greenlee and Drayton moved their performance of accomplished urbanity from street to stage. Their “class act” cultivated a genteel polish in dress as well as dance style, based on the prestige of their European experience. Billing themselves as “Those Two Colored Fashion Plates” in the mainstream entertainment weekly *Variety*, they boasted of their recent engagements in “Wintergarten, Berlin, and Orpheum, Budapest, Austria-Hungary.”⁵² They also preserved the language schtick. As clarinetist Garvin Bushell recounted in his memoirs, the team “had an international act where they’d come out dancing and talk in all these different languages. They’d start with Hungarian, then they’d speak Russian, then French, Yiddish, English, and finally wind up in German”—and Italian and Gaelic, in other reports.⁵³

Producers often balked at this aspect of their performance. “Agents were always trying to get us to cut out the talking,” remembered Drayton. Jazz historians Marshall and Jean Stearns explain that talking acts earned more, but while the extra expense was surely part of the reason the dancers were asked to excise this aspect

of their act, the obvious erudite cosmopolitanism of these African American performers probably rubbed white viewers uncomfortably against the grain. The pair understood this discomfort perfectly and flaunted their refusal to soothe it: in response to demands that they silence their voices, “Greenlee added a lot more and started singing, too.”⁵⁴ The duo’s insistence on maintaining this facet of their performance despite their agents’ subsequent change of heart reveals the disguise to have been more potent than expected. Greenlee and Drayton refused the ridiculous roles of blackface, staking claims to speech, intellect, elegance, and affluence on the grounds of their international travels.

Greenlee and Drayton’s New York success would spark further motion, as readers may recall from chapter 3; in the 1920s their travels included Brazil, and in the ’30s their repertoire featured the Carioca, the “Brazilian” dance from *Flying Down to Rio*. Surely Greenlee picked up some Portuguese for his next round of Broadway patter?

That Greenlee and Drayton were able to use Europe and language so successfully in their refusal of debased performance has much to do with gender. The distinctly feminine sexuality of the exotic was not such a minefield for them. What they most needed to conquer were the usual representational possibilities for African American men. Playing dandyish European sophisticates helped them steer clear of the Scylla of the minstrel fool and the Charybdis of the buck. The performance of “Europe” was harder for African American women to pull off, requiring the transcendence of not one but two qualities, “black” and “female,” which distanced their designates from the heights of European status. No wonder, then, that in contrast to Greenlee and Drayton, many African American women who broke into the world of “high” art dance in the twenties often did so via ever more thorough performances of the exotic. As the constraints of Jim Crow consolidated and the seductions of the exotic continued to glow, some rose to a level of exoticist performance so thoroughgoing that they practically qualify as “passing.”

The concert dancer Margot Webb, for example, had worked the multiculti repertoire of a “pick” as a child, as had Thaddeus Drayton. Her adult routines are an illustrative index of the exoticist twenties, including rumba; bolero; tango; waltz; novelty dances such as the Apache; fleeting fads such as the Continental and the Carioca; and “‘Oriental’ numbers, Egyptian dances, Gypsy routines with tambourines, scarf dances, Grecian dances—basically, all kinds of ethnic dances distilled into [a] catchall style.”⁵⁵ Graduating from “pick” routines to exoticist programs was a step Webb took alongside many others; her endpoint, however, was audacious. “Norton and Margot,” as Webb and her partner named their duo, became “one of the few Afro-American ballroom teams in history.”⁵⁶

As Webb’s biographer, Brenda Dixon Gottschild, observes, Norton and Margot’s significant, even striking, success was still always tightly constrained by racism.⁵⁷ When skill and will were not enough to propel Webb over the barriers racism threw in her way, she deployed her exoticist training to move up the cultural

hierarchy into the realm of the dances she wanted to do. To break in to the white world of ballroom dancing, Webb engaged in masquerade. Adroitly reading her ideological environment, in which African American dancers could not be hired but “Latin” ones sometimes could, she modified her first name from Marjorie to Margot, sometimes dropping the final “t” for an even more Latin effect. Norton and Margot presented themselves as “Spanish” to work a Jewish summer camp in 1936 and as natives of the “South Seas” in a 1941 show in Montreal, a double drag in which they first had to feign Francophone affiliations. Norton, who spoke no French, simply refused to speak.⁵⁸

With these masquerades, the couple elevated their performance to the level of genuine identity. This fully deliberate, acknowledged exoticism helped some performers, unlikely to be able to claim themselves white, to sidestep the strictures of anti-black racism. The tactic has a long tail, evident in literature and beginning to be documented historically.⁵⁹ Those who wielded it, like Norton and Margot, were not exactly passing as white. They were not exactly passing at all, necessarily. They were raising an alternative racial schema—a system in which there were not two but many racial categories—to displace the black-white dichotomy constraining their skills and ambitions. Rogers’s Jones would have approved.

