

CHRYsalis

[kris-uh-lis]

from Latin chrȳsallis, from Greek khrusallis

1. the obtect pupa of a moth or butterfly
2. anything in the process of developing

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CHRYsalis was created by Dr. Charmaine A. Nelson as a vehicle to showcase the most innovative, rigorous, and sophisticated research produced by students within the context of her Art History courses at McGill University (Montreal). Over the years, Nelson observed that undergraduate students in her courses were more than capable of producing exceptional research on par with that of graduate students, and at times even professional academics. Disappointed that the majority of these students were faced with a negligible audience (if any) for their incredible work, with the help of her graduate student Anna T. January (MA Art History 2014), Nelson came up with the idea to provide another platform for their research dissemination. CHRYsalis is that platform! In 2017-18, Nelson served as the William Lyon Mackenzie King Visiting Professor of Canadian Studies at Harvard University (Cambridge, USA). In this, the seventh and final issue of CHRYsalis, we include articles from Nelson's McGill University and Harvard University undergraduate students. We also say goodbye and a heartfelt thank-you to the second Managing Editor, Uma Vespaziani (BA Cultural Studies and Art History, McGill University 2015). Farewell and thank you to our audience for continuing to read and share the students' important research!

CHRYsalis is an open access, electronic journal that will be published in seven special issues on Nelson's research website: www.blackcanadianstudies.com The goal of CHRYsalis is transformation: to publish scholarship that seeks answers to exciting new questions, to encourage students to undertake primary research and to open the discipline of Art History in ways that make it more welcoming to a diverse population of students. For more information please contact: charmaine.nelson@mcgill.ca

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THE PROBLEMATIC REPRESENTATION OF RACE AND BLACKNESS IN DISNEY'S FIRST AFRICAN-AMERICAN PRINCESS FILM THE PRINCESS AND THE FROG

Yael Chapman (McGill University)

When the Walt Disney Company announced in 2007 that their first ever film featuring an African American princess was in production, many were optimistic that the long overdue representation of black people in the popular line of princess films would be a positive one.¹ In an interview with CNN, Cori Murray, an entertainment director from *Essence* magazine, stated, “finally, here is something that all little girls, especially young black girls, can embrace.”² However, hope that Disney would abandon the black stereotypes and heterosexist framing employed in so many of its previous movies proved to be futile.³ The Princess and the Frog (2009) elided the racism and segregation of the Jim Crow South, rendered the “first black princess” a frog for the majority of the film, and imparted a number of racial stereotypes on its characters. This essay will utilize visual analysis in order to argue that rather than championing a positive representation of African-Americans to the millions of children who consume Disney movies, The Princess and the Frog employs problematic narratives and stereotypes, demonstrating a lack of comfort with the concept of a black princess.

The Princess and the Frog takes place in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1926. The protagonist is a young, hardworking, African-American waitress named Tiana (Anika Noni Rose) who dreams of opening a restaurant— a goal her father had imparted to her before he passed away serving in World War I. When Prince Naveen (Bruno Campos) of Maldonia comes to town, Tiana’s rich, white best friend Charlotte Le Bouff (Jennifer Cody) plans a big ball in his honour in the hopes of receiving a marriage proposal. However, the Shadowman (Keith David), a black voodoo witch doctor, turns Naveen into a frog and pressures Naveen’s white, British valet, Lawrence, to pose as Naveen, marry Charlotte, and steal the La Bouff fortune. As a frog, Naveen mistakes Tiana for a princess and asks her to give him a kiss in order to reverse the spell, promising to give her the remaining money for the sugar mill she wishes to purchase and turn into a restaurant in exchange. When they kiss it not only fails to turn Naveen back into a human, but turns Tiana into a frog as well. The pair attempts to break the curse with the help of other swamp animals and Mama Odie (Jenifer Lewis), a black voodoo priestess. When their efforts fail, they realize they have fallen in love and happily marry as frogs. Tiana’s marriage to Naveen makes her a princess, and their second kiss thus transforms them back into humans. They open Tiana’s restaurant together and appear to live a happy life thereafter.

The Idealized Portrayal of the Jim Crow South

The combination of Disney’s return to hand-drawn animation for The Princess and the Frog and the location in exciting New Orleans resulted in a movie that is vivid, colourful, and pleasing to the eye.⁴ However, its setting in the early twentieth century, Jim Crow South provides the first line of criticism of the movie. Unlike other Disney princess films, The Princess and the Frog is positioned in a concrete time and place. While the spirit of 1920’s New Orleans as a *city* is captured well, the film completely disregards the reality of racism and segregation experienced by blacks during this time period.⁵ It offers numerous hints to the poorer, second-class status of Tiana and her family, but refrains from giving any contextual explanation for their poverty.⁶

The very first scene shows Tiana and Charlotte sitting beside each other while Tiana's mother, Eudora, who works as a seamstress for the La Bouff family, sews Charlotte a dress and reads the girls the story of the Frog Prince. Charlotte's elaborate princess costume complete with a tall hat and wand is juxtaposed with Tiana's simple dress and small crown [fig. 1]. The depiction of a black



Figure 1: Ron Clements and John Musker, *The Princess and the Frog*, film still, scene: Charlotte (left) and Tiana (right) as children, Walt Disney Pictures, USA, 1 hour 37 minutes.

woman in the 1920's working for a white family who became rich off the sugar business evokes memories of slavery from a few decades prior.⁷ Furthermore, Tiana's status as Charlotte's best friend is reminiscent of the practice of slave owners giving young black children to white girls as playmates.⁸ When Eudora and Tiana head home, they take the streetcar from the La Bouff's neighbourhood populated with lavish mansions to the "less opulent 'black' section, featuring rows of similarly shaped bungalows."⁹ The contrast between Charlotte's extravagant, princess room in an opulent, stately manor and Tiana's modest dwelling, as well as the difference between the expensive clothing of those in the rich -and seemingly white- section of town with the working class garb of the people in Tiana's black area visually indicate the drastic class difference between the races. These signs of racial divide are not inaccurate in regards to New Orleans in the 1920's, "where decades of housing discrimination, environmental racism, urban renewal, and police harassment have relegated different races to different spaces."¹⁰ *The Princess and the Frog* takes place during a period not long after the abolition of slavery in 1865, when lynching and segregation practices were still widespread in Louisiana. And yet, the film presents an idealized, *colourblind* south.¹¹ Disney makes no effort to explain the reasons for the financial and material disparities between Charlotte and Tiana's families, leaving the impressionable children who view the film to assume that it is simply the natural order of things.

The film also fails to acknowledge the systematic barriers families such as Tiana's would have experienced in this time and place. Eudora's job as a seamstress and Tiana's as a waitress play into the age-old stereotype of black women being too unintelligent to do anything aside from domestic work, often in the service of white people.¹² Tiana's goal of owning her own restaurant would have likely been impossible in 1920's New Orleans, when African American men owned less than 1% of the city's restaurants and cafes and African American women owned zero.¹³ The two white brothers who own the sugar mill Tiana hopes to purchase proclaim, "a little woman of [her] background would have had her hands full trying to run a big business." This is the extent to which Disney acknowledges the hardships a black woman living in the South would have experienced at this time.¹⁴ This fantasy depiction of New Orleans in the film works "to erase the horrific oppression of black women in the South, both in the 1920 time period of the storyline and in its present-day manifestation."¹⁵ Given the film's release during the election year of Barack Obama, the movie works within a common misconception that arose during 2009 that America had become "post-race."¹⁶

The Representation of Tiana as a Frog and the “First Black Princess”

In order to understand the racial issues inherent to Tiana’s representation, it is important to situate the discussion within the history of Disney princesses. Aside from her brown skin tone,



Figure 2: Ron Clements and John Musker, The Princess and the Frog, film still, scene: close up of Tiana’s facial features, Walt Disney Pictures, USA, 1 hour 37 minutes.

Tiana possesses the typical signifiers of attractiveness in Disney movies: a slim body, doe-eyes, and a womanly figure – all characteristics that are associated with European standards of beauty [fig. 2].¹⁷ Tiana’s appearance is a prime example of representations of black women that present them as “aspiring white women,” as opposed to affirming their Africanness and marking it as beautiful.¹⁸ One way in which this phenomenon is evident in Tiana’s appearance is through her wavy – as opposed to natural – hair texture.¹⁹

A big disparity between Tiana and the other Disney princesses is that she is born lower class.²⁰ While some of the other princesses also had to work, it was often for an identifiable reason; Cinderella was born rich but had an evil stepmother, and Snow White helped out so she would not be a burden to the seven dwarfs. Why is it that the *black* princess is the one who is made to work *so* hard? In an early scene Tiana is shown coming home looking exhausted and

disheveled from a night shift waitressing, collapsing on her bed, and getting up moments later to go to her second job [fig. 3].²¹ Furthermore, one of the first musical numbers in The Princess and the Frog is entitled “Almost There,” featuring Tiana singing lines such as “so I work real hard each and every day,” and “fairytale can come true, but you gotta make 'em happen, it all depends on you.”²² No other Disney princess’s need to work and save money was so critical to her character that it required an entire song devoted to it.²³ Furthermore, the notion that fairytales will only come true if Tiana *makes* them happen is a departure from the narratives of the other princesses, whose wishes are magically granted by fairy godmothers, princes, genies, and the like.²⁴ Tiana must exhibit self-reliance and sufficiency to get what she



Figure 3: Ron Clements and John Musker, The Princess and the Frog, film still, scene: Tiana falling into bed after a long day of work, Walt Disney Pictures, USA, 1 hour 37 minutes.

wants; white princesses' dreams will come true, "but African Americans need to accept unequal or unjust conditions," even in the context of a fairytale.²⁵

Arguably the biggest difference between The Princess and the Frog and the other Disney princess films is that Tiana spends a very small portion of the movie as a princess, let alone as a *human*.²⁶ For eighty of the ninety-five minute movie Tiana is a frog; her black body "rendered invisible, [and] masked as a frog, further negating her presence as a black woman but also as a full-fledged Disney princess."²⁷ By hiding Tiana's black body for the majority of the film via her conflation with animality, Disney reveals its discomfort with having an African-American protagonist as its princess.²⁸ Furthermore, when human characters are transformed into animals in Disney movies it is usually indicative of a character flaw, such as when the prince in Beauty and the Beast is transformed into a beast as punishment for his arrogance.²⁹ The fact that Tiana falls into the category of a Disney princess only by the narrowest definition of the term has led some critics to argue that Charlotte is the *real* princess of the film. Charlotte functions as a white, blond-haired, blue-eyed, glamorous, wealthy trope that placates target audiences who desire a princess figure, but are not wholly comfortable with a black one.³⁰

Prince Naveen as Racially and Morally Ambiguous

Thus far it has been demonstrated that the black princess, Tiana, in The Princess and the Frog is generally given the short end of the stick in her representation and storyline when compared to her white Disney princess counterparts. Her disadvantage is additionally displayed in her "prince charming," the deeply flawed Prince Naveen.³¹ Prince Naveen is marked as racially ambiguous through a number of signifiers: his name is Hindi, his accent is Latin, his native tongue is French, and he hails from the fictional country of Maldonia.³² Visually, he is classically handsome—at least, by Disney's European beauty standards—with a broad build, wide smile, and sharp jaw line. He has lighter, olive-toned skin and lighter eyes than the indisputably black characters in the film, and wavy, europeanized hair [fig. 4]. Prince Naveen



Figure 4: Ron Clements and John Musker, The Princess and the Frog, film still, scene: Prince Naveen, film, 97 minutes, Walt Disney Pictures, USA, 1 hour 37 minutes.

raises two crucial questions about The Princess and the Frog: why does Tiana's prince diverge from the idealistic mates afforded to the other princesses, and why is Tiana's prince not *black*?³³

By utilizing so many contradictory indicators of Naveen's origin, Disney made it clear that his ethnic and racial ambiguity was imparted intentionally. Naveen is *not* intended to be read as a black character. As one mother accurately put it: "does that tell black women and black young girls, 'You better look elsewhere because you're not going to find [a] prince in your own race?'"³⁴ The decision to use a light-skinned prince from a fictional country as Tiana's mate is not only problematic because it sends the message to viewers that black men are not desirable spouses, but it also fails to make logical sense in the context of the film. One of the most unique characteristics of The Princess and the Frog as a fairytale is that it takes place in a specific,

historical, time and place.³⁵ To then make Prince Naveen from a fictitious country completely lacks rationality, and seems to indicate that Disney made the decision to utilize a lighter-skinned prince in order to once again placate audiences uncomfortable with black characters. At the same time, Naveen's racial ambiguity forestalls discussions of cross-racial intimacy since his race is difficult to pin down.

Unlike the other Disney princes who can generally be characterized as brave, smart, well mannered, and overall idealized, Naveen is chock-full of serious flaws.³⁶ He is shown as lazy through his expectation that others serve him, financially irresponsible because his parents cut him off, unintelligent for falling for the Shadowman's tricks simply because "he was very charismatic," and sleazy in his proclamation that he has dated "thousands of girls."³⁷ Once again, we must critically question why it is only the *black* princess who is given such an unideal mate, while the white princesses are afforded near perfect gentlemen.³⁸ Children who have seen a number of the Disney princess films would likely register the fact that Tiana's prince is not flawless like the others, and very possibly receive the impression that she is less deserving of an



Figure 5: Ron Clements and John Musker, *The Princess and the Frog*, film still, scene: Mama Odie, Walt Disney Pictures, USA, 1 hour 37 minutes.

idealistic mate because of her racial difference from the other princesses.³⁹

One unfortunate way in that Tiana does not deviate too far from the other princesses is that she is "neatly folded and contained within the parameters of heterosexual love."⁴⁰ Although *The Princess and the Frog* makes many references to the virtue of hard work and due diligence, Tiana's goal of owning a restaurant and consequently rising out of her societal position is only achieved once she is connected to a lighter-skinned, privileged man.⁴¹ Disney may have tried to break with its past by presenting

Tiana as empowered and having ambitions aside from marriage, but ultimately the discovery of heterosexual love is the most valued outcome of the story, and the sole reason her dream of opening "Tiana's Place" is realized.⁴² In this sense, the animation industries' long history of presenting women as helpless objects until they find a male partner persists in *The Princess and the Frog*.⁴³

Racial Stereotyping of Supporting Characters

The utilization of black stereotypes is not only seen in the depiction of Tiana and her family, but in a number of the supporting characters as well. Mama Odie is the "fairy godmother" figure in *The Princess in the Frog*. She is one hundred and ninety-seven years old, blind, and lives in the Louisiana bayou with a pet snake.⁴⁴ While the notion of a wish-granting woman in Disney films is no new concept, Mama Odie's oversized earrings, dress, and head

wrap evoke the “mammy” stereotype of the black woman whose sole purpose is to serve, making her character’s purpose questionable [fig. 5]. Ray is a firefly who is befriended by Naveen and Tiana and assists them in their quest to transform back into humans, tragically dying in the process. He has a toothless mouth and uneducated speech, and his heavy Creole accent marks him as a “blackened” character despite his on-screen appearance as a green insect [fig. 6].⁴⁵ Although *The Princess and the Frog* was meant to distance Disney from its racist past, Ray’s character



Figure 6: Ron Clements and John Musker, *The Princess and the Frog*, film still, scene: Ray the Firefly, Walt Disney Pictures, USA, 1 hour 37 minutes.



Figure 7: Ron Clements and John Musker, *The Princess and the Frog*, film still, scene: The Shadowman, Walt Disney Pictures, USA, 1 hour 37 minutes.

falls into the same problematic category as the three crows in *Dumbo* and Sebastian the Caribbean crab in *The Little Mermaid*.⁴⁶

Additionally, if Naveen is not intended to be read as a black character, and Tiana’s loving father is only alive for the first few minutes of the film, then by default the voodoo master “Shadowman” – the film’s resident villain – is the principal representation of (human) black men in *The Princess and the Frog*. The Shadowman, or Dr. Facilier, is an evil, scheming trickster whose main interest is making money and repaying the debts he owes to his “friends on the other side.”⁴⁷ His appearance is composed of a slender body, eerie purple eyes, a conniving smile, and a number of bone and skull accessories [fig. 7]. The combination of the movie’s portrayal of its main, black male character as wicked, and the evil “friends on the other side’s” resemblance to African masks [fig. 8] symbolically equates Africanness and the colour black with evil.