Another way in which Norton and Margot were not passing involved their disguises’ sitting lightly upon them, only nominally threatened by the possibility of revelation. Gottschild notes that “what was required of Webb was simply stating that she was Latina. She was not obliged to feign an accent or give proof of her country of origin. ‘They just took me at face value’” in Webb’s ironic phrase. In Canada, similarly, Webb remembered the absolute openness of the farce, suggested by the booking agent herself. She “told us they weren’t going to hire blacks so we’d better be something else. ‘It says here,’ [the agent] observed, pointing to a clip from the Montreal paper, ‘featuring a real South Sea Island dance team.’” Dancer Edna Guy had a similar experience when applying to a dance camp. The director “recommended that Guy send a photograph and perhaps pass as East Indian. Guy easily recognized the hypocrisy: ‘They will let every other foreign nationality come in their classes expect [sic] an American colored girl. Oh! Why are they like that.’”⁶⁰

Nor were these ballet-trained dancers required to perform “Latin” styles. Margot Webb’s specialty remained a toe dance, and her favorite couple dance was always the waltz, “the dance most reminiscent of ballet adagio work and the lightest, whitest part of their repertory.” Perhaps their performance of balletic whiteness shifted the perception of their skin color toward the lighter end of the scale, enhancing their opportunities to pass as foreign. As dance historian Julia Foulkes has observed, “Lighter-skinned African Americans had less trouble because passing as white or foreign was another way to enter white dance studios.”⁶¹ Gottschild agrees that Norton and Margot’s co-workers in Montreal “had caught on to the team’s masquerade but chose to treat them as pariahs rather than fire them.”⁶² More important, audiences chose not to react. Those who “knew,” on

whatever level, preferred the masquerade to losing the opportunity of this spectacle, whose pleasure hinged on the blackness of its objects but whose possibility required its denial.

The same setting presented itself to Laura Bowman, the dramatic actress we met above. In 1916, she and Sidney Kirkpatrick moved to Indianapolis, “rather a prejudiced town with disadvantages for colored performers,” she mildly put it. The couple decided to claim to be Hawaiian, a transparent sham that nobody protested. Bowman again: “Although it was Sidney’s home and everyone knew his family, we billed ourselves as a modern Hawaiian Duet and got by with it. We often played in theatres that did not allow colored patrons or performers.”⁶³ Black exotic masquerades, therefore, allowed black artists to desegregate not only white-dominated performance genres, but white-only performance spaces as well.

This was the case of the 1914 fad for Brazilian-Argentine-French tango, as readers may recall from chapter 2. African American instrumentalists dominated tango bands, crossing a color line, we learned from a vaudeville critic who mentioned it in 1915. Hiding a “negro orchestra” behind a bank of palms, he pointed out, was “unnecessary after a season of the tango, since we know nearly every ebony musician by sight.”⁶⁴ African American musicians had played tango in white venues openly, though whether they could continue to do so with other genres was an unsettled question. Why? What was happening that allowed black musicians to appear openly in white clubs? Were they “passing” as Argentine or Brazilian? If so, did they do so mindfully, or was it inadvertent, the music their only disguise? Whatever the details, it is clear that in the liminality of tango’s exoticism, the performers moved beyond the binary of black and white for a fleeting moment. This subtle movement was less a loud crack than a small crevice, part of a network of similar fissures in the ideological terrain opened up in front of performances of exotic forms by African American artists. White producers and audiences cooperated in the charade—they wanted, on some level, to enjoy the tanguistas’, or Bowman and Kirkpatrick’s, or Norton and Margot’s several performances.