Conclusions: Colour Symbolism and Disney’s Influence on Black Children

This notion of colour symbolism in which white represents what is pure and good and black represents what is wicked and evil is an extremely prominent visual device utilized in almost all Disney films.⁴⁸ *Snow White* (1937) offers an excellent example: the wicked witch lives in a



Figure 8: Ron Clements and John Musker, *The Princess and the Frog*, film still, scene: the Shadowman’s friends on the other side, Walt Disney Pictures, USA, 1 hour 37 minutes.

black castle with black rats surrounded by a dangerous black forest, while the Prince lives in a white castle, with a white horse,⁴⁹ and loves Snow White who is quite literally described as the *fairest* of them all.⁵⁰ Most kids spend their early years consuming Disney films, and the “overexposure to stereotypical color symbolism proves toxic to children’s psyche as it can lead to the rejection of dark skin as precious and beautiful.”⁵¹

The constant reaffirming of the association of white with goodness and physical beauty that children are subjected to is one of the many reasons it was imperative that Disney get the portrayal of blackness in The Princess and the Frog right. Fairytales play a crucial role in the shaping of self-image. As Paula Marie seniors argues, “Without seeing themselves on toy store shelves, children are forced to internalize a message of exclusion that makes them feel inadequate.”⁵² The Princess and the Frog was an opportunity for Disney to give children, especially young black girls, a wholly positive representation of blackness as beautiful and good, free from stereotypes of African Americans as people who are lower class, unskilled, evil, stupid, or subservient. However, it did not succeed in doing so, and instead provided a movie set in a heavily sanitized Jim Crow South, with stereotypical and racist narrative aspects and characters. The Princess and the Frog is “not a cause for hope but a reiteration of white racial (hetero) sexist frames.”⁵³

ENDNOTES

¹ C. Richard King et al, Animated Difference (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011), p. 163.

² Brooke Barnes, “Her Prince Has Come. Critics, Too,” The New York Times (New York, NY), Friday, 29 May 2009, p. ST1.

³ King et al, Animated Difference, p. 163.

⁴ Kimberly R Moffitt and Heather E. Harris, “Of Negation, Princesses, Beauty, and Work: Black Mothers Reflect on Disney’s the Princess and the Frog,” Howard Journal of Communications, vol. 25, no. 1 (2014), p. 57.

⁵ New Orleans of the 1920’s is captured in a number of ways including through jazz music, architecture reminiscent of the French Quarter, and traditional foods such as beignets. King et al, Animated Difference, p. 163.

⁶ Tiana’s second-class status is signaled many times throughout the film both directly and discreetly. She sings about labour, she and her mother take the streetcar to their visibly poor and predominantly black neighbourhood, and she works many hours in an attempt to save money.

⁷ Lecture, Charmaine A. Nelson, “Black Children,” McGill University, Montreal, Canada, 13 March 2015.

⁸ Mary Price was a black woman born into slavery in Bermuda in the eighteenth century. As a young girl she was given to the granddaughter of her master to be her companion servant. Mary Prince, The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave Related by Herself, ed. Moira Ferguson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), p. 1.

⁹ Ajay Gehlawat, “The Strange Case of The Princess and the Frog: Passing and the Elision of Race,” Journal of African American Studies, vol. 14, no. 4 (2010), p. 420.

¹⁰ George Lipsitz, “The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race,” Landscape Journal, vol. 26, no. 1 (2007), p. 10.

¹¹ King et al, Animated Difference, p. 163.

¹² Moffitt and Harris, “Of Negation, Princesses, Beauty, and Work,” p. 71.

¹³ Richard M. Breaux, “After 75 Years of Magic: Disney Answers Its Critics, Rewrites African American History, and Cashes In on Its Racist Past,” Journal of African American Studies, vol. 14, no. 4 (2010), p. 404.

¹⁴ Mary K. Bloodsworth-Lugo and Carmen R. Lugo-Lugo, “Elisions of Race and Stories of Progress,” Race, Philosophy, and Film, eds. Mary K. Bloodsworth-Lugo and Dan Flory (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 191.

¹⁵ Janell Hobson, Body as Evidence: Mediating Race, Globalizing Gender (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2012), p. 13.

¹⁶ Lecture, Kimberly R Moffitt, “Acting While Black (and male) in Disney’s Land,” McGill University, Montreal, Canada, 2 April 2015.

¹⁷ However, Tiana’s nose is broader than most of the prior Disney princesses. Moffitt and Harris, “Of Negation, Princesses, Beauty, and Work,” p. 59.

¹⁸ Moffitt and Harris, “Of Negation, Princesses, Beauty, and Work,” p. 59.

¹⁹ Moffitt and Harris, “Of Negation, Princesses, Beauty, and Work,” p. 59.

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- ²⁰ Lecture, Nelson, "Black Children," McGill University.
- ²¹ Ron Clements and John Musker, *The Princess and the Frog*, film, 97 minutes, Walt Disney Pictures, USA, 7:11.
- ²² Clements and Musker, *The Princess and the Frog*, Walt Disney Pictures, 14:24-14:50.
- ²³ Lecture, Nelson, "Black Children," McGill University.
- ²⁴ Paula Marie Seniors, "Exile and Erasure: The African-American Cinderella and the Asian American Prince," *Images that Injure*, eds. Susan Dente Ross and Paul Martin Lester (Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2011), p. 134.
- ²⁵ Seniors, "Exile and Erasure," p. 134.
- ²⁶ Lecture, Nelson, "Black Children," McGill University.
- ²⁷ Moffitt and Harris, "Of Negation, Princesses, Beauty, and Work," p. 65.
- ²⁸ Moffitt and Harris, "Of Negation, Princesses, Beauty, and Work," p. 65.
- ²⁹ Gehlawat, "The Strange Case of The Princess and the Frog," p. 418.
- ³⁰ Moffitt and Harris, "Of Negation, Princesses, Beauty, and Work," p. 65.
- ³¹ Lecture, Nelson, "Black Children," McGill University.
- ³² Gehlawat, "The Strange Case of The Princess and the Frog," p. 423.
- ³³ Lecture, Nelson, "Black Children," McGill University.
- ³⁴ Moffitt and Harris, "Of Negation, Princesses, Beauty, and Work," p. 66.
- ³⁵ Bloodsworth-Lugo, "Elisions of Race and Stories of Progress," p. 188.
- ³⁶ Naveen's laziness and self-centered behavior is immediately apparent when he disembarks the boat with his ukulele in order to entertain and woo women, leaving Lawrence behind to offload all of the luggage on his own. Lecture, Nelson, "Black Children," McGill University.
- ³⁷ Clements and Musker, *The Princess and the Frog*, Walt Disney Pictures.
- ³⁸ Lecture, Nelson, "Black Children," McGill University.
- ³⁹ Lecture, Nelson, "Black Children," McGill University.
- ⁴⁰ Tiana is, however, still the one who pays for the restaurant as depicted when she hands over the cans of money she had been saving from earlier in the film. King et al, *Animated Difference*, p. 167.
- ⁴¹ Bloodsworth-Lugo, "Elisions of Race and Stories of Progress," p. 192.
- ⁴² Moffitt and Harris, "Of Negation, Princesses, Beauty, and Work," p. 59.
- ⁴³ Breaux, "After 75 Years of Magic," p. 339.
- ⁴⁴ Breaux, "After 75 Years of Magic," p. 401.
- ⁴⁵ The three crows were voiced by James Baskett, Cliff Edwards, and Jim Carmichael, and Sebastian was voiced by Samuel E. Wright. Moffitt and Harris, "Of Negation, Princesses, Beauty, and Work," p. 66.
- ⁴⁶ Dorothy L. Hurley, "Seeing White: Children of Color and the Disney Fairy Tale Princess," *The Journal of Negro Education*, vol. 74, no. 3 (Summer 2005), p. 226.
- ⁴⁷ Clements and Musker, *The Princess and the Frog*, Walt Disney Pictures.
- ⁴⁸ Elizabeth Yeoman, "How Does It Get into my Imagination?: Elementary school children's intertextual knowledge and gendered storylines," *Gender and Education*, vol. 11, no. 4 (July 2010), p. 437.
- ⁴⁹ Hurley, "Seeing White," p. 223.
- ⁵⁰ Fairest signifies both beauty and lightness/whiteness simultaneously. Moffitt, "Of Negation, Princesses, Beauty, and Work," p. 68.
- ⁵¹ Seniors, "Exile and Erasure," p. 137.
- ⁵² Seniors, "Exile and Erasure," p. 136.
- ⁵³ King et al, *Animated Difference*, p. 156.

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Figure 1: Ron Clements and John Musker, The Princess and the Frog, film still, scene: Charlotte (left) and Tiana (right) as children, Walt Disney Pictures, USA, 1 hour 37 minutes.

Figure 2: Ron Clements and John Musker, The Princess and the Frog, film still, scene: close up of Tiana's facial features, Walt Disney Pictures, USA, 1 hour 37 minutes.

Figure 3: Ron Clements and John Musker, The Princess and the Frog, film still, scene: Tiana falling into bed after a long day of work, Walt Disney Pictures, USA, 1 hour 37 minutes.

Figure 4: Ron Clements and John Musker, The Princess and the Frog, film still, scene: Prince Naveen, film, 97 minutes, Walt Disney Pictures, USA, 1 hour 37 minutes.

Figure 5: Ron Clements and John Musker, The Princess and the Frog, film still, scene: Mama Odie, Walt Disney Pictures, USA, 1 hour 37 minutes.

Figure 6: Ron Clements and John Musker, The Princess and the Frog, film still, scene: Ray the Firefly, Walt Disney Pictures, USA, 1 hour 37 minutes.

Figure 7: Ron Clements and John Musker, The Princess and the Frog, film still, scene: The Shadowman, Walt Disney Pictures, USA, 1 hour 37 minutes.

Figure 8: Ron Clements and John Musker, The Princess and the Frog, film still, scene: the Shadowman's friends on the other side, Walt Disney Pictures, USA, 1 hour 37 minutes.

BLACKFACE IN AUSTRALIA: AN ANALYSIS OF ITS HISTORICAL ORIGINS AND CONTEMPORARY RESURGENCE

Rapunzel Aguillon Espiritu (McGill University)



Figure 1: Chris Lilley, *Squashed Nigga* (2011), music video still; close up shot of female dancer in minimal clothing dancing in front of a truck, ABC TV, Australia, 1 minute and 35 seconds.

Blackface minstrelsy originated and proliferated in the Americas as a result of slavery and white nostalgia for slavery.¹ Minstrelsy was a popular form of entertainment that systematically subjugated the black population.² The minstrel show borrowed and commodified elements of black culture in order to earn financial and social profit for its white organizers and consumers.³ Americans, however, were not the only consumers of minstrel shows; American minstrel troupes were imported to perform for Australian audiences.⁴ A recent resurgence of blackface minstrelsy has emerged in America as well as Australia: “S.mouse,” played by the white Australian actor Chris Lilley, embodies a caricature of a black male rapper from Los Angeles. Examples like S.mouse suggest that the practice of black minstrelsy within contemporary visual culture is still in existence and continues to methodically mock, oppress, and belittle black populations in popular culture, both in America and Australia. The discrepancy between America and Australia, however, is that due to Australia’s geographical location, Australia was not a direct participant of Trans Atlantic Slavery and therefore, did not become a site of the Black Diaspora. It is a strange reality then, that Australian producers like Chris Lilley choose to spuriously represent and demean black populations.

The minstrel show represented slavery as “amusing, right, and natural,” and it endorsed the white dissemination of black culture.⁵ Early minstrel shows, which took place between 1843 and continued until the 1860s, emphasized the white obsession with the “commodified ‘black’ bod[y].”⁶ As Eric Lott has argued, there was a “sheer overkill of songs in which black men [we]re roasted, fished for, smoked like tobacco, peeled like potatoes, planted in the soil, or dried and hung up as advertisements,” and these disconcerting images embodied the murderous fantasies of whites.⁷ The way in which blacks were represented on stage showcased the creators’



Figure 2: Chris Lilley, *Squashed Nigga* (2011), music video still; long shot of female dancer accompanied by the character of S.mouse in blackface, ABC TV, Australia, 1 minute and 59 seconds.

antagonism towards the black race.⁸ Black bodies served as amusing spectacles for the white audience, and thus, were there to be objectified and to be looked at with ardent fascination.⁹ White individuals used blackface as entertainment and ridiculed black populations for social and monetary profit.¹⁰

The origins of blackface minstrelsy can be traced back to the Americas, but tours of minstrel troupes made it to Australia.¹¹ Minstrelsy involved the process of “white actors ‘black[ing] up’ their faces to sing ballads associated with black Americans,” in the latter half of the nineteenth-century. Due to its success in the United States,¹² late nineteenth-century Australia adopted minstrel entertainment, rendering it “the most commonplace form of amateur stage production.”¹³ It was performed in music halls, vaudeville shows, and on public street corners.¹⁴ The colonial population of Australia laughed openly at the “minstrel jokes, songs and sketches” from the mid nineteenth century until the end of the nineteenth century.

The earliest minstrel shows were transported to Australia from England in 1850 and included the Blythe Waterland Minstrels and the Howard Serenaders. American groups like The New York Serenaders and Totten’s Harmonions—among others—followed in 1851 and 1854 respectively.¹⁵ The managers of American companies saw the success of their shows as an opportunity to export them to Australia, as they believed that they would be met with the same degree of approval from individuals in the Australian mining industry. As anticipated, the shows drew audiences at Bathurst and Ballarat.¹⁶ In fact, the shows were so largely successful that the miners even travelled to Melbourne and Sydney to watch the same performances.¹⁷ The earlier performances contained most of the same elements as the American minstrel show, but throughout the 1850s, the “stump speech” was removed from the Australian stage (possibly because colonial authorities policed opportunities to challenge law and order).¹⁸

The second American tour, by Charlie Backus, was a financial failure, and may have discouraged future tours.¹⁹ This meant that most troupes that visited Australia in the 1860s were “English-based Christy parties,” which featured music more than humour.²⁰ These groups did not play on political or social issues, and would instead focus on satirical operas or plays.²¹ The

success of these British-styled companies meant that minstrelsy continued as a significant component of urban recreation.²²

The American minstrel troupes re-emerged in the 1870s alongside the completion of the “Union Pacific-Central Pacific” railroad as well as the establishment of regular steamship services between Sydney and San Francisco.²³ These advancements allowed for travel between the colonies and New York to be more comfortable, affordable and quicker than the voyages between London and Sydney.²⁴ In addition, there was a rapid increase in the population of Sydney and Melbourne, and this growth in the economy that continued until the 1890s, created a market for theatre.²⁵ In response to these circumstances, companies flocked to Australia, so much so that the colonies essentially became “an extension of the western American circuit.”²⁶ Blackface minstrelsy remained and adapted according to audience demands.²⁷

The success of this derogatory form of entertainment was largely due to its influence in its original American context²⁸ and the rich concoction of “songs, sentimentality, banter and burlesque,” also added to its appeal.²⁹ In addition, minstrelsy was one of the initial forms of entertainment that used publicity and advertising.³⁰ Minstrelsy in Australia proved its ability to cross social class lines as well as its malleability – blackface performers were flexible and changed the content of the song, according to the audience.³¹ Minstrelsy was able to adapt “racial stereotypes to meet the changing conceptions...” but sustained its political message “about the superiority of the ‘white race.’”³² Words and images associated with “the stage Negro [were] utilized to characterize Australia’s native inhabitants,” known as the Aborigines.³³ Words like “nigger” and “coon” were used by colonial Australians to mock Australia’s Aboriginal population.³⁴ The term “nigger” incrementally transformed into an all-encompassing term, to mean “any racial group in need of degrading.”³⁵ The pliability of this racial epithet suggests the adaptability of minstrelsy to the site-specific needs of Australian racism. For the Australian stage, the hyperbolic use of black make-up was not amended. The appeal of the minstrel show in Australia – a country that did not become a site of the Black Diaspora and that was separated from the Trans Atlantic Trade Routes – is unexpected. This ultimately suggests that the “black body” may be a universally discriminated subject and a spectacle that elucidates white identity because black identity is its supposed antithesis.

As mentioned above, Australia’s main distinction from the Americas is that, although it was a site of British colonization, it was not a direct part of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.³⁶ The historical practice of minstrelsy in Australia, then, was sustained over a century, in the absence of a significant black population. In the early colonial period of Australia, black Americans garnered “special attention and elicited ambivalent reactions from Australians.”³⁷ In fact, there was confusion between “stereotypical racist images of black Americans and Australian Aborigines.”³⁸ The reasons why minstrelsy spread throughout the Australian entertainment industry was because it praised the white race and it derided the native population of Aborigines – the Aboriginal population was associated with the “minstrel black.”³⁹ Aborigines were also described as “darkies” and “niggers,” which are terms that are derived from Southern United States culture.⁴⁰ This confusion bound African American identity with Aboriginality, and through the blending of the two, transformed the two cultures so that they were interchangeable in the Australian context.



Figure 3: Chris Lilley, *Poo On You* (2011), music video still; mid shot of S.mouse in blackface and openly defecating on the hood of a car, ABC TV, Australia, 37 seconds.

Perhaps this interchangeability of terms accounts for the continuation and re-emergence of blackface minstrelsy in Australia. However, why do artists like Chris Lilley mimic African American hip-hop? *Angry Boys* is an Australian mockumentary featuring Lilley that showcases one male actor who dresses as three different characters: an elderly Asian mother, a LA rapper, and two country boys. Lilley is a producer and actor who is renowned for his often-sadistic characterizations of racial groups – S.mouse is just one of the protagonists that Lilley represents. Lilley’s use of blackface is unabashedly offensive and distasteful, and as the TV critic Ed Yates has argued, “Lilley doing blackface seems like a deliberate attempt to create controversy and get ratings.”⁴¹ S.mouse “glorifies lechery and criminal behaviour,”⁴² and Lilley, through his use of blackface, also pitches this series to a predominantly white audience, which, in light of the history of blackface in Australia, is a continuation of the minstrel tradition.⁴³ While Lilley’s practice of painting himself black may seem to be due to the country’s blending of African American and Indigenous Australian populations, this is not the case. Rather, Lilley is clearly poking fun at African American men; there is no confusion about S.mouse’s racial background because he states that he is from LA.⁴⁴ The permissibility of blackface and the offensive cultural appropriation of hip-hop in Australian contexts are problematic because it ultimately suggests that white Australia, or at least the stakeholders of the entertainment industry, cannot connect the racism that is so heavily attached to blackface and the ongoing mockery of black bodies and experiences of anti-black racism in the real world. The problem with Chris Lilley, in addition, is that he fails to question racism. His mockumentary could possibly offer critical insights about the construction of racial identity and has the potential to dismantle racist attitudes, but instead, it is just blatantly racist. There were ways that S.mouse could have critiqued hip-hop more successfully and could have used it to induce a critical conversation and intellectually engaging show that probed race issues, but he failed to do so.

Chris Lilley’s “Squashed Nigga” is a rap video that uses this term to refer to African Americans, since S.mouse is a rapper from LA.⁴⁵ There is no confusion with Aboriginal Australians because the video portrays clear, unadulterated racism towards African Americans.

The chorus, “Squashed nigga, squashed nigga, I feel like a squashed nigga” shows this rapper’s false affiliation with the struggles of African American communities who, “feel crushed all the time.” The accompanying images in the video clip seem unjustified and unrelated to the song,



Figure 4: Chris Lilley, *Slap My Elbow* (2011), music video still; close up of S.mouse in blackface dancing in front of group, ABC TV, Australia, 48 seconds.

with arbitrary placements of sexualized dancing women of colour [fig. 1, fig. 2]. The incongruence between the visual and lyrical components questions the purpose and agenda of the video as it seems to be a fantasy scenario that shows S.mouse as socially and economically comfortable with women desiring him while his lyrics speak of oppression. While Lilley’s “intention” is supposedly to showcase “compelling and real characters,” he fails to elaborate on his meaning of “real characters”. But it can be assumed that it alludes to the imitation of the physical and social behaviours of specific racial groups.⁴⁶ His replication of anti-black stereotypes is racist and stems from a history of discriminatory practices that humiliated black populations.

Given that Lilley is impersonating a rapper that is clearly African American, the type of lyrics in the song “Poo On You,” uses the traditions of hip-hop including the objectification of women, and promotes the stereotype that African American men engage in disruptive and anti-social behaviour.⁴⁷ These negative portrayals of African Americans are being adopted and commodified by Lilley, a privileged white male whose skits further subject African Americans to mockery. There is a scene where Lilley openly defecates on the bonnet of a car [fig. 3] in a neighbourhood that is inhabited by other black people with the accompanying lyrics: “it’s only right I jack your keys and run/ spent all of my advancements on weed and guns/ for fun, when I’m drunk” and, “I’ll reach in your mouth and pull your fucking skeleton out/ Niggas get hit with a two piece...I’m such a violent thing.”⁴⁸ This blatant racism is excused and employed as a form of comedy, and is indivisible from the “original spirit of the practice, in nineteenth century minstrel shows.”⁴⁹



Figure 5: Chris Lilley, *Slap My Elbow* (2011), music video still; long shot of S.mouse in blackface dancing in front of group, ABC TV, Australia, 56 seconds.



Figure 6: Chris Lilley, *Slap My Elbow* (2011), music video still; mid shot of S.mouse in blackface in front of female dancers, ABC TV, Australia; 1 minute and 31 seconds.

In “Slap My Elbow,” S.mouse – through clothing and mannerisms – lampoons African American hip hop artist Soulja Boy [fig. 4].⁵⁰ Again, he is dressed up as a black man, and ridicules hip-hop music in this segment for the sake of comedy [fig. 5, fig. 6, fig. 7, and fig. 8]. Like “Squashed Nigga,” S.mouse uses the motif of female dancers as a redundant backdrop. He imitates the content of rap videos through satire, but is unsuccessful because of its vulgarity. Finally, the video “Animal Zoo” flirts with the aforementioned tropes of objectified women [fig. 9 and fig. 10] and the reproduction of hegemonic ideas that elevate the white male.

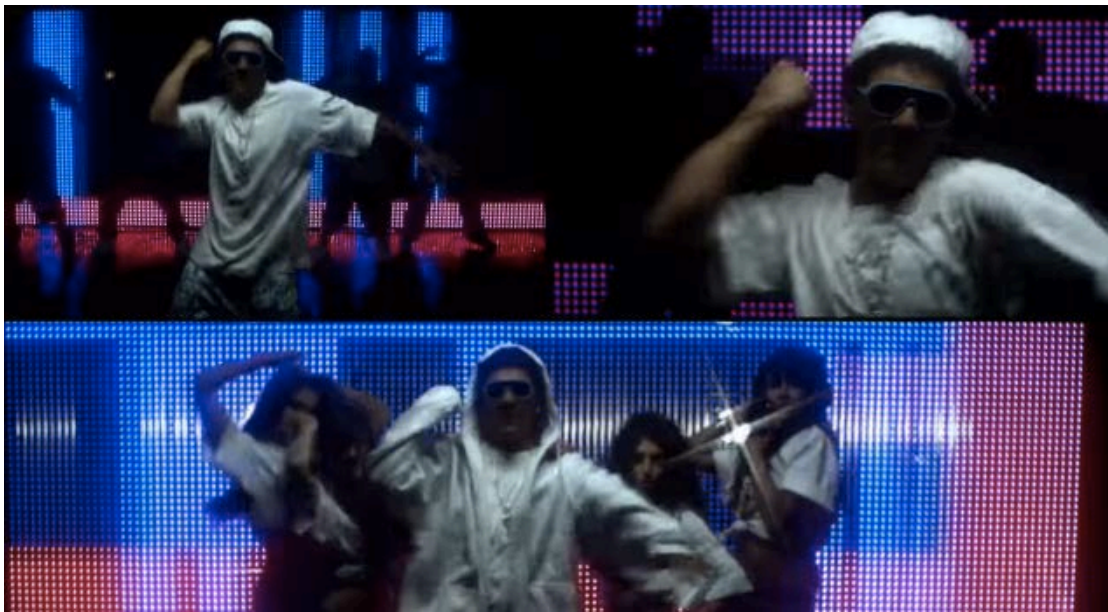


Figure 7: Chris Lilley, Slap My Elbow (2011), music video still; triptych shot of S.mouse in blackface in front of dancers, ABC TV, Australia, 48 seconds.



Figure 8: Chris Lilley, Animal Zoo (2011), music video still; mid shot of female character dressed as unknown animal, ABC TV, Australia, 4 seconds.

There has been a negative reaction to Angry Boys because of the blatant use of blackface by its main character S.mouse. An MC from Philadelphia who goes by the name of Has-Lo publicly commented on Lilley's character S.Mouse, stating that he "found it offensive both in terms of its portrayal of black males and rap music," and that when there are parodies of black men, they are usually "ill-mannered, unintelligent, quick to anger, violent, money-hungry, [and]



Figure 9: Chris Lilley, *Animal Zoo* (2011), music video still; long shot of S.mouse hunting for woman in fig. 8, ABC TV, Australia, 6 seconds.

sex-crazed.”⁵¹ Similarly, Australian audiences have been less than enthusiastic about the airing such a show on their own shores. Hoskins, for example, acknowledges that this is for an “overwhelmingly white audience,” and “the very point of blackface is to belittle black people in order to make white people laugh [at] every single element [including] the exaggeration of the physical features, the mockery of their speech and [their] behaviour.”⁵²

In the context of Australia, minstrelsy’s function is to juxtapose whiteness against blackness, in order to reconfirm whiteness, and like the old minstrel shows, allow white people to sustain their power over marginalized groups through the guise of comedy. This infers that the



Fig. 10: Chris Lilley, *Animal Zoo* (2011), music video still; long shot of female characters dressed as unknown animals, ABC TV, Australia, 13 seconds.

“black body” remains an object of appropriation, abuse and degradation within the television industry. The people consuming Lilley’s television series are Australians who are largely ignorant of the history of minstrelsy. As such, through mere ignorance, they perpetrate racism.

Although the Transatlantic Slave Trade has ceased, the black body remains under attack, and these modern forms of minstrel performances encapsulate the existing issues that, in this case, black male bodies have to endure. Again, the white population is taking what is not theirs and misrepresenting it for their profit; such performances do not honour black people. The problem remains since these comedic forms of racism are not banned and Australian actors like Chris Lilley fail to understand the ramifications of this type of “humour”. Blackface is never acceptable, especially in this context, because Lilley comes from a position of ignorance and white male privilege. These incidents of minstrelsy in Australia highlight that minstrelsy is a global phenomenon, and will continue to exist if members of society continue to remain misinformed.

ENDNOTES:

¹ Eric Lott, “Love and Theft: The Racial Unconscious of Blackface Minstrelsy,” *Representations*, no. 39 (Summer 1992), pp. 23-50.

² Lott, “Love and Theft,” pp. 23-50.

³ Lott, “Love and Theft,” p. 28.

⁴ Richard Waterhouse, “Minstrel show and vaudeville house: The Australian popular stage, 1838-1914,” *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 23, no. 93 (October 1989), pp. 367-68.

⁵ Lott, “Love and Theft,” p. 23.

⁶ Lott, “Love and Theft,” p. 24.

⁷ Lott, “Love and Theft,” p. 29.

⁸ Lott, “Love and Theft,” p. 29.

⁹ Lott, “Love and Theft,” p. 28.

¹⁰ Lott, “Love and Theft,” pp. 28-29.

¹¹ Waterhouse, “Minstrel show and vaudeville house,” p. 366.

¹² Kenneth Morgan, *Australia: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 105.

¹³ Waterhouse, “Minstrel show and vaudeville house,” p. 366.

¹⁴ Alison Ravenscroft, *The Postcolonial Eye: White Australian Desire and the Visual Field of Race* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2012), p. 140.

¹⁵ Waterhouse, “Minstrel show and vaudeville house,” p. 366.

¹⁶ Waterhouse, “Minstrel show and vaudeville house,” p. 372.

¹⁷ Waterhouse, “Minstrel show and vaudeville house,” p. 372.

¹⁸ Waterhouse, “Minstrel show and vaudeville house,” p. 372.

¹⁹ Waterhouse, “Minstrel show and vaudeville house,” p. 372.

²⁰ Waterhouse, “Minstrel show and vaudeville house,” pp. 372-73.

²¹ Waterhouse, “Minstrel show and vaudeville house,” p. 373.

²² Waterhouse, “Minstrel show and vaudeville house,” p. 373.

²³ Waterhouse, “Minstrel show and vaudeville house,” p. 373.

²⁴ Waterhouse, “Minstrel show and vaudeville house,” p. 373.

²⁵ Waterhouse, “Minstrel show and vaudeville house,” p. 373.

²⁶ Waterhouse, “Minstrel show and vaudeville house,” p. 373.

²⁷ Waterhouse, “Minstrel show and vaudeville house,” pp. 372-78.

²⁸ Waterhouse, “Minstrel show and vaudeville house,” p. 366.

²⁹ Waterhouse, “Minstrel show and vaudeville house,” p. 378.

³⁰ Gunther Barth, *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 7-27, 192-228.

³¹ Waterhouse, “Minstrel show and vaudeville house,” pp. 378-79.

³² Waterhouse, “Minstrel show and vaudeville house,” p. 380.

³³ Richard Waterhouse, “The Minstrel Show and Australian Culture,” *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 14, no. 3, p. 149.

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- ³⁴ Waterhouse, "The Minstrel Show and Australian Culture," p. 149.
- ³⁵ Waterhouse, "The Minstrel Show and Australian Culture," p. 154.
- ³⁶ Stephen Johnson, *Burnt Cork: Traditions and Legacies of Blackface Minstrelsy* (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), p. 224.
- ³⁷ Robert Catley and David Mosler, *America and Americans in Australia* (Westport: Praeger, 1998), p. 171.
- ³⁸ Catley and Mosler, *America and Americans in Australia*, p. 171.
- ³⁹ Jon Stratton, "The Jackson Jive: Blackface Today and the Limits of Whiteness in Australia," *The Journal of the European Association of Studies on Australia*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2011), pp. 22, 26.
- ⁴⁰ Catley and Mosler, *America and Americans in Australia*, p. 171.
- ⁴¹ Ed Yates, "Still angry?: The elusive characters of Chris Lilley," *Metro Magazine: Media & Education Magazine*, no. 170 (2011), p. 126.
- ⁴² Dave Hoskin, "TV eye: Beyond the Pale," *Metro Magazine: Media & Education Magazine*, no. 170 (2011), p. 128.
- ⁴³ Hoskin, "TV eye: Beyond the Pale," pp. 128-29.
- ⁴⁴ Jasmin Tiggett, "HBO's 'Angry Boys' and that Black Face thing...", *Shadow and Act: On Cinema of the African Diaspora*, <http://blogs.indiewire.com/shadowandact/hbos-angry-boys-and-that-black-face-thing> (date of last access 10 April 2015)
- It is important to note that there is a prominent West Coast rap and hip hop music scene, led by widely recognized artists such as Tupac and Snoop Dogg, which Lilley is referencing through his character while donning blackface.
- ⁴⁵ Tiggett, "HBO's 'Angry Boys' and that Black Face thing...", (date of last access 10 April 2015)
- ⁴⁶ Tiggett, "HBO's 'Angry Boys' and that Black Face thing...", (date of last access 10 April 2015)
- ⁴⁷ Michael P. Jeffries, *Thug Life: Race, Gender, and the Meaning of Hip-Hop* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 62.
- ⁴⁸ Chris Lilley, *Poo On You* (2011), music video; 55 seconds, ABC TV, Australia.
- ⁴⁹ T'cha Dunlevy, "Blackface in Quebec: Intent vs. Offence," *Montreal Gazette*, <http://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/blackface-in-quebec-intent-vs-offence> (date of last access 13 May 2012)
- ⁵⁰ Soulja Boy is an African American rap artist. Matt Shea, "US hip-hop industry reacts to Angry Boys," *The Sydney Morning Herald: Entertainment*, <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/tv-and-radio/us-hiphop-industry-reacts-to-angry-boys-20110706-1h1k3.html> (date of last access 3 April 2015)
- ⁵¹ Shea, "US hip-hop industry reacts to Angry Boys," (date of last access 3 April 2015)
- ⁵² Hoskin, "TV eye: Beyond the Pale," pp. 128-29.