Such manipulations of racial and national categories were not confined to the United States. Information gathered from travels and fellow cultural workers gave performers finely tuned understandings of the precise masquerades required elsewhere as well. Europe had a widely known reputation as a place “free” of racism, for example, which meant African Americans could perform as such. South Africa, in contrast, was reputed to resemble the United States in its anti-black racism. “South Africa was known as a destination with severe race prejudice,” writes a biographer of a family of black women in vaudeville, “so severe that when the Meredith Sisters toured the area they billed themselves as American Indian Squaws.”⁶⁵ To evade South African racism, the Meredith Sisters clearly saw, they needed a category that would stand on its own and avoid being collapsed into a subordinate local one.

White views of this phenomenon could be as clear as the masquerades were transparent. In 1899, a white minstrel quipped, “Der ain’t no niggers since de war

broke out; 'I'm a Cuban now,' you'll hear them shout."⁶⁶ The author of this taunt had clearly registered the solidarities imperial engagements made possible between subjects of internal domestic and formal political colonialism. In particular, he had noted African American admiration for and identification with the Cuban, particularly Afro-Cuban, soldiers just then visibly and valiantly resisting U.S. occupation. This taunt also highlights the axis of these charades: the parodied speakers did not renounce one nationality for another or pass from black to white; they substituted a national for a racial category. More precisely, they refused an inherently demeaning racial category by gesturing to a national one that was both dark and dignified. "Cuban" was incompatible with "n—," not blackness.

Understanding, of course, implied neither sympathy nor support. White willingness to go along with national masquerade was highly contingent. In many cases the revelation of a person's "real" identity would have mattered—a lot. Masquerades in those contexts could be breathtakingly audacious. In the late 1930s (a date that makes this story all the more remarkable), Herb Flemming returned to the United States from many years in Europe, mourning the feeling of freedom he left behind. During a tour of the South, in Macon, Georgia, he used his language skills in a convincing nation drag: "There were no hotels (colored) available at the time of my arrival (11:30 P.M.). So, playing dumb, I walked into a white hotel and spoke only German. A man offered to help the desk clerk to find out what I wanted (the man was American, born in Hamburg, Germany). When he learned of my desire he was overjoyed to be able to prove there were colored people from his country who only spoke German. He told the hotel manager: 'This is a countryman of mine and I want him respected.' I got a room in a white hotel in Macon, Georgia, believe it or not!"⁶⁷ Flemming's narration suggests he was performing near or in Macon, perhaps the very next day. Why, then, was he not more concerned with being "discovered"? Flemming read the landscape of social possibility through his own frustration with U.S. racism and reached a conclusion that, for reasons that must remain elusive, did not bring white wrath down upon his shoulders. Not every careful player of this outside chance was so lucky.

Flemming's nerve is all the more striking when placed beside failed attempts to use national masquerades. Whites were not always willing to tolerate the border crossings such disguises reflected and enabled. The experience of Caterina Jarboro, born Catherine Yarborough in Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1903, suggests that whites policed the boundaries of race more intently in elite cultural realms than in vaudeville; it also may point to the diminished space for such moves during the Depression.⁶⁸ Jarboro "passed" as Italian to earn a principal role with the Chicago Opera Company in 1933. The *New York Times* raved about her "vivid dramatic sense" and "remarkably pure and distinct" Italian pronunciation. Alas, Jarboro was revealed to "be" African American and was dismissed. She turned to the National Negro Opera Company and a segregated career as a concert singer.⁶⁹ The crest of the exoticist wave that pulled Sissieretta Jones out of opera to her second-choice venue

of vaudeville rolled Jarboro hard into the undertow of Jim Crow social codes, increasingly consolidating as the 1920s drew to a close.

The reasons Flemming pulled off his charade while Jarboro did not include the one-time nature of his attempt versus the sustained effort of hers, as well as, again, gender. Gendered ideas about which sorts of subjects ought to speak helped make Flemming's words (like Greenlee's) compelling and Jarboro's gorgeous pronunciation unbearable. Masculinity was far from sure-fire protection, and in fact racially marked subjects attempting to assume the prerogatives granted its white claimants could face even more bitter consequences. A tragic illustration is a 1916 lynch mob that murdered an African American minister on a train for "fraudulent impersonation of a Frenchman"—a luggage tag revealed he had traveled to France.⁷⁰ Pasted over the "skin" of a suitcase, the tag indexed the minister's various mobilities (economic, social, geographic) and recalled all sorts of passings, including the possibility of national masquerade, as the accusation specified.⁷¹ The extreme brutality with which it was met confirms the potential power of this representational stance.