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PLATE LIST

Figure 1: Chris Lilley, Squashed Nigga (2011), music video still; close up shot of female dancer in minimal clothing dancing in front of a truck, ABC TV, Australia, 1 minute and 35 seconds.

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SCRUBBING DOUBLES: THE GOLD DUST TWINS AND RACIAL TROPES IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN SOAP ADS

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Soap and cleaning solutions were mass-produced as branded, packaged products for the first time in the nineteenth century.¹ Manufacturers needed to establish brand loyalty and persuade consumers to incorporate these new products into their domestic routines. This task inspired innovation in advertising, especially in the United States, who were leaders in branded soap manufacturing at the time.² In 1887, the N.K. Fairbank Company commissioned E.W. Kemble, a staff artist for the *Chicago Daily Graphic*, to create a logo for their new product, Gold Dust Washing Powder.³ Kemble produced the Gold Dust Twins [fig. 1] – two identical, asexual black children, naked except for skirts emblazoned with the words “GOLD” and “DUST.” Despite their young age, the Gold Dust Twins were depicted as “inseparable and indefatigable workers,” often happily doing household chores or scrubbing each other in a washtub.⁴ Over the course of the next decade, the Gold Dust Twins came to be one of the most famous and beloved logos in the United States.⁵

Focusing on the imagery of the Gold Dust campaign, this paper seeks to explore why the Gold Dust Twins would have enticed a white American consumer audience to buy cleaning products, especially amid the racial tensions following the Reconstruction Era.⁶ Each advertisement will be considered as a site of representation whereby the black subject is configured as racially inferior to a white consumer audience. I will begin by discussing the provenance of the advertising material featured in this paper. Then, I will discuss the innovations in nineteenth-century printmaking techniques that allowed for a hitherto unprecedented dissemination of racist advertising material. Finally, I will analyze the derogatory racial stereotypes evident in the



Figure 1: N.K. Fairbank Company (product manufacturer), E.W. Kemble (artist of original logo design) and Gray Lithography Company (lithography firm), “Fairbank’s Soaps: These are the Original Twins,” (c. 1890), chromolithograph illustration on advertising card, 13 x 9 cm, Warshaw Collection of Business Americana – Soap, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., USA.

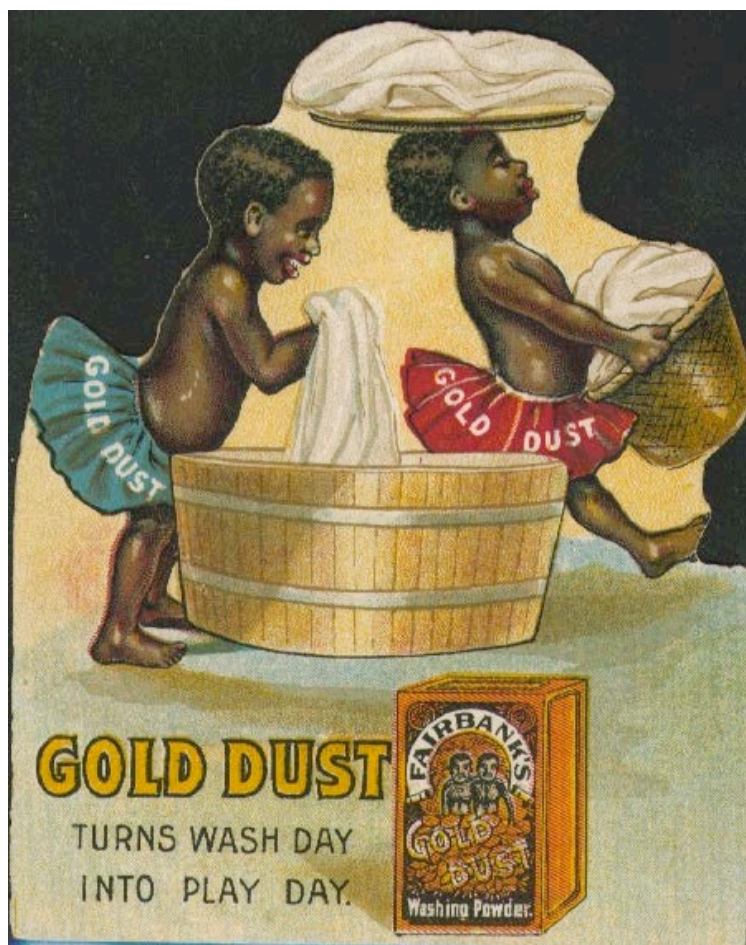


Figure 2: N.K. Fairbank Company (product manufacturer), E.W. Kemble (artist of original logo design) and Gray Lithography Company (lithography firm), "Gold Dust Turns Wash Day Into Play Day," (c. 1890), chromolithograph illustration on advertising card, Warshaw Collection of Business Americana – Soap, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., USA.

advertisements. Rather than merely selling cleaning products, the advertisements constructed a visual narrative of contented black subservience that upheld the supposed inherent racial inferiority of black people. These depictions coincided with and legitimated the ongoing implementation of Jim Crow segregation practices, obscured the harsh reality of black domestic service at the time, and ultimately worked to reassert white social dominance in post-Civil War America.

Now part of the Warshaw Collection of Business Americana at the *Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History* in Washington, D.C., the advertising cards discussed in this paper previously belonged to Isadore Warshaw, a rare book dealer who began collecting turn-of-the-century American posters, advertising cards, and business correspondences in 1928.⁷ They came into the possession of the Smithsonian Institution when the museum bought Warshaw's entire collection of business ephemera in 1967.⁸ The cards had been created between 1890 and 1902 to advertise Gold Dust Washing Powder, a new "all-

purpose cleaning agent" for "anything about the house – pots, pans, dishes, clothes, woodwork" that claimed to "do the work better, easier and cheaper than any other cleanser."⁹ Gold Dust Washing Powder was manufactured and marketed across the United States by the *N.K. Fairbank Company*.¹⁰ Established in 1864 by prominent Chicago businessman Nathaniel Kellogg Fairbank, the *N.K. Fairbank Company* produced five million dollars' worth of hygiene products per year, with Gold Dust becoming one of the most popular and recognized brands of the late nineteenth century.¹¹

The brand's success was generally attributed to its innovative use of advertising.¹² The *N.K. Fairbank Company* took advantage of advances in pictorial printing in order to mass-produce small, portable advertisements in the form of cards bearing large, colourful illustrations.¹³ With the invention of the steam press in 1870, the practice of chromolithography allowed for the cheap mass-production of brightly coloured prints. Chromolithography replaced

engraving as the dominant printmaking medium of the nineteenth century and led to the proliferation of urban lithography firms dedicated to the production of advertising paraphernalia, including calendars, labels, and printed cards.¹⁴ By the beginning of the twentieth century, advertising cards had become the most ubiquitous commercial images in America.¹⁵ Distributed by brand name companies to acquaint potential consumers with their products, advertising cards were circulated where the products were sold. Due to their small size, they could be slipped into the packaging of the products they advertised or sent to local shopkeepers, who would then hand them to customers.¹⁶ Moreover, since the innovations in chromolithography made for aesthetically pleasing cards, they directly extended the lifespan of the advertisement. Advertising cards were rarely discarded – instead, they were often saved as bookmarks or keepsake displayed in the household.¹⁷ Children, in particular, collected advertising cards and would compile them in scrapbooks.¹⁸ In these ways, the Gold Dust Twins became well known and cherished figures across the country.

Since the Gold Dust advertising campaign was launched in 1887, the advertising cards were circulated during the early decades of the Jim Crow Era.¹⁹

The abolition of slavery and the granting of constitutional rights to freedmen following the Civil War had generated significant anxiety and resentment among white citizens who interpreted these concessions as a challenge to white supremacy. Beginning in 1876, a series of state and local ordinances – called “Jim Crow” laws, after a popular minstrelsy character – were enacted to enforce racial segregation in public facilities and institutions.²⁰ These laws claimed to give a “separate but equal” status to African-American citizens, but generally functioned to sanction and systematize black inequality and reassert white social dominance.²¹ Notably, they existed in all of the states where the Gold Dust advertising cards were circulated. In the following ways, the imagery of the Gold Dust Twins campaign functioned to reassert the supremacy of a white middle-class American consumer audience.²²

First, the Gold Dust Twins were always depicted as young children [fig. 1, fig. 2, fig. 3, fig. 4]. The configuration of the black subject as a childlike figure was a common motif in soap

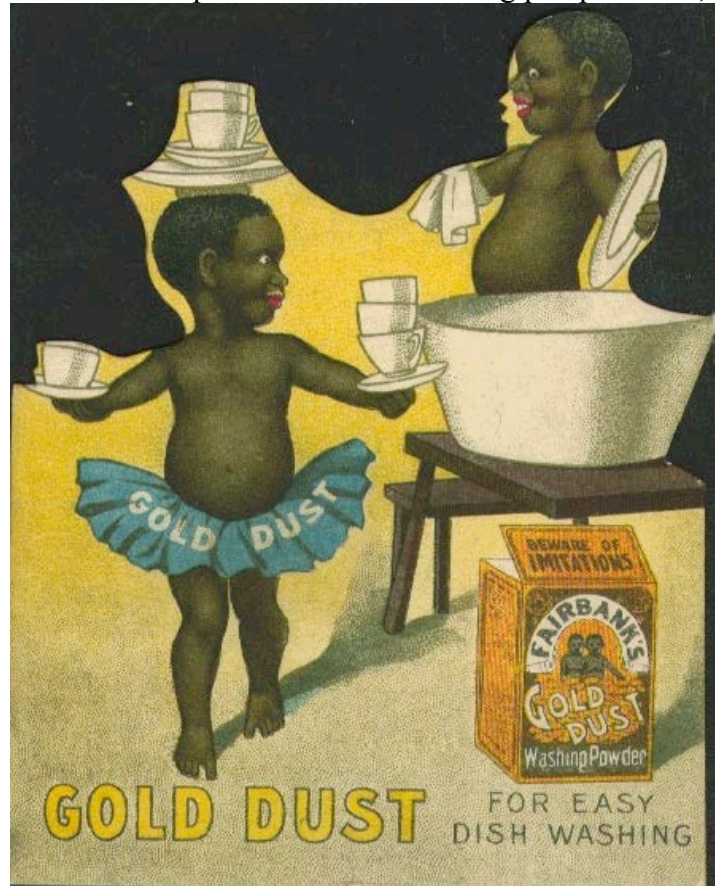


Figure 3: N.K. Fairbank Company (product manufacturer), E.W. Kemble (artist of original logo design) and Gray Lithography Company (lithography firm), “Gold Dust for Easy Dish Washing,” (c. 1890), chromolithograph illustration on advertising card, Warshaw Collection of Business Americana – Soap, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., USA.

advertisements of the period, and had several rhetorical effects.²³ It reinforced notions of black ineptitude, testified to the supposedly disparate levels of intelligence between blacks and whites, and suggested a general need for white guidance, evoking the colonial belief of African dependency.²⁴ Further, in his or her diminished status as a child, the black subject posed no veritable threat to the white consumer. Rendered benign (if not endearing)²⁵ by virtue of his or her youth, the black subject was robbed of threatening sexuality or strength.

Further, the child-like appearance of the Gold Dust Twins drew from the iconography of the picaninny, which scholar David Pilgrim defines as the “dominant racial caricature of black children for most of American history.”²⁶ Like the picaninny, who typically appeared either nude or dressed in tattered clothing, the Gold Dust Twins were either depicted completely naked and thus denied the possibility of modesty [fig. 1, fig. 4], or clad in short skirts that would have resembled so-called “exotic” costume and carried associations of savagery [fig. 2, fig. 3].²⁷ Moreover, as the pitiable state of the picaninny’s clothing typically implied the inability of black parents to care for their children, the Gold Dust advertisements functioned to uphold the domestic and maternal superiority of white women, to whom such cleaning products were marketed.²⁸

In addition, the Gold Dust Twins were often featured sitting in a washtub [fig. 1, fig. 4]. This image is reminiscent of the common trope of the black subject making fruitless attempts to scrub away the pigment from his or her skin.²⁹ Pictorial advertisements for cleaning products were often invested with a chromatic symbolism in which blackness was equated with dirt and moral corruption, while whiteness signified cleanliness and moral purity.³⁰ The futile exercise of attempting to remove the blackness from one’s skin underlined the fact that the black subject, supposedly lacking the moral and rational capacity to truly assimilate into “civilized” society, could only “comically mimic” the refined manners of whites.³¹

The theme of bathing the black subject is one of considerable historical importance. It originates from the popular expression “to wash an Ethiopian white is to labour in vain,” a phrase once used across Western Europe from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century to describe the act of attempting a fundamentally impossible task.³² Its subsequent appearance in mass-circulated advertisements in nineteenth-century America had significant appeal for a white consumer audience: it emphasized the efficacy of cleaning products by suggesting their accomplishment of the impossible.³³ In combination with their status as children, the Gold Dust Twins’ vain attempts to reach a fundamentally inaccessible whiteness underlines the fact that they are too immature and unintelligent to realize the insurmountable extent of their own social and racial inferiority.³⁴ While the Gold Dust Twins are incapable of ridding themselves of racial stigma and are trapped in a permanent state of racial inferiority as a result, the white consumer could aspire to social respectability by simply buying the cleaning product for sale.³⁵ The Gold Dust Twins therefore served as “regressive foil[s]” for the ideal (white) consumer. The advertising card was not so much a visual endorsement of the benefits of Gold Dust Washing Powder, but a warning of what the failure to use the product might imply about one’s character.³⁶

Finally, it is imperative to address the fact that the Gold Dust Twins were consistently depicted performing domestic labour. When not sitting in a sudsy washtub, they were shown carrying baskets of laundry [fig. 2] or washing dishes [fig. 3], alongside the slogan of the Gold Dust Twins campaign, “*Let the Gold Dust Twins Do Your Work!*” When shown performing these domestic tasks, the Gold Dust Twins are always smiling. Working in tandem with the slogan, these images upheld the notion of benevolent black servitude. This cheerful black servant or slave stereotype perpetuated the misconception that black people were naturally suited to menial

jobs in service of the white population and catered to white nostalgia for the practice of slavery, enacting a fantasy of “limitless [black] service and ownership” encouraged by the representation of the black subject as the willing, perpetual servant.³⁷

The Gold Dust advertisements can also be analyzed as examples of how racialized exclusion from and participation in mainstream consumer culture was codified in visual popular



Figure 4: N.K. Fairbank Company (product manufacturer), E.W. Kemble (artist of original logo design, shown here on the reverse) and Gray Lithography Company (lithography firm), “It Cleans Everything,” (c.1890), advertising card, 14 x 9 cm, Warshaw Collection of Business Americana – Soap, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., USA.

culture.³⁸ By 1890, American advertisers had come to the realization that women were responsible for buying eighty percent of all consumer merchandise.³⁹ Accordingly, the Gold Dust advertising campaign was designed to appeal to white women and mothers. One advertising card depicts a white woman admiring her spotless dishware above the tagline “*IT CLEANS EVERYTHING!*”⁴⁰ presenting female satisfaction as being inextricably tied to a domestic order that could be achieved by using Gold Dust Washing Powder [fig. 4].⁴¹ On the back of the same card, the Gold Dust Twins appear in a washtub of suds. In the imagery of the Gold Dust campaign, it is obvious that black people were not addressed as potential consumers of the product, but only represented as a means to showcase the product itself. Considering the racial trope of cleansing black skin, it is clear that the Gold Dust product was not intended for the consumption of certain people. Black people are permitted to clean – to perform domestic labour for the white population – but the advertisement implies that this product is only for the white consumer.⁴²

Ultimately, the Gold Dust advertising campaign embodied national aspirations of progress through commerce, while also making visible white anxieties of threatened social dominance following the Civil War. The Gold Dust Twins were designed and deployed to promote whiteness and its association with cleaning products as a consumer ideal. Advances in

printmaking techniques made for small, mobile and aesthetically pleasing cards with keepsake quality, creating advertising material with a more expansive physical reach and longer lifespan than ever before. As the derogatory racial stereotypes featured on each card were more easily disseminated and kept throughout the country, the Gold Dust Twins became not only ubiquitous

but beloved figures in mainstream popular culture. The depiction of their contented subordination and naïve, futile attempts at “cleansing” themselves of racial stigma upheld notions of natural black inferiority that, amid the social tensions and legal sanctions of the post-Civil War era, ultimately worked to reassert and legitimize white social dominance.

ENDNOTES:

¹ Juliann Sivulka, *Soap, Sex and Cigarettes: A Cultural History of American Advertising* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1998), pp. 47-48.

² David Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 240.

³ Sivulka, *Soap, Sex and Cigarettes*, p. 100.

⁴ “Definition of Gold Dust Twins,” *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gold%20dust%20twins> (date of last access 28 March 2015); Cynthia Bailin, “From Picaninny to Savage Brute: Racialized Images and African American Stereotyping in Turn-of-the-Century American Advertising,” *We Are What We Sell: How Advertising Shapes American Life...and Always Has*, eds. Danielle Sarver Coombs and Bob Batchelor (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2014), p. 90.

⁵ Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire*, p. 9.

⁶ Reconstruction refers to the period of rebuilding the United States following the Civil War from 1865 to 1877. Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 1988), p. xvii.

⁷ The provenance of the cards prior to their being acquired by Warshaw (as well as records for when, from whom, and for how much money Warshaw was able to procure the cards) is unknown.

⁸ “Warshaw Collection of Business Americana, circa 1724-1977,” *Archives Center, National Museum of American History*, <http://amhistory.si.edu/archives/d7060c.htm> (date of last access 6 April 2015)

⁹ “Gold Dust for Easy Dish Washing [Advertising Card],” *Smithsonian Institution*, <http://collections.si.edu/search/results.htm?view=&dsort=&date.slider=&q=gold+dust+twins> (date of last access 8 April 2015)

¹⁰ Sivulka, *Soap, Sex and Cigarettes*, p. 100.

¹¹ “Inventory of the Fairbank-Graham Family Papers, 1775-1980,” *The Newberry: Chicago’s Independent Research Library Since 1887*, http://mms.newberry.org/xml/xml_files/FairbankGraham.xml (date of last access 6 April 2015)

¹² “Fairbank (N.K.) & Co.,” *Dictionary of Leading Chicago Businesses (1820-2000): The Electronic Encyclopedia of Chicago*, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/2657.html> (date of last access 6 April 2015)

¹³ Sivulka, *Soap, Sex and Cigarettes*, p. 32.

¹⁴ Marilyn Maness Mehaffy, “Advertising Race/Raceing Advertising: The Feminine Consumer (-Nation), 1876-1900,” *Signs*, vol. 23, no. 1 (Autumn 1997), p. 137.

¹⁵ Mehaffy, “Advertising Race,” pp. 132, 37.

¹⁶ Mehaffy, “Advertising Race,” pp. 137-38.

¹⁷ Sivulka, *Soap, Sex and Cigarettes*, pp. 32, 101.

¹⁸ Mehaffy, “Advertising Race,” p. 132.

¹⁹ Leslie Vincent Tischauser, *Jim Crow Laws* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2012), p. 2.

²⁰ Tischauser, *Jim Crow Laws*, p. 1.

²¹ Stephen J. Riegel, “The Persistent Career of Jim Crow: Lower Federal Courts and the ‘Separate but Equal’ Doctrine, 1865-1896,” *The American Journal of Legal History*, vol. 28, no. 1 (January 1984), pp. 19, 25.

²² Juliann Sivulka, *Stronger Than Dirt: A Cultural History of Advertising Personal Hygiene in America, 1875 to 1940* (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2001), p. 98.

²³ Anandi Ramamurthy, *Imperial Persuaders: Images of Africa and Asia in British Advertising* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 50.

²⁴ Ramamurthy, *Imperial Persuaders*, pp. 50-51.

²⁵ Cynthia Bailin, “From Picaninny to Savage Brute,” p. 91.

²⁶ Cynthia Bailin, “From Picaninny to Savage Brute,” p. 92.

²⁷ Ramamurthy, *Imperial Persuaders*, pp. 50-51.

²⁸ Robin Bernstein, *Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), p. 34; Sivulka, *Stronger Than Dirt*, p. 98.

²⁹ Wulf D. Hund, “Advertising White Supremacy: Capitalism, Colonialism and Commodity Racism,” *Colonial Advertising and Commodity Racism*, eds. Wulf D. Hund, Michael Pickering and Anandi Ramamurthy (Zurich: Lit Verlag, 2013), pp. 10-11.

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- ³⁰ Ramamurthy, Imperial Persuaders, p. 25; Cynthia Bailin, "From Picaninny to Savage Brute," p. 92.
- ³¹ Radiclan Clynus, "At Home in England: Black Imagery Across the Atlantic," Black Victorians: Black People in British Art, 1800-1900, ed. Jan Marsh (Aldershot, Hampshire: Lund Humphries, 2005), p. 25.
- ³² Ciarlo, Advertising Empire, pp. 239-240, 245; Anu Korhonen, "Washing the Ethiopian White: Conceptualising black skin in Renaissance England," Black Africans in Renaissance Europe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 94. The trope has classical origins, first appearing in the writings of Greek satirist Lucian ("*You wash the Ethiopian in vain; why not give up the task? / You will never manage to turn black night into day*") and later popularized in Great Britain over the course of the eighteenth century as one of Aesop's fables, "Washing the Ethiopian White" or "Washing the Blackamoor White," in which a slave owner attempts to scrub the blackness from the skin of his slave. The moral of the story - that the true nature of a person cannot be altered - was often used to underscore the perception of inherent black racial inferiority.
- ³³ Ciarlo, Advertising Empire, pp. 240-241.
- ³⁴ Ramamurthy, Imperial Persuaders, pp. 31-32.
- ³⁵ Hund, "Advertising White Supremacy," p. 11.
- ³⁶ Mehaffy, "Advertising Race," p. 137; Sivulka, Stronger Than Dirt, p. 100.
- ³⁷ Micki McElya, Clinging to Mammy, p. 212; Kimberly Wallace-Sanders, Mammy: A Century of Race, Gender, and Southern Memory (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), p. 2.
- ³⁸ Paul R. Mullins, Race and Affluence: An Archaeology of African America and Consumer Culture (New York: Springer Science & Business Media, 2006), p. 2.
- ³⁹ Vincent Vinikas, Soft Soap, Hard Sell: American Hygiene in an Age of Advertisement (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1992), p. 98. Vinikas does not clarify whether this statistic refers to white or black women, but I will focus on which party was explicitly addressed by the advertisement as a consumer of the product (namely, white women).
- ⁴⁰ "It Cleans Everything [Advertising Card]," Archives, Manuscripts, Photographs Catalog: Smithsonian Institution Research Information System, <http://sirsis-archives.si.edu/ipac20/ipac.jsp?&profile=all&source=~!siarchives&uri=full=3100001~!245133~!0#focus> (date of last access 8 April 2015)
- ⁴¹ Sivulka, Soap, Sex and Cigarettes, p. 266.
- ⁴² Chadwick Roberts, "Lily 'White': Commodity Racism and the Construction of Female Domesticity in *The Incredible Shrinking Woman*," The Journal of Popular Culture, vol. 43, issue 4 (August 2010), pp. 807-08.

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PLATE LIST

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WHITEWASHING – THE NEW BLACKFACE: AN ANALYSIS OF CASTING CHOICES IN RECENT AMERICAN FILM

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In 1927, Al Jolson donned blackface to play Jack Robin in *The Jazz Singer* [fig. 1]. White actors “blackening up” in order to embody a black character is a familiar practice, most (although not all, as has been made evident in recent years) will agree it is racist.¹ Due to the popular collective consciousness that has finally deemed blackface as wildly offensive and



Figure 1: Alan Crosland, *The Jazz Singer* (1927), film still, scene: Al Jolson as Jakie Rabinowitz (Jack Robin), Warner Brothers Entertainment Inc., Burbank, California, USA, 89 minutes.

unacceptable, it is unlikely that North American films will be made in the near future that recreate this antiquated method of assuming a black identity. That does not mean, however, that this practice has ended. A trend that many refer to as “whitewashing” continues to exist and in a more covert way, carries on the cultural legacy of blackface. This term refers to the casting of white actors to play roles of black people. It should be noted, however, that whitewashing is not limited to black roles, as there are countless examples of Asian and Native roles being filled by white actors.² Through the analysis of several films, this paper strives to establish that whitewashing is a form of blackface that has been permitted to continue into the present day. Also addressed here are the negative societal and psychological impacts of whitewashing black figures. This type of analysis is necessitated by the fact that there are films slated for release in coming years that have cast white actors to play roles of people of colour, one of which, *Cleopatra* (2018), will be discussed. It must be stressed that this analysis does not mean to equate whitewashing with blackface. It is recognized here that blackface existed as an act of violence against black bodies, stemming from nostalgia for slavery with the goal of humiliation and the perpetuation of negative stereotypes.³ This paper instead hopes to highlight the similarities between blackface and whitewashing to indicate that the latter is also a harmful practice that should be scorned and deemed unacceptable in modern filmmaking.

Though the term “whitewashing” is somewhat dated, for the purposes of this paper, the phrase will refer to the practice of a race or ethnicity of a character being changed by a “media content creator” from non-white to white.⁴ Using this definition is an effort to differentiate between whitewashing and what will later be referred to as “racebending.” For this paper,

racebending will describe the practice of fans and media consumers imagining established characters with new ethnic or racial identities (white characters portrayed by people of colour). It is important to note that these phrases are used interchangeably in most of the literature, both referring to the first practice of non-white to white alterations. The distinction made in this paper is one made for convenience and to avoid confusion.

The practice of changing the racial identity of characters (both fictional and historical) is, by no standards, a new phenomenon. While blackface has been somewhat culturally invalidated, whitewashing has been able to continue relatively unchecked. The past few decades have seen the release of countless films that are guilty of this practice, a large percentage of which are involved in the casting of white actors to play the roles of black characters. The characters whose identities are being changed come from different cultural sources. For some, the character originates in a novel, while others are historical figures. In order to shed some light on the particularities of the practice, examples will be examined within three categories. These categories should not be seen as an exhaustive list of films that have participated in whitewashing, but rather a selection of significant instances.

The first category is one that involves characters whose background is historical. Films that have been particularly guilty of this are those with biblical characters. A recent scandal related to biblical whitewashing is the 2014 Ridley Scott film *Exodus: Gods and Kings*. The English film director has come under scrutiny for casting white actors such as Christian Bale and Sigourney Weaver to play Moses and other characters of Egyptian/African origin [fig. 2]. Not only this, but many have noted that while the lead actors are white, the characters that appear in the background as the enslaved and thieves are the ones played by people of colour. One article justly describes this as “cinematic colonialism.”⁵ Two other films that use white actors to portray



Figure 2: Ridley Scott, *Exodus: Gods and Kings* (2014), film still, scene: Moses (Christian Bale) in a battle scene against Ramses (Joel Edgerton, not pictured), Scott Free Productions, UK, 150 minutes.

a North African figure are Cleopatra (1963) and its forthcoming remake. The original 1963 film starred Elizabeth Taylor, a white actress, as the Egyptian pharaoh.⁶ Though the remake of the film does not have a release date as of yet, it is confirmed that Angelina Jolie will play the titular character.⁷ Despite continued speculation by many concerning the racial identity of the historical figure, it has been confirmed that her mother was African. It was through the discovery of the tomb and remains of Cleopatra's sister, Princess Arsinoe, in Ephesus, Turkey, that these biological discoveries were made possible.⁸

This trend has continued with the portrayal of recent figures of importance. The 2007 film A Mighty Heart is another casting controversy that involves Angelina Jolie. This film, directed by Michael Winterbottom tells the story of Mariane Pearl, the wife of murdered journalist Daniel Pearl.⁹ Mariane Pearl is French-born with Afro-Cuban and Dutch Heritage. Pearl was involved in the process of production, as the film was based on her autobiography, and was supportive of Jolie filling the role. However, many were upset by this choice, as well as the portrayal, as Jolie “put on a corkscrew wig and a spray tan” in order to embody the character [fig. 3]. Should this be regarded as blackface? Many have debated the issue and it is unclear whether people feel that this portrayal harkened back to the days of burnt cork, however, it is clear that several communities viewed this choice as inappropriate.¹⁰ Another film dealing with a contemporary event is Oliver Stone's World Trade Center (2006), a film telling the story of two port authority workers trapped under the rubble from the World Trade Center and their rescue. One of the two marines that rescue the trapped workers was Sgt. Jason Thomas, a black man whose role in the film was replaced by a white actor.¹¹

The final category is of a slightly different nature, dealing with literary characters that have been brought to life through film. The first example is that of the film adaptation of the Catharine Ryan Hyde novel Pay It Forward (2000). The film was released in 2000 and tells the story of a young boy inspired to “pay forward” acts of kindness. An important role in the film is that of Eugene Simonet, the boy's schoolteacher, portrayed by Kevin Spacey. In the novel, however, the character's name is Reuben St. Clair, and is “an educated black man,” and a veteran of the Vietnam War.¹² Some sources have claimed that the role was originally offered to Denzel



Figure 3: Michael Winterbottom, A Mighty Heart (2007), film still, scene: Angelina Jolie as Mariane Pearl, Paramount Vantage, Hollywood, California, USA, 108 minutes.

Washington, who was unavailable at the time.¹³ The author has stated that were she in charge of casting the film, the original character's racial identity would have remained.¹⁴ The second example involves Angelina Jolie (yet again) and deals with a comic book character rather than a novel. *Wanted* (2005) is a comic book written by Mark Millar with illustrator J.G. Jones. In 2008, director Timur Bekmambetov released a film of the same title with Angelina Jolie as the character Fox.¹⁵ The character in the comic is illustrated as a black female. This analysis will return to the issue of the film adaptation of literary sources later with reference to the concept of racebending.