As the Depression receded, and as there was less encroaching on white privilege in "low-culture" venues, black exoticist masquerades continued. Lavinia Williams, one of the dancers from Katharine Dunham's original company, adopted nation drag during the filming of the 1940 *Carnival in Rhythm*, as did her fellow cast members, in a permutation that indexed the samba craze accompanying Carmen Miranda. "We were [passed off as] Brazilians," she recalled, "anything but black Americans."⁷² People discussing this chapter with me have offered anecdotal musings about similar charades by baseball players, activists, job seekers, pleasure shoppers, and more; clearly the phenomenon is ongoing, though its specifics will change over time.

Scholarly observers have not fully recognized this shifting between two kinds of racial schemas, one with multiple intermediate racial categories and the other predicated upon the duality of black and white. Margot Webb and her biographer, Brenda Dixon Gottschild, perceptive social critics who offer an unusually explicit discussion of national masquerades, illustrate the dilemma. "Back then, performers in the United States who were Spanish- or French-speaking and claimed to be from another country were treated as honorary whites and were not subject to antiblack discrimination," Gottschild glosses, agreeing with Webb: "They called Spanish 'white' then. . . . Today they lump the two groups [i.e., 'Spanish' and 'black'] together, but in those days if you spoke Spanish and were from any country speaking Spanish—you were considered white, whether you were dark-skinned or not."⁷³ Yet as Gottschild also explains, "Norton was noticeably darker than Margot and looked Spanish, a connotation that allowed for a broader range of skin color than the white category."⁷⁴ The contradiction between the suggestion that Spanish meant white and that Spanish was a category broader than white is precisely the tension so productively mined by African American masquerades of nation and performances of

the exotic. It is the tension generated by multiple, competing racial schemas—some dichotomous, some plural—operating simultaneously.

A similar misconception characterizes scholars' discussions of one of the incidents of national masquerade in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: George Harris's escape from slavery by pretending to be "Spanish." Presenting a collection of essays on passing, one scholar writes, "George's masquerade exposes the inability of his audience—representative of the rural antebellum South—to read 'otherness' in anything but black/white terms."⁷⁵ Yet while "black" and "white" were certainly dominant terms in Harriet Beecher Stowe's day, they were not the only ones available. A more nuanced observer sees in Harris's Spanish masquerade an "important alternative vision to the manichean allegory at work in his culture," existing *alongside* the dualistic division of black and white, the author's prose implies.⁷⁶ As she continues, "the nonblack, nonwhite other passes precisely because such otherness remains relatively unintelligible in the terms of a manichean hierarchical system."⁷⁷ The word "relatively" is critical, for Harris's masquerade would have floundered had he assumed a character that was entirely unintelligible to his peers. Harris's category made sense: "Spaniards" inhabited North American imaginations in the nineteenth century, representing "power" when figured as lighter-skinned and "difference" when darker.⁷⁸ As the Meredith Sisters, performing as "Indian Squaws" in South Africa, well understood, a successful masquerade had to embody a *relatively unfamiliar* category, recognizable as kin to but obviously outside the family of local possibilities.

Observers of national masquerades have often understood them as instances of "passing." As Margot Webb explained about an actor of her acquaintance, "That's why Frank Silvera made so much money—because he was really passing, in a way. He was always playing foreign people. He was either Jewish, Greek, Spanish—anything but black."⁷⁹ Webb understood "passing" in its usual sense of a foray into whiteness, as in the definition ventured by another scholar: "light-skinned black Americans who shed their blackness in order to assume the social, legal, and economic privileges of whiteness in America."⁸⁰ As this definition suggests, passing as conceptualized in most cases invokes only the racial categories of black, white, and in between. While such a process can wreak wonderful havoc on the schema of black and white, undeniably a controlling fiction of U.S. life, it stops short of the more profoundly disruptive transformations. So thoroughly does passing invoke this simplistic schema that its most brilliant scholars obediently confine themselves to it, even as they critique its reinforcement of "an archaic notion of identity" or point out that "one cannot pass for something one is not unless there is some other, prepassing, identity that one is."⁸¹