As mentioned, this practice has received backlash from varied sources. It is interesting to note the response of directors involved in these films when accused of whitewashing. The justification often comes in one of two forms; the first is availability. Michael Winterbottom has stated, "had there been some more choices I might have thought, 'why don't we have that person?' I don't think there would have been anyone better."¹⁶ Winterbottom suggests that there were no actors of colour available to portray Pearl.¹⁷ The second justification is economic in nature, claiming that financing for a film relies on big name actors to fill the lead roles. Guilty of this explanation was Ridley Scott when confronted about his choice to cast Christian Bale in *Exodus: Gods and Kings*. He has been quoted saying "I can't mount a film of this budget, where I have to rely on tax rebates in Spain, and say that my lead actor is Mohammad so-and-so from such-and-such."¹⁸ This reasoning suggests that had he cast actors of colour, he would have been unable to make the film, as there would not have been sufficient funding. Both of these explanations – suggesting that there are not enough actors of colour and that if a director were to hire one, the film would not receive funding – are extremely problematic and highlight the racist attitudes behind the practice of whitewashing.¹⁹

The first issue, that of a lack of black actors, needs to be addressed in the context of the inequality of opportunities available to these actors. Though it is difficult to know the exact number of African American actors currently active in the United States, looking at statistics of black characters in American films will show that they are an underrepresented population. In 2012, 70% of the top 100 grossing films featured black characters on screen at a percentage disproportionate to the population of black Americans as reported by the census of the same year.²⁰ The census reports the black population of the United States as being 13.1% of the entire population. In the top 500 grossing films from 2007-2012, only 12.4% of speaking characters were black, while 75.8% were white. With regards to recognition of these actors from the *Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences*, only 2% of the members of the *Academy* are black, with 93% white and 76% male.²¹ These numbers show that, regardless of the number of actors available, African Americans are an underrepresented population in film, even in recent years. With regards to the issue raised by Ridley Scott, many economists have suggested that, because the United States is becoming a "minority-majority" (a population wherein the majority is made up of minority groups, meaning that the exclusively white population would be the minority), a profitable media strategy would be to "popularize rather than devalue diversity."²² This is in contrast to the strategy of programming for the interests and tastes of the majority, established in the 1950s and continuing until recent years.²³

While it is now clear that the "American mass media fails to serve the needs and interests of racial and ethnic minorities," the consequences of such 'media invisibility' must be addressed.²⁴ At the heart of the problem is the importance of proper representation. Simply put, "media culture helps shape the prevalent view of the world and its deepest values: it defines what is considered good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil."²⁵ The media, and more

specifically film, inform the ways in which society orders itself; the groups with which people identify and the roles that people play within the broader societal framework. Said differently, what is seen in popular film both reflects and informs the way people feel about certain groups, meaning that these feelings are a direct relation to how these groups are portrayed (or not portrayed). The practice of whitewashing is an instance of institutional oppression that disallows opportunities for black people to see themselves in important roles in film, as well as employment opportunities for black actors.²⁶ Since these roles are often those of heroism, denying black people the opportunity to be seen in a heroic light, diminishes the potential for the



Figure 4: TT Bret, “A Whole New World...,” Disney’s Princess Aurora reimagined as having African ancestry, digital illustration, Let There Be Doodles, <http://lettherebedoodles.tumblr.com/post/80372626961/a-whole-new-world-so-this-week-i-decided-to> (date of last access 2 April 2015)

societal impression that black people can, in fact, be heroic. An interesting take on this issue can be seen in the response of African American actor Donald Glover when confronted with extreme racism related to the casting of a contemporary superhero film. In 2012, it was suggested by an online columnist that the upcoming *Marvel* film *The Amazing Spider-Man* film cast a black actor for the role of the lead. When Donald Glover was suggested as a potential casting choice, the backlash was disproportionate. It is interesting to note that a lot of the backlash centered on the thought that Peter Parker could not be black (as there were “no black kids like him”) rather than overtly state that a superhero cannot also be black.²⁷ Glover’s response to this was as follows: “It’s 2011 and you don’t think there’s a black kid who lives with his aunt in Queens who likes science? Who takes photography?”²⁸ This captures the essence of the issue with representation – if people do not see black people in a diversity of roles, it becomes much harder to imagine them outside of the normalized

stereotypes. Even for roles that are less heroic, the importance of proper representation still remains.

Stemming from this are the psychological effects of the lack of representation on both black and white opinions of black people. For white populations, the lack of representation coupled with the prevalence of negative stereotypes of black people in films creates negative “cognitions and emotions toward minority group members.”²⁹ For black people, this underrepresentation (again, paired with stereotypes), often leads to complex and inferior

conceptions of self-worth and identity. This type of psychological effect is similar to those seen in the Kenneth and Mamie Clark doll experiments, where African American children valued and desired the white doll over the black doll.³⁰ Although these experiments were linked to racially-segregated schooling rather than media representation, their findings are applicable.

Another rather insidious consequence of this practice is the normalization of whiteness. This refers to the perception of whiteness being the societal norm and therefore not considered a race at all. If all that is seen in film and mass media in all its visual incarnations are white bodies, then that body erroneously becomes the “norm”. This issue is particularly harmful because it has the potential to be invisible. As author John Gabriel states, “the very invisibility of whiteness and its associated privileges serves to *de-ethnicize* its beneficiaries and turn them into *individuals* who achieve, not as a result of their collective ethnic status, but because of individual merit.”³¹ He goes on to claim that it is this normative whiteness that “claims to speak for all,” which, in part, is what is seen with whitewashing. Using white bodies to tell the stories of black people furthers this trend of normalization that has characterized the media (and other aspects of society) for decades.³² Even for films that include black characters, if white actors are the focus of the film, perpetuate this normalization.

That these films exist shows how the stories and lives of black people have been placed in the hands of the white population in an act of, to quote Rosen again, “cinematic colonialism”. This perpetuation of unequal access to the rights of their own representation will continue to have negative effects on how people perceive the black population, and how they perceive themselves. One remains hopeful that this practice will be stopped, given that people and the popular media have brought attention to these issues and continue to scrutinize and criticize the directors and actors that participate. As can be seen by several articles here, there *has* been a substantial backlash. One site of this backlash exists online, in the form of racebending (defined above). Most see this as a response to the practices of whitewashing; as a way of challenging this practice by creating a more diverse canon of television and film casts. One need only search “racebent casting” to find a wealth of “dream casts”. *Disney* is a popular target of this practice, with countless re-imaginings of classic *Disney* roles with new ethnic identities [fig. 4].³³ This practice has been brought to mass media in films that have elected to cast black actors in traditionally white roles. Examples of this can be seen with Samuel L. Jackson as Nick Fury in



Figure 5: Joss Whedon, *The Avengers* (2012), film still, scene: Samuel L. Jackson as Nick Fury, Marvel Studios, Burbank, California, USA, 143 minutes.

the *Marvel* franchise *The Avengers* (2012) [fig. 5], Quvenzhané Wallis as the title role in *Annie* (2014) and Michael B. Jordan as Johnny Storm in the recent remake of *The Fantastic Four* (2015).³⁴ Though there has been an immense backlash towards this “reverse” whitewashing, as seen in the case of Donald Glover, maybe someday soon people will stop casting Angelina Jolie as a black woman.

ENDNOTES:

¹ It is important to note that Western culture has seen a resurgence of blackface, both on college campuses and in the media. These instances have come under the attack of scholars and (some) news outlets, but the controversy remains. Many see this as a “collective amnesia” of racist practices that is being “co-opted, resurrected and recycled.” See: Stephen Johnson ed., “Introduction: The Persistence of Blackface and the Minstrel Tradition,” *Burnt Cork: Traditions and Legacies of Blackface Minstrelsy* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012)

² One of the most recent occurrences of whitewashing is in the film *Pan* (2015), a reimagining of the Peter Pan story directed by Joe Wright. The controversy associated with this film is the choice of white actress Rooney Mara to play Tiger Lily, a traditionally Native American role. See: Soraya Nadia McDonald, “Thousands petition Warner Bros. over Rooney Mara’s casting as Tiger Lily,” *The Washington Post*, 20 March 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/03/20/thousands-petition-warner-bros-over-rooney-maras-casting-as-tiger-lily/> (date of last access 9 April 2015)

³ Lecture, Charmaine A. Nelson, “Minstrelsy and Blackface,” McGill University, Montreal, Canada, 30 January 2015. See also: Eric Lott, “Love and Theft: The Racial Unconscious of Blackface Minstrelsy,” *Representations*, no. 39 (Summer 1992), pp. 23-50.

⁴ “What is ‘racebending’?,” *Racebending.com: Media Consumers for Entertainment Equality*, <http://www.racebending.com/v4/about/what-is-racebending/> (date of last access 2 April 2015)

⁵ Christopher Rosen, “Ridley Scott Addresses ‘Exodus’ Casting Controversy,” *The Huffington Post*, 26 November 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/26/ridley-scott-exodus-controversy_n_6225022 (date of last access 6 April 2015)

⁶ The 1963 film was directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz and Rouben Mamoulian, and produced by Walter Wagner and Peter Levathes under the Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation. See: “Cleopatra (1963),” *The International Movie Database*, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0056937/> (date of last access 5 April 2015)

⁷ Sophie Forbes, “Race row erupts over casting Angelina Jolie as Cleopatra,” *The Daily Mail*, 18 June 2010, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-1287595/Race-row-erupts-casting-Angelina-Jolie-Cleopatra.html> (date of last access 30 March 2015)

⁸ “Cleopatra’s mother ‘was African,’” *BBC News*, 16 March 2009, http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/also_in_the_news/7945333.stm (date of last access 24 February 2016)

⁹ “A Mighty Heart (2007),” *The International Movie Database*, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0829459/> (date of last access 5 April 2015)

¹⁰ Teresa Wiltz, “‘Mighty Heart’ casting stirs debate over race,” *The Seattle Times*, 27 June 2007, <http://www.seattletimes.com/entertainment/mighty-heart-casting-stirs-debate-over-race/> (date of last access 2 April 2015)

¹¹ Wiltz, “‘Mighty Heart’ casting debate,” (date of last access 2 April 2015)

¹² “Pay It Forward,” *Publisher’s Weekly*, <http://www.publishersweekly.com/978-0-684-86371-2#path> (date of last access 2 April 2015)

¹³ Amanda Scherker, “Whitewashing Was One Of Hollywood’s Worst Habits. So Why Is It Still Happening?,” *The Huffington Post*, 6 November 2014 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/07/10/hollywood-whitewashing_n_5515919.html (date of last access 6 April 2015)

¹⁴ Scherker, “Whitewashing Was One Of Hollywood’s Worst Habits,” (date of last access 6 April 2015)

¹⁵ “Wanted (2008),” *The International Movie Database*, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0493464/> (date of last access 4 April 2015)

¹⁶ Wiltz, “‘Mighty Heart’ casting debate,” (date of last access 2 April 2015)

¹⁷ Winterbottom’s comment on the matter points to one of the difficulties of being a black actor in a climate that allows for whitewashing. Having less access to roles, these actors have a harder time establishing the type of reputation and recognition that Jolie has been able to build because of her position of white privilege.

¹⁸ Rosen, “Ridley Scott Addresses ‘Exodus’ Casting Controversy,” (date of last access 6 April 2015)

¹⁹ The director George Lucas commented on this trend directly in reference to the production of his film *Red Tails* (2012). In an interview with Jon Stewart, Lucas explained that many studios did not want to be involved in

producing an expensive World War II action movie with an all-black cast because they, as he states, “don’t believe there’s any foreign market for it.” As such, Lucas contributed \$58 million of his own money into production, and \$35 million more for its distribution. See: “George Lucas says Hollywood won’t support black films,” *BBC News – Entertainment & Arts*, 12 January 2012, <http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-16525977> (date of last access 24 February 2016)

²⁰ “New York Film Academy Presents Black Inequality in Film: An Infographic,” *New York Film Academy*, <http://www.nyfa.edu/nyfa-new/black-inequality-in-film-infographic.php#.VScFe4b3arU> (date of last access 4 April 2015)

²¹ “Black Inequality in Film: An Infographic,” (date of last access 4 April 2015)

²² Forrest P. Chisman, “Delivering on Diversity: Serving the Media Needs and the Interests of Minorities in the Twenty First Century,” *Investing in Diversity: Advancing Opportunities for Minorities and the Media*, Report of the Aspen Institute Forum on Diversity and the Media, ed. Amy Korzick Garner (Washington: The Aspen Institute, 1998), p. 8.

²³ Chisman, “Delivering on Diversity,” p. 2.

²⁴ Chisman, “Delivering on Diversity,” pp. 5-8.

²⁵ Linda Holtzman, *Media Messages: What Film, Television and Popular Music Teach Us About Race, Class, Gender, and Sexual Orientation* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2000), p. 3.

²⁶ Holtzman, *Media Messages*, pp. 24-26.

²⁷ Albert S. Fu, “Fear of a black Spider-man: racebending and the colour-line in superhero (re)casting,” *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, vol. 6, no. 3 (January 2015), p. 279.

²⁸ “Childish Gambino AKA Donald Glover Talks Black Spiderman, Asian Girls, News, Community + More,” YouTube Interview of Donald Glover by Nick Huff Barili, director of *Hardknock TV*, 21 November 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lgko-xReFSs>

²⁹ Robert M. Entman and Andrew Rojecki, “Minorities in the Mass Media: A Status Report,” *Investing in Diversity: Advancing Opportunities for Minorities and the Media*, Report of the Aspen Institute Forum on Diversity and the Media, ed. Amy Korzick Garner (Washington: The Aspen Institute, 1998), pp. 67-81.

³⁰ Kenneth B. Clark and Mamie P. Clark, “Emotional Factors in Racial Identification and Preference in Negro Children,” *The Journal of Negro Education*, vol. 12, no. 3 (Summer, 1950), pp. 341-50.

³¹ John Gabriel, *Whitewash: Racialized Politics and the Media* (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 88.

³² Gabriel, *Whitewash*, p. 184.

³³ One artist that has participated in this trend is TT Bret, who has uploaded illustrations to the popular blogging website *Tumblr*. Bret claims that the illustrations stemmed from a desire to “see a little more diversity in Disney, and media in general,” and that it “was simply an exploration of race and culture from an artistic standpoint.” Bret is not the only artist that has contributed to the collection of racebent characters, and *Disney* has not been the only target. See: Robbie Couch, “This Artist Swapped Iconic Characters’ Skin Colors in Racebent Disney,” *The Huffington Post*, 14 May 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/05/14/race-bent-disney-characters_n_5323545.html (date of last access 7 April 2015)

³⁴ Erin E. Evans, “Color-Blind Casting: Black Actors in Traditionally White Roles,” *The Root*, 16 December 2014, http://www.theroot.com/photos/2014/12/black_actors_in_traditionally_white_roles.html (date of last access 6 April 2015)

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PLATE LIST

Figure 1: Alan Crosland, The Jazz Singer (1927), film still, scene: Al Jolson as Jakie Rabinowitz (Jack Robin), Warner Brothers Entertainment Inc., Burbank, California, USA, 89 minutes.

Figure 2: Ridley Scott, Exodus: Gods and Kings (2014), film still, scene: Moses (Christian Bale) in a battle scene against Ramses (Joel Edgerton, not pictured), Scott Free Productions, UK, 150 minutes.

Figure 3: Michael Winterbottom, A Mighty Heart (2007), film still, scene: Angelina Jolie as Mariane Pearl, Paramount Vantage, Hollywood, California, USA, 108 minutes.

Figure 4: TT Bret, “A Whole New World...,” Disney’s Princess Aurora reimagined as having African ancestry, digital illustration, Let There Be Doodles, <http://lettherebedoodles.tumblr.com/post/80372626961/a-whole-new-world-so-this-week-i-decided-to> (date of last access 2 April 2015)

Figure 5: Joss Whedon, The Avengers (2012), film still, scene: Samuel L. Jackson as Nick Fury, Marvel Studios, Burbank, California, USA, 143 minutes.

CHINESE WORKERS AS MORE THAN WORKERS: PHOTOGRAPHY OF THE CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY AND THE ERASURE OF CHINESE CONTRIBUTION

Mars He (Harvard University)



Figure 1: Alexander Ross, Hon. Donald A. Smith driving the last spike to complete the Canadian Pacific Railway (1885), photograph, 25 x 20 cm, Library and Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Canada.
Credit: Alexander Ross / Library and Archives Canada / C-003693

On 1 July 2017, the Canadian History Hall exhibition opened at the *Canadian Museum of History* in Gatineau, Québec. According to its website, the Canadian History Hall “tells Canada’s story in a very *inclusive* way through the lived experiences of *real people* and from *multiple perspectives*.”¹⁸² (italics mine) Three months earlier, on April 7th, the Canadian Museum of History Blog published the following to promote the Canadian History Hall:

“On November 7, 1885, the driving of the ceremonial ‘Last Spike’ at Craigellachie, British Columbia marked the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Despite rising costs, a political scandal that toppled Sir John A. Macdonald’s government and the death of at least 600 Chinese railway workers, the CPR — linking Eastern and Western Canada — was completed 5 years ahead of schedule.”¹⁸³

Perhaps credit is due to the museum for even including the fact that Chinese workers were involved in (and died while) building the Canadian Pacific Railway. But mere inclusion in a narrative shows nowhere near the respect that these workers deserve. The deaths of “at least 600”¹⁸⁴ Chinese workers were more than just an obstacle amongst three that the construction of the CPR managed to “overcome,” and their deaths were not an unexpected or accidental setback.

However, there is nothing new about Chinese workers being discussed only in terms of the work they perform. In this paper, I examine photographs taken during or shortly after the construction of the CPR, and how Chinese workers are portrayed differently than white subjects. The content of these photographs, as well as the context of both their production and distribution, reveal that Chinese workers were valued primarily as a source of cheap labour, and not as equals deserving of recognition or respect.

Part One: Exclusion

The aforementioned blog post by the *Canadian Museum of History* is accompanied by a famous photograph: Hon. Donald A. Smith driving the last spike to complete the Canadian Pacific Railway (1885) [fig. 1], also known as The Last Spike. In this photograph, Donald Smith (later known as Lord Strathcona)¹⁸⁵ drives the last spike of the CPR into the rails. Dozens of men surround him, including a crowd of men behind him, peering over each other's shoulders. Every subject in this photograph appears to be white and male.¹⁸⁶

The Last Spike is not reflective of the people who actually built the railway. It is true that most of the railway, by length, had few if any Chinese workers involved in its construction. Construction from Callander, Ontario to the border between Alberta and British Columbia¹⁸⁷ accounted for the majority of the railway's length, and given that fewer than 50 Chinese people were reported even living outside of British Columbia on the 1881 Canadian Census, they did not make up a significant portion of the labour force in these regions.¹⁸⁸

However, the land between British Columbia and Ontario was relatively easy for construction. The stretch of railway between the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific coast would be the hardest to build, due to unlevelled ground, thick forest, and hard granite.¹⁸⁹ It was far more difficult to lay down track in British Columbia, meaning that it took more time and a larger workforce, and it was in British Columbia where Chinese workers made up a majority of the workforce. Andrew Onderdonk, who purchased the contracts to build the railway from Yale, BC to Savona's Ferry, BC,¹⁹⁰ reported that the greatest number of workers he had employed at once was nine thousand, of who six thousand were Chinese.¹⁹¹

Working conditions for Chinese immigrants were incredibly dangerous and Chinese workers were often tasked with jobs that their white workers could not or refused to perform. As James Morton explained, "Above and Below Yale, hills were being cut away . . . This grading work was done almost completely by the Chinese, while the white labour force did the lumber work, largely on bridge and tunnels."¹⁹² As a result, "blasting [of explosives], in particular, killed workers who were crushed by collapsing tunnels and rock slides."¹⁹³ In a widely broadcast television short titled *Nitro*, an elderly Chinese character who had worked on the CPR states, "They say that there is one dead Chinese man for every mile of that track."¹⁹⁴ In reality, estimates range from "600 deaths . . . based on Onderdonk's testimony . . . [to] in the thousands."¹⁹⁵



Figure 2: Anonymous, *Chinese at Work on C.P.R. in Mountains* (1884), photograph, 19.1 x 11.4 cm, Library and Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

Credit: Boorne & May / Library and Archives Canada / C-006686B

As such, *The Last Spike* fails to represent, or even acknowledge the existence of, the harms inflicted upon, sacrifices made by, and work done by Chinese workers. Even out of the few photographs of Chinese workers on the CPR, none of them are depicted in the most dangerous of situations [fig. 2].¹⁹⁶ The only photograph¹⁹⁷ (ca. 1884) that does depict a tunnel that had been cleared out of rock alongside a work crew was taken east of Golden, BC, meaning that it most likely features white men¹⁹⁸ who were not in as much danger. For Chinese workers, “blasting was often done with cheaper nitroglycerine, rather than the more stable and expensive TNT dynamite, which the white workers used”.¹⁹⁹

Furthermore, even if some photographs were taken of Chinese workers, they were not nearly as widely publicized, if they were publicized at all. This is not the case for *The Last Spike*. Not only is the original photograph at *Library and Archives Canada*, a reproduction is held in the *University of British Columbia* library collections,²⁰⁰ and two different colour reproductions are held at the *McCord Museum*.²⁰¹ In fact, on the back of the original photograph there are written instructions to prepare it for widespread distribution [fig. 3]: “Cut at top so that reproduction will come in the proportion 6 x 3^{5/8}. . . omit copyright, so that we can print it later.” This photograph continues to be a dominant representation of the construction of the CPR.

Even though this photograph might make it seem that Chinese workers were excluded from the national discourse of who contributed to the construction of the CPR, they were actually at the centre of a heated and controversial debate. Even before construction of the CPR began, “all [Chinese workers were] prepared to work for lower wages than any white labourer; that was the chief cause of discomfort.”²⁰² Onderdonk paid \$1.50 a day, or more, to white unskilled labourers, and at least \$2.00 a day to skilled ones; but Chinese workers would work for only \$1 a day.²⁰³ However, the supply of cheap labour angered white labourers, and during an 1883 strike by white miners, their employer “did not hesitate to use [Chinese workers] to break the strike.”²⁰⁴

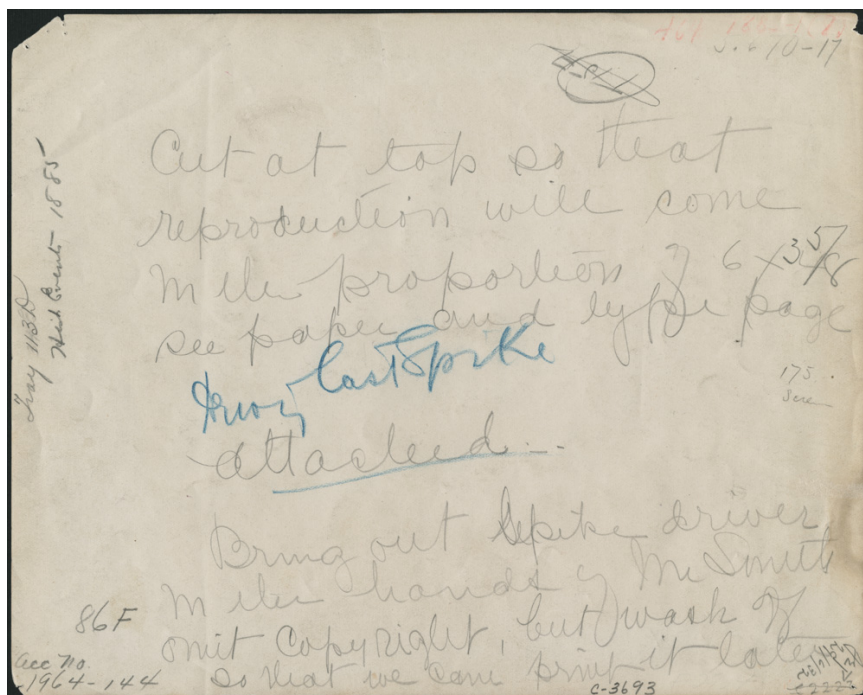


Figure 3: Alexander Ross (author of writing unknown), Hon. Donald A. Smith driving the last spike to complete the Canadian Pacific Railway (1885), writing on back of a photograph, 25 x 20 cm, Library and Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

As a result, groups such as the Anti-Chinese Union and the Knights of Labor gained popularity.²⁰⁵

While anti-Chinese groups pushed for limits on immigration of Chinese workers, property owners and employers fought to make sure they could continue to hire Chinese workers. Despite the fact that “politicians . . . sought to put their opposition to the Chinese on record; many reluctantly admitted that Chinese labour was probably necessary if the railway were to be completed on time.”²⁰⁶

Onderdonk wrote to the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration, held

in Ottawa in 1885, that Chinese workers were “industrious,” “necessary,” and that “any sudden restriction [on Chinese immigration] will close down many industries and seriously injure the prosperity of British Columbia.”²⁰⁷

It might be the case that individual Canadians who saw The Last Spike, and came to think of it as representative of who built the CPR, did not intentionally exclude Chinese workers from the CPR’s history. But given that “the CPR disseminated reproductions of them widely, and . . . historian R.G. MacBeth . . . was suggesting that there should be a copy of a Last Spike photograph on the wall of every schoolroom,”²⁰⁸ the parties that were responsible for promoting The Last Spike *did* know about the contribution that Chinese workers made, and, in fact, advocated for them to make that contribution. The CPR chose to publicize an image that excluded the contribution of Chinese workers.

After the completion of the railway, the role that Chinese workers played in its construction was erased, even though they had been publicly described as “necessary” by prominent political figures. This might appear to be a sudden change from inclusion to exclusion, but a closer examination of the way in which Chinese workers were “included” makes their eventual exclusion not only comprehensible, but also unsurprising.

Part Two: “Inclusion”

There is a difference between appreciating someone’s work and valuing someone exclusively for that work. While Onderdonk spoke of the economic importance of Chinese workers with emphasis and depth, his description of their personal traits, while positive, comes off as disinterested: “They take care of themselves . . . They are industrious, sober, economical,

and law-abiding; they are not drunken, extravagant, or turbulent.”²⁰⁹ Attitudes like his might explain the motivation behind photographs such as Canadian Pacific Railway Construction At Yale (188?),²¹⁰ where a work in progress is pictured without any of the workers present. If the sole importance of Chinese workers is the work they do, then these photographs reflect that sentiment.

In the first part of this paper, I argued that The Last Spike erased the role that Chinese workers played in building the CPR. A fair objection one might raise is to say that *no* worker appears in the photograph — the wealthy, white elite replaced both white and Chinese workers. And while this is true, a comparison of the photographs of white and Chinese workers reveals that Chinese workers were excluded in a way that white workers were not, specifically because Chinese workers were valued only for their work.

Canadian Pacific Railway Work Crew Laying Track in The Lower Fraser Valley (1881),²¹¹ A Chinaman Section Gang (ca. 1889),²¹² and Chinese at Work on C.P.R. in Mountains (1884) [fig. 2], all bear several similarities. First, in every photograph, the workers are in action — they are not resting, or posing for a photograph. Compare this to photographs of white CPR workers, such as View of rock cut and crew, Canadian Pacific Railway spiral tunnels under construction between Hector and Field, British Columbia (1908) [fig. 4], Canadian Pacific Railway Construction Crew (n.d.),²¹³ and Canadian Pacific Railway employees on the track near Donald the day the last spike was driven (1885).²¹⁴ In each of these photographs, the workers are at rest; in Employees near Donald there is no more work to be done. Each of these photographs, therefore, show that the photographer was interested in capturing *who* was working, not just *the work that was being done*.

Furthermore, the photographs of Chinese workers dehumanize them, or at least show little concern for their individuality. First, in Work Crew Laying Track and Chinese at Work, the photographs have been taken from a distance, making it difficult to view any details of individual workers. Whereas in Chinaman Section Gang, their hats obscure the workers’ faces, despite the photograph being taken at a closer distance. Given that their hat style is noticeably different from the hats worn by white men in other photographs, perhaps differentiating them as “Chinese” was



Figure 4: Anonymous, View of rock cut and crew, Canadian Pacific Railway spiral tunnels under construction between Hector and Field, British Columbia (1908), photograph, The Chung Collection, Rare Books and Special Collections, University of British Columbia Library, Vancouver, Canada.
Image Identifier: CC-PH-10660

felt by the photographer to be sufficient characterization. In each photograph, most of the workers are facing away from the camera and their faces are not seen.

In contrast, in each photograph of white workers, each worker's face is clearly visible.²¹⁵ In *View of rock cut and crew*, even a horse has been positioned so that it faces the camera directly. It would be possible for friends or relatives of these workers to recognize them in these photographs, but even if the photographs were never widely distributed or copied, the workers would know that there would always be a photographic record of their work on the railway. For Chinese workers, only their work would be left behind. Their individual contributions would be forgotten, even when they lost their lives from being forced to do unsafe work: "Their deaths were often omitted from accident reports issued by Onderdonk's company, while the deaths of white workers were recorded".²¹⁶ Even in other work contexts, Chinese workers are depicted from afar and from behind.²¹⁷ The difference in genre between photographs of white workers and of Chinese workers is informative. Most photographs of white workers function as portraits, capturing each individual. The identity of the subject is crucial to the photograph: it matters *who* was doing the work. However, most photographs of Chinese workers function instead as genre studies, capturing human activity. The identity of the specific people captured is a secondary consideration of the photographer and intended audience of a genre study, if it is thought about at all.

The names of the elite white males featured in *The Last Spike* are known to this day: the CPR released a key of the famous figures in the photograph in 1961 [fig. 5], but even without this key, their names were well-reported in the *Daily Colonist*²¹⁸ and the *British Columbian*.²¹⁹ For white workers, even if they were not featured in *The Last Spike*, at least some of them were given the opportunity to have their photo taken. Chinese workers were never given that recognition, and even the few photographs that exist of them are inadequately studied, and sometimes incorrectly attributed.²²⁰

Given the dearth of information about the production of the photographs of Chinese workers, determining every single factor and cause of their dehumanization may be impossible.

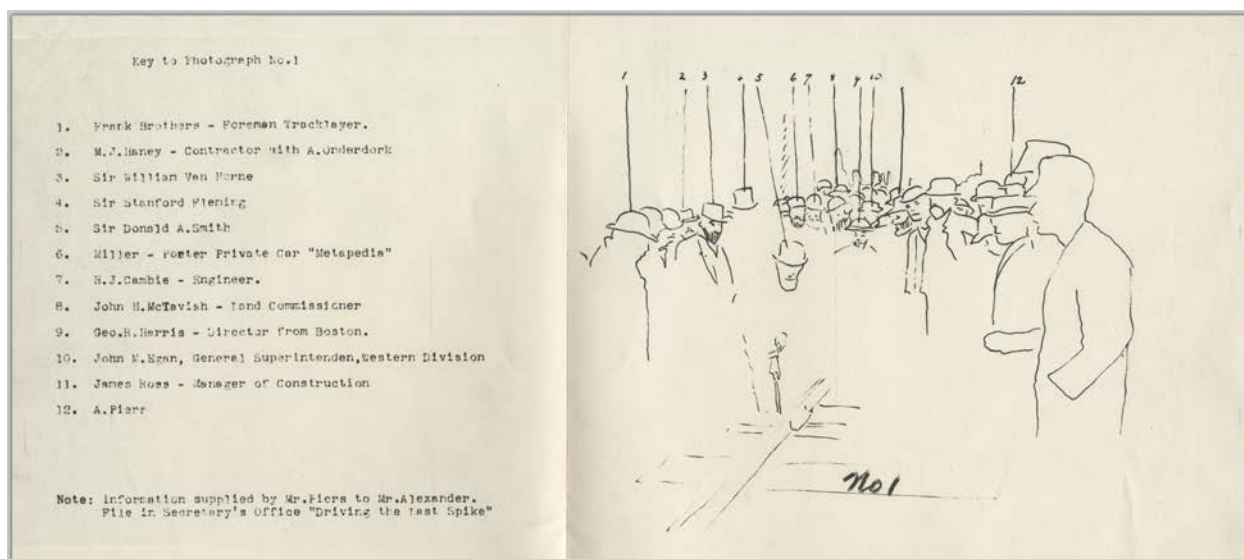


Figure 5: Canadian Pacific Railway Company, Public Relations and Advertising, *Key to photograph of Lord Strathcona and others posed before driving the last spike in the Canadian Pacific Railroad* (1961), pamphlet, The Chung Collection, Rare Books and Special Collections, University of British Columbia Library, Vancouver, Canada.

However, the racist discourse surrounding Chinese people at the time makes it clear that racist attitudes held by white photographers²²¹ was a significant, if not the most significant, driving factor. Augie Fleras writes in “Reconceptualizing Racism,” (2014) “Chinese migrants were seen as cheap and exploitable workhorses . . . but expendable once the task was completed.”²²² Photographers that viewed Chinese workers as cheap, efficient, and interchangeable workers, and nothing else, might not have even thought to ask them to pose and face the camera.

However, the expression of racism is not only limited to ignorance. Bruce Retallack writes in “Jack Canuck meets John Chinaman” (2004):

“ . . . Images presented their Chinese subjects in a deliberately demeaning fashion . . . persistent graphic disempowerment (in white Western terms) had the effect of symbolically licensing dominant white males to manhandle the unruly ‘John Chinaman’.”²²³

In other words, there may have been an active intent to downplay the identities and contributions of Chinese workers, both because of, and in order to further, an attitude that Chinese workers were not valuable as people.