Might "drag" be a better description of these national masquerades than passing? Drag is often understood as a more explicitly acknowledged performance. "In contrast to passing, drag calls attention to the act of impersonation and foregrounds its status as imitation."⁸² Because drag is explicitly conceptualized as a

performance, it holds out the promise of entertainment—drag is fun. Drag “describes discontinuities between gender and sex or appearance and reality,” in which, rather than constituting a problem, “incongruence becomes the site of gender creativity.”⁸³ Drag is a fabulous parody that “mocks . . . the notion of a true gender identity” and “implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself,” in Judith Butler’s resonant terms.⁸⁴

Most theorizations of drag have confined themselves to gender, and discussions of passing tend to focus on race. Yet the determination of a given performance as drag or passing is less about the category it negotiates than the eye of the beholder. A masquerade can shuttle between drag and passing as context shifts the act’s reception.⁸⁵ When performers such as the stars of this story mounted their transparent but necessary charades, some in their audience chose ignorance’s bliss; to those fans, the performers were passing. Others enjoyed the performance enhanced with performance, the play within a play. Neither passing nor drag describes these phenomena precisely; they exceed language in a way that burlesques the desire to define them. If the masquerades discussed here passed, it was from binary to plural (two-category to multi-category) racial schemas, but they never came to rest in either. They pointed out the coexistence of both, highlighting the shifting social landscapes that are not the exception but the norm, mocking our ceaseless struggles to make them hold still.

NOTES

1. Rogers, *As Nature Leads*, 54–55.
2. *Ibid.*, 57.
3. Historians have tried to pin down the moment at which the United States moved to a dichotomous racial system or the moment it left such a system behind: the 1924 immigration restriction, Third Reich, decolonization, civil rights, Black Power, and so on. Immigration historian Oscar Handlin, for example, cited restriction and postwar prosperity as axes of racial consolidation in *The Uprooted*, 299–300. More recently, Thomas A. Guglielmo, in *White on Arrival*, has suggested that Italian immigrants were always perceived as white, even as recent arrivals. Sociologist Howard Winant sees a shift in the other direction very recently, as if dichotomy were constant before that: “race is becoming more complicated and nuanced, largely as a result of the struggles of the recent past, so that the color line and the traditionally bipolar, black-white foundation of racial politics and identity is eroding.” Winant credits the U.S. civil rights movement with forcing North Americans to see non-black and non-white people (Latinos and Asians, signally), making the United States multipolar. Winant, *Racial Conditions*, 159, 165. Such periodizations are fruitless ultimately; while emphases change, no single system ever consolidates its hegemony nationwide. On the shuttling back and forth possible in ethnic identification, helpful work includes Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, and Sollors, *The Invention of Ethnicity*. On the existence of multiple, ranked racial categories in the early twentieth century, see Gossett, *Race*; Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic*; Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*; Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America*; Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*; Foley, *The White Scourge*; Jacobson, *Special Sorrows*; Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*; Haney Lopez, *White By Law*; Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 78–79.
4. Said, *Orientalism*; Stam and Shohat, *Unthinking Eurocentrism*. This is not to suggest that all non-black performers had easy access to whiteness or to the entitlement necessary to perform Orientalism as condescension; clearly there are complications for various sorts of people.
5. On the connections and tensions between colonialism and racism, see Renda, *Taking Haiti*; Rafael, *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History*; Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*; A. Kaplan, “Black and Blue on San Juan Hill”; Michaels, “Anti-Imperial Americanism”; Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*; Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*; Wexler, *Tender Violence*; Kramer, “Jim Crow Science and the ‘Negro Problem’ in the Occupied Philippines, 1898–1914.”
6. A note on boundaries: while Brazil was a favorite object of exoticist attentions from all corners, it was only one of many such places in the imaginative lexicon of early-twentieth-century U.S. popular culture, alongside Cuba, Spain, Hawaii, France, “the South Seas,” ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, and so on.