It is important to consider the motives and biases not only of the photographers, but also of the audience and patrons of these photographs. If photographers were commissioned by the CPR or one of its contractors such as Onderdonk, they would have felt a need to showcase how “hard-working” the Chinese workers were. Public animosity towards the Chinese meant that it might have been worse for the workers themselves to have photographs of them relaxing or posing for the camera. Because the “inclusion” of Chinese workers in Canada was based on their work, the public representation of Chinese workers had to be confined to this narrow conception of what Chinese workers were like.

This analysis shows that, to the eye of the white general public, Canadian Pacific Railway Construction at Yale and Work Crew Laying Track might have held the same meaning—all that mattered was that work was being done. And when Chinese workers were not working, there was no support for them, even though the elite understood their economic importance. In 1883, when CPR contractors were laying off Chinese workers for the winter, “Victoria’s Chinese merchants sent word to China requesting that no more Chinese be sent . . . since the care of unemployed . . . railway workers had become a burden.”²²⁴ In other words, even though Chinese workers were building a railway for Canadians for meagre wages, when they were in need, they could not rely on the aid of white Canadians.

The speed with which racist immigration laws were enacted to prevent Chinese immigration after the CPR was completed²²⁵ in November of 1885 is therefore unsurprising. The Chinese Immigration Act came swiftly into effect on 1 January 1886, putting a fifty-dollar head tax on every Chinese person seeking to immigrate.²²⁶ Onderdonk and other key figures in the construction of the CPR only needed to respect the labour of Chinese workers when they needed to make sure that it would be politically palatable to hire them. As a result, when demand for labour fell, wealthy white citizens of British Columbia no longer had any interest in supporting their immigration. Inclusion by a community for its own benefit is not truly inclusion. It is exploitation.

Nonetheless, Chinese workers saved up to try to bring their loved ones over to Canada. But once Chinese immigration began to rise again, white citizens took greater exclusionary measures, eventually passing the Chinese Immigration Act in 1923, preventing almost all

Chinese people from entering the country.²²⁷ It is a sad, yet apt, reflection of Canada's colonial history that this Act was passed on July 1st, Canada's birthday.

When the *Canadian Museum of History* claims that the CPR was completed "despite" the deaths of "at least 600" Chinese workers, it pays lip service to their work. But what it does not consider at all is how those deaths were unjust, undeserved, and bad for those workers and their families. Instead, the museum focuses only on the impact their deaths had on the speed of construction. It treats them like the faceless workers in photographs, seeing only the tracks and not the people that laid them.

ENDNOTES

¹⁸² "About the Hall," *Canadian History Hall*, <http://www.historyhall.ca/> (date of last access 15 November 2017). The bolded words were originally written as such.

¹⁸³ "Canadian Pacific Railway is Completed," *Canadian Museum of History*, <http://www.historymuseum.ca/blog/canadian-pacific-railway-is-completed/> (date of last access 15 November 2017)

¹⁸⁴ As will be discussed later in the essay, while I have not found proof that this estimate is incorrect, it is much lower than other estimates.

¹⁸⁵ "Donald Smith, later Lord Strathcona, driving the last spike, C.P.R., Craigellachie, BC, 1885 (copied about 1928)," *McCord Museum*, <http://collections.musee-mccord.qc.ca/en/collection/artifacts/MP-0000.158.125> (date of last access 17 November 2017)

¹⁸⁶ There are some onlookers whose faces are unclear, but their hats suggest that they are men. No one in the crowd appears to be non-white, and I was not able to find any report indicating the presence of a non-white person.

¹⁸⁷ Pierre Breton, "The End and the Beginning," *The Last Spike: The Great Railway 1881-1885* (Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2001), p. 20. While the CPR did extend farther east than Ontario, the railway east of Ontario was already built, and the CPR only needed to connect to it.

¹⁸⁸ James Morton, "1880-1883," *In the Sea of Sterile Mountains: The Chinese in British Columbia* (Vancouver: J.J. Douglas, 1973), p. 82.

¹⁸⁹ Huang Annian, "The Vanguard in the Construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway," *The Silent Spikes: Chinese Laborers and the Construction of North American Railroads* (Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2006), p. 106.

¹⁹⁰ Yale is just north of Hope, BC. Savona's Ferry is just outside of Kamloops, BC.

¹⁹¹ James Morton, "1883-1886," *In the Sea of Sterile Mountains: The Chinese in British Columbia* (Vancouver: J.J. Douglas, 1973), p. 119.

¹⁹² Morton, "1880-1883," p. 81.

¹⁹³ "Casualties," *The Ties that Bind*, <https://www.mhso.ca/tiesthatbind/WorkingConditions.php#> (date of last access 20 November 2017). See Bibliography for more information about this source.

¹⁹⁴ *Historica Canada*, *Nitro* (1995), short film, 1 minute, *Historica Canada*, Canada. *Youtube*, 2 March 2016, <https://youtu.be/EE3ISzaIVuo> (date of last access 20 November 2017)

¹⁹⁵ "Casualties," *The Ties that Bind*, <https://www.mhso.ca/tiesthatbind/WorkingConditions.php#> (date of last access 20 November 2017). While the *Canadian Museum of History* estimates that 600 Chinese workers died working on the railway, I think this estimate is too low. Other sources such as the *Canadian Encyclopedia* claim "historians estimate" 600 workers died, but I have been unable to find any source that would suggest that 600 workers died other than Onderdonk's testimony, and Onderdonk probably did not have an incentive to reveal how many of his own workers were dying.

Source for *Canadian Encyclopedia* quote: Daniel Francis, "The Last Spike," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/the-last-spike/> (date of last access 20 November 2017)

¹⁹⁶ It is unclear whether the lack of photography depicting Chinese workers in dangerous situations is because there was no interest in showing Chinese workers doing dangerous work, or because photographers were unwilling to put themselves in harm's way. Either way, Chinese workers made huge sacrifices that were not documented in any kind of photographic record or representation. Other photographs depicting Chinese workers in relatively safe conditions include *Canadian Pacific Railway Work Crew Laying Track In The Lower Fraser Valley* (1881), and *A Chinaman Section Gang* (ca. 1889), not reproduced here.

Anonymous, *Canadian Pacific Railway Work Crew Laying Track in The Lower Fraser Valley* (1881), photograph, *Royal BC Museum Archives*, Victoria, Canada.

F. Jay Haynes, *A Chinaman Section Gang* (ca. 1889), photograph, *The Chung Collection, Rare Books and Special Collections*, *University of British Columbia Library*, Vancouver, Canada.

- ¹⁹⁷ This is the only photograph of its kind I could locate. While I did find other photographs from the 1880's of tunnels made for the CPR, most of them only show the finished product.
Anonymous, Rock Tunnel East Of Golden On The Canadian Pacific Railway (ca. 1884), photograph, Royal BC Museum Archives, Victoria, Canada.
- ¹⁹⁸ Since Golden is east of Craigellachie, where the railway from the east eventually met the railway from the west, it is most likely that the workers in the photograph came from the east, where there were barely any Chinese workers.
- ¹⁹⁹ "Type of Work Performed," The Ties that Bind, <https://www.mhso.ca/tiesthatbind/WorkingConditions.php#> (date of last access 20 November 2017). Nitroglycerin is far more likely to accidentally discharge, or to be dangerous to anyone nearby when it explodes. "It is the speed of the decomposition reaction which makes nitroglycerin such a violent explosive . . . Nitroglycerin has one major disadvantage, however – it is very, very unstable." "Nitroglycerin," Molecules in Motion: An Active Chemical Exploratorium, <http://www.ch.ic.ac.uk/rzepa/mim/environmental/html/nitroglyc.htm> (date of last access 27 February 2018)
- ²⁰⁰ "Donald Smith drives the last spike on the Canadian Pacific Railway," The University of British Columbia Library, <https://open.library.ubc.ca/collections/chung/chungphotos/items/1.0219993> (date of last access 20 November 2017).
- ²⁰¹ "Donald Smith, later Lord Strathcona, driving the last spike, C.P.R., Craigellachie, BC, 1885 (copied about 1928)," McCord Museum, <http://collections.musee-mccord.qc.ca/en/collection/artifacts/MP-0000.158.125> (date of last access 17 November 2017)
- ²⁰² Pierre Breton, "The beardless children of China," The Last Spike: The Great Railway 1881-1885 (Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2001), p. 139.
- ²⁰³ Breton, "The beardless children," p. 141.
- ²⁰⁴ Morton, "1883-1886," p. 107.
- ²⁰⁵ Morton, "1883-1886," p. 135.
- ²⁰⁶ Patricia E. Roy, "Confederation, the Chinese, and the C.P.R.," A White Man's Province (Vancouver: UBC Press 1989), p. 50.
- ²⁰⁷ Report on Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration, Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration, 1885, F5032.C5 C2, Rare Books and Special Collections, University of British Columbia Library, Vancouver, Canada.
- ²⁰⁸ Daniel Francis, "The Last Spike," The Canadian Encyclopedia, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/the-last-spike/> (date of last access 20 November 2017)
- ²⁰⁹ Report on Chinese Immigration, University of British Columbia Library, Vancouver, Canada.
- ²¹⁰ Anonymous, "Canadian Pacific Railway Construction at Yale" (188-), photograph, Royal BC Museum Archives, Victoria, Canada.
- ²¹¹ While the Royal BC Museum does not label the photograph as depicting Chinese workers, the online virtual exhibit The Ties that Bind does. Since mostly Chinese workers worked in the harder-to-navigate terrain of the Fraser River Valley, it is most likely the case that they are Chinese workers. "Working Conditions," The Ties that Bind, <https://www.mhso.ca/tiesthatbind/WorkingConditions.php> (date of last access 25 November 2017)
- ²¹² F. Jay Haynes, A Chinaman Section Gang (ca. 1889).
- ²¹³ Anonymous, Canadian Pacific Railway Construction Crew (n.d.), photograph, Royal BC Museum Archives, Victoria, Canada.
- ²¹⁴ Anonymous, Canadian Pacific Railway employees on the track near Donald the day the last spike was driven (1885), photograph, Royal BC Museum Archives, Victoria, Canada.
- ²¹⁵ Although some faces are blurry, it is clear that the *intention* was to capture everyone's likeness.
- ²¹⁶ "Casualties," The Ties that Bind, <https://www.mhso.ca/tiesthatbind/WorkingConditions.php#> (date of last access 20 November 2017)
- ²¹⁷ Two examples of these photographs include Chinese laborers. Vancouver, B.C. and Chinese workers cleaning salmon, Ewen & Co's Salmon Cannery, near New Westminster, BC, 1887.
Phillip T. Timms, Chinese laborers. Vancouver, B.C. (1906), postcard, 15 x 10 cm, The Chung Collection, Rare Books and Special Collections, University of British Columbia Library, Vancouver, Canada.
William McFarlane Notman, Chinese workers cleaning salmon, Ewen & Co's Salmon Cannery, near New Westminster, BC, 1887 (1887), photograph, 25 x 20 cm, McCord Museum, Montreal, Canada.
- ²¹⁸ Anonymous, "1871-1885: Fourteen Years' Patience Rewarded at Last," Daily Colonist (Victoria, BC), vol. XLIV, no. 128 (8 November 1885), p. 2.
- ²¹⁹ Anonymous, "The Last Spike! Connecting the Ends of the Track," The British Columbian (New Westminster, BC), vol. 28, no. 39 (11 November 1885), p. 3. Both articles list the names of over a dozen men present.

²²⁰ Several sources I found incorrectly labelled Ernest Brown as the photographer of Chinese at Work [fig. 2], which seems highly unlikely given that Ernest Brown was not born until 1877. I located an archive online that had a collection of photographs that he owned, and managed to find within this collection photos taken in Alberta in 1883 that also bear “Copyright Ernest Brown” on them, which suggests that this photo, too, was only collected by, and not taken by, Ernest Brown. The photographer therefore remains unknown; Anonymous, Ranching Scene in Alberta, A band of horses, 1883 (1883), B117, PR0043, Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada.

²²¹ While it is true that the photographers of several of the photographs analyzed in this paper are not known, it is very likely that all (or at the very least, most) of the photographers were white. Every photographer that is known out of the photographs I looked at is white, and the fact that Chinese workers were performing hard labour, with extremely long working hours, for very little pay suggests that photography would not have been an accessible hobby, let alone a profession.

²²² Augie Fleras, “Reconceptualizing Racism,” Racisms in a Multicultural Canada: Paradoxes, Politics, and Resistance (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2014), p. 33.

²²³ G. Bruce Retallack, “Jack Canuck meets John Chinaman,” Racism, Eh?: A Critical Inter-disciplinary Anthology of Race and Racism in Canada, eds. Charmaine A. Nelson and Camille A. Nelson (Concord, Canada: Captus Press, 2004), pp. 263-64.

²²⁴ Roy, “Confederation, the Chinese, and the C.P.R.,” p. 53.

²²⁵ Improvement, maintenance, and expansionary work on the CPR continued for several more years, but the main railway construction was complete.

²²⁶ Roy, “Checking Chinese and Japanese Competition,” A White Man’s Province (Vancouver: UBC Press 1989), p. 66.

²²⁷ Arlene Chan, “Chinese Immigration Act,” The Canadian Encyclopedia, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/chinese-immigration-act/> (date of last access 27 November 2017)

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Anonymous, Canadian Pacific Railway Construction at Yale (188-), photograph, Royal BC Museum Archives, Victoria, Canada.

Anonymous, Canadian Pacific Railway Construction Crew (n.d.), photograph, Royal BC Museum Archives, Victoria, Canada.

Anonymous, Canadian Pacific Railway employees on the track near Donald the day the last spike was driven. (1885), photograph, Royal BC Museum Archives, Victoria, Canada.

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PLATE LIST

Figure 1: Alexander Ross, Hon. Donald A. Smith driving the last spike to complete the Canadian Pacific Railway (1885), photograph, 25 x 20 cm, Library and Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

Credit: Alexander Ross / Library and Archives Canada / C-003693

Figure 2: Anonymous, Chinese at Work on C.P.R. in Mountains (1884), photograph, 19.1 x 11.4 cm, Library and Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

Credit: Boorne & May / Library and Archives Canada / C-006686B

Figure 3: Alexander Ross (author of writing unknown), Hon. Donald A. Smith driving the last spike to complete the Canadian Pacific Railway (1885), writing on back of a photograph, 25 x 20 cm, Library and Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

Credit: Alexander Ross / Library and Archives Canada / C-003693

Figure 4: Anonymous, View of rock cut and crew, Canadian Pacific Railway spiral tunnels under construction between Hector and Field, British Columbia (1908), photograph, The Chung Collection, Rare Books and Special Collections, University of British Columbia Library, Vancouver, Canada.

Image Identifier: CC-PH-10660

Figure 5: Canadian Pacific Railway Company, Public Relations and Advertising, Key to photograph of Lord Strathcona and others posed before driving the last spike in the Canadian Pacific Railroad (1961), pamphlet, The Chung Collection, Rare Books and Special Collections, University of British Columbia Library, Vancouver, Canada.

Image Identifier: CC-TX-204-20-1

A TALE OF TWO WOMEN: VISUAL DEPICTIONS OF INFANTICIDE IN ENSLAVED COMMUNITIES

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It was seven o'clock in Quebec on the 5 March 1787, when Bett, eighteen and pregnant, was fleeing for her life.²²⁸ Hundreds of miles away and nearly 70 years later, Margaret Garner too took flight. In January of 1856 she escaped into the Kentucky night with her husband and their four children.²²⁹ These two women, separated by time, space, and blood, shared a common goal: freedom from enslavement, for themselves, and for their children. Both tales, however, end in tragedy—Bett and Margaret were recaptured. Even more horrifically, their stories became haunted by infanticide; Bett was put on trial for alleged murder of her baby, and Margaret killed her infant as they were being recaptured.²³⁰ Histories like these highlight the shocking realities of Trans Atlantic Slavery.

In this paper I will argue that these narratives are not a wholly universal experience of slavery, but instead are born out of the specific trauma experienced by enslaved females, particularly as it relates to pregnancy and motherhood. Attempts to untangle such complex histories require a multidisciplinary approach, and art historians are necessary in such work. Through an art historical lens, I will argue that the visual images surrounding these two cases can provide unique and valuable insight into the stories of these women, and the trauma they experienced as enslaved females. This investigation