- Evocations of Brazil are good starting points for *this book's* exploration of national masquerades during the exoticist culture of empire, given its expositions of Brazil-U.S. cultural exchange, the most concrete bases of ideas about Brazil circulating in U.S. intellectual, commercial, and political spheres. A discussion of this phenomenon that limited itself to a single manifestation, however, would not convey its multidirectional reach. As the discourse under discussion did not preserve Brazil's integrity, this chapter cannot hope to salvage it; it will instead contextualize Brazil's subsumption in the sea of exotic possibilities that rendered such tactics productive. In addition, this chapter ventures across the chronological borders of most of the others, accompanying several of the figures whose lives continued to engage questions of exoticist performance beyond the 1920s.
7. Krasner, *A Beautiful Pageant*, 4; and explaining the dynamic in a broader frame, Hammonds, "Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality."
 8. See A. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*; Harrison, *Black Pearls*; Carby, "'It Jus Be's Dat Way Sometime'"; Kainer, "Sophie Tucker and Elsie Janis."
 9. Lorde, *Uses of the Erotic*.
 10. "Badge of color" is from Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 117. By 1923, the *Chicago Defender* could argue that black stage performance was quintessentially American. "Our peculiar gifts for the theater are a heritage of America," wrote a stage reviewer; a movie critic exulted, "There is nothing American unless the black man is in it." "American National Theater," *Chicago Defender*, May 12, 1923, 12; "The Silent Drama," *Chicago Defender*, June 23, 1923, 12. Excellent secondary sources on African American engagement with empire include Von Eschen, *Race against Empire*; Plummer, *Rising Wind*; Gatewood, "*Smoked Yankees*" and *the Struggle for Empire*; Gatewood, *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden, 1898–1903*; Marks, *The Black Press Views American Imperialism (1898–1900)*; Gaines, "Black Americans' Racial Uplift Ideology as 'Civilizing Mission'"; C. Robinson, "W. E. B. Du Bois and Black Sovereignty."
 11. Lott, *Love and Theft*; Toll, *Blacking Up*; Spencer, *The New Negroes and Their Music*; Sampson, *Blacks in Blackface*; Spackman, "Passing for Colored."
 12. L. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*; Kibler, *Rank Ladies*, "debate" on 7, citing Oberdeck, "Contested Cultures of American Refinement."
 13. Gottschild, "Between Two Eras," 267.
 14. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*; Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*; E. Love, *Race over Empire*.
 15. Henriksen, "Black Patti"; citation from ch. 4, "Achievement Summary," 10, citing an article in the *Empire* (Toronto), author, title, date, and page not given; my emphasis. In folder "Black Patti (1868–1933)," Helen Armstead Johnson Miscellaneous Theater Collections, 1831–1993, New York Public Library, Schomburg Library (hereafter HAJ MTC). Although printed in a newspaper in

- Canada, not the United States, this piece evinces a shared North American imperial standpoint in title and content.
16. The others were at Buffalo, Pittsburgh, and Chicago. Tanner, *Dusky Maidens*. Jones did not appear in Chicago, apparently for contractual failure to make timely payment, reports Reed, *All the World Is Here!* It is interesting that Jones seems to have been particularly attractive or attracted to fairs in the border zone connecting the United States and Canada, whose imperial representations are likely to have affirmed an even more pointed view of the common destiny of Anglo-Americans in North America.
 17. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*; Rydell, Findling, and Pelle, *Fair America*; Burris, *Exhibiting Religion*; Harvey, *Hybrids of Modernity*; P. Bender, Brown, and Vasquez, *Savage Acts*.
 18. Sampson, *Blacks in Blackface*, 386.
 19. Ibid.
 20. *Pittsburgh Post*, March 11, 1896, n.p.; cited in Henrikson, "Black Patti," ch. 2, p. 8.
 21. Sampson, *Blacks in Blackface*, 9.
 22. Stearns and Stearns, *Jazz Dance*; Sampson, *Blacks in Blackface*, 388; Tanner, *Dusky Maidens*; Henriksen, "Black Patti."
 23. For example, the Oriental Troubadours, active 1889–1905, and a white burlesque show of the same name; see Peterson, *The African American Theatre Directory, 1816–1960*.
 24. Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*.
 25. Sampson, *Blacks in Blackface*, 386; Tanner, *Dusky Maidens*, citing newspaper reviews of the show.
 26. Lott, *Love and Theft*.
 27. – 34. Notes to section omitted from this excerpt.
 35. Tanner, *Dusky Maidens*, 89, 93.
 36. Ibid., 99, 101. Note that Sampson, *Blacks in Blackface*, 340–341, has a different version of events in Bowman's life, though the difference does not affect the argument made here.
 37. Omitted from this excerpt.
 38. D. Baldwin, "Out from the Shadow of E. Franklin Frazier?"; Yelvington, "The Invention of Africa in Latin America and the Caribbean."
 39. Tanner, *Dusky Maidens*, 71–73, 98, 100, 101; Foulkes, *Modern Bodies*, ch. 3.
 40. Act I, Scene 2, p. 1, of Hall Johnson, *Run, Little Chillun!*, n.d., Box 3, Folder 9, HAJ MTC; see also Foulkes, *Modern Bodies*, 51.
 41. This is the strategy African Americans would adopt using Brazil, as noted throughout this book; see also Hellwig, *African-American Reflections on Brazil's Racial Paradise*.
 42. "Rise of Josephine Baker Not Possible in America," *Chicago Defender*, February 4, 1928, 10.

43. "Mme. Patti Brown Royally Received at Bahai [sic], Brazil," *Chicago Defender*, January 15, 1916, 1.
44. "Brazil Wants Educated Black Men," "Brazil's Black President," and "Brazil Ideal Country for Black Man," all in *Chicago Defender*, January 22, 1916, 1.
45. "Race Artists to Sing for Victrolas," *Chicago Defender*, January 8, 1916, page illegible [3 or 4].
46. Foreman, "Jazz and Race Records, 1920–1932," citing the *Chicago Defender*, January 8, 1916, 1, 4, and 5.
47. Cited in Stearns and Stearns, *Jazz Dance*, 296–297.
48. *Ibid.*, 291–92.
49. Gottschild, *Waltzing in the Dark*, 42.
50. *Ibid.*, 43.
51. Stearns and Stearns, *Jazz Dance*, 293.
52. "Those Two Colored Fashion Plates" (advertisement for Grenlee [sic] and Drayton), *Variety*, December 15, 1914, 54.
53. Bushell, *Jazz from the Beginning*, 56; Stearns and Stearns, *Jazz Dance*, 294.
54. Stearns and Stearns, *Jazz Dance*, 294.
55. Gottschild, *Waltzing in the Dark*, 41–43, 49.
56. Gottschild, "Between Two Eras"; quotation from 267.
57. Gottschild, "Between Two Eras."
58. *Ibid.*; Gottschild, *Waltzing in the Dark*.
59. Nella Larsen includes in her novel *Passing* a character who sometimes declines to correct people who read her as "an Italian, a Spaniard, a Mexican or a gipsy," understanding that these readings confer social privileges unlikely to be bestowed upon an African American woman. See Larsen, *Passing*, 150, and Ginsberg, introduction to *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*, 1–18, esp. 11. Larsen offers a wonderfully subtle portrait of the uses African Americans made of global racial variation through a character (the protagonist's husband) who yearns to move his family to Brazil, indexing the many journalists and activists at the time who juxtaposed supposedly better racial arrangements abroad to protest those in the United States. Such a move also appears in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* twice, as we will consider below. Also relevant is the protagonist of James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, who realizes that in Europe he would "have greater chances of attracting attention as a colored composer than as a white one" and alters his racial performance accordingly. Quoted in Pfeiffer, "Individualism, Success, and American Identity in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*," 404. One historian who has documented the utility of foreign nationality in evading U.S. racial categories is Martha Hodes, who points out that in the antebellum U.S. South "a claim of Spanish or Portuguese nationality could erase counter-claims of blackness." For a Caribbean man in New England, "British nationality may have accomplished the same end." Hodes, "The Mercurial Nature and

- Abiding Power of Race,” 103; see also Hodes, *White Women, Black Men*, 97, 100, 105, 119.
60. Foulkes, *Modern Bodies*, 55.
 61. *Ibid.* Foulkes suggests Florence Warwick and Katherine Dunham may have leaned on their lightness in this way as well.
 62. Gottschild, *Waltzing in the Dark*, 118–120, and “lightest, whitest” on 7.
 63. Cited in Tanner, *Dusky Maidens*, 89, citing LeRoi Antoine, *Achievement: The Life of Laura Bowman*.
 64. Cited in Foreman, “Jazz and Race Records, 1920–1932,” 213.
 65. George-Graves, *The Royalty of Negro Vaudeville*, 20.
 66. “Got Your Habits On,” words and music by John Queen; cited in Dennison, *Scandalize My Name*, 346 (attribution, 537n2).
 67. Biagioni and Flemming, *Herb Flemming*, 55–57.
 68. Gottschild agrees with this periodization, noting the difficulties Norton and Margot faced given the elite forms they preferred and the timing of their career, which was rising most steeply just after the twenties. Gottschild, “Between Two Eras,” 267. This despite the Popular Front era of the 1930s, which gave some cultural forms (concert dance, for example), more room in the ’30s than in the ’40s. Foulkes, *Modern Bodies*, chs. 6–7.
 69. Folder “Jarboro, Caterina (1903–1986),” HAJ MTC. On the National Negro Opera Company, founded in 1941 in Pittsburgh, see Cheatham, “African-American Women Singers at the Metropolitan Opera before Leontyne Price.”
 70. Everett, *Returning the Gaze*, 61. Everett finds in this *Bystander* report evidence of “the absurdities of early-twentieth-century race relations.” Are they more logical today?
 71. Clearly this was a person of no little mobility, in transit again at the fateful moment, and on a train, the vehicle most loaded with white racial anxieties in the period of the Great Migration. Elizabeth Marie Smith suggests that the “proliferation of discussions of passing” in the 1920s was a reflection in part of white Americans’ fears of the Great Migration as a “racial threat” justifying great attention to “purity” in that period. E. Smith, “‘Passing’ and the Anxious Decade,” 12, 13, citing Kevin Mumford. Smith also finds an abundance of fictional accounts of passing at the turn to the twenty-first century, a phenomenon she wryly leaves to future historians to decipher.
 72. Cited in Gottschild, *Waltzing in the Dark*, 122, author’s brackets.
 73. *Ibid.*, 121–22, author’s ellipses.
 74. *Ibid.*, 46.
 75. Ginsberg, *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*, 12.
 76. Stern, “Spanish Masquerade and the Drama of Racial Identity in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*,” 107. Kathleen Pfeiffer also discusses the runaways in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* who escape by dressing as Spanish aristocrats, disguising “their race, nationality, class, and gender” ; Pfeiffer, “Individualism, Success, and

- American Identity in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*,” 417. Another use of George Harris’s “Spanish Masquerade” as the axis of an argument about passing is Kosnik, “The Alien in Our Nation.”
77. Stern, “Spanish Masquerade,” 110.
 78. *Ibid.*, 110 and 126n16, citing Elizabeth Boone.
 79. Cited in Gottschild, *Waltzing in the Dark*, 125.
 80. Kosnik, “The Alien in Our Nation,” 3, 8. Elizabeth Marie Smith offers another definition: “the process by which a person who is believed to be a member of one race identifies themselves or is identified by others with another race.” Smith also offers Joel Williamson’s definition, “crossing the color line and winning acceptance as white in the white world,” preferring hers, she explains, to make clear “that ideas about race are grounded in beliefs not biology, and that race is not a stable, coherent identity.” E. Smith, “Passing and the Anxious Decade,” 2n3, citing Williamson, *New People*.
 81. A. Robinson, “It Takes One to Know One,” 716; Ginsberg, *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*, 4. See also A. Robinson, “To Pass/In Drag,” on the “relation between passing and those visual models of identity that sustain its plausibility,” p. vii; Kawash, “*The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*,” on passing novels’ “assumption that passing for white conceals or obscures a true black identity” (62); and Valerie Smith’s critical widening of the lens, which seeks to situate passing within what she calls the “discourse of intersectionality,” noting the critical roles of class and gender in motivating and structuring passing, which still restricts itself to black and white; V. Smith, “Reading the Intersection of Race and Gender in Narratives of Passing.” Even Kristin Kosnik’s wonderfully productive reading of passing narratives as refusals of “American” identity and of passing as a negotiation of national identity as much as of race is hampered by her unwillingness to articulate national identities available in the United States beyond “American.” “In a nation defined by what Eric Sundquist aptly terms its ‘dual citizenship’ of white and black,” writes Kosnik, “persons of mixed race—those who resist classification as being neither white nor black—are ultimately relegated to the category *not American*, in some sense, entrapped in the role of being neither citizen nor alien.” Kosnik, “The Alien in Our Nation,” 5.
 82. A. Robinson, “It Takes One to Know One,” 727, citing Bertolt Brecht.
 83. Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 236. Halberstam here is explicitly glossing Esther Newton’s groundbreaking consideration of drag, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*.
 84. J. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 137.
 85. A. Robinson, “It Takes One to Know One,” 727.

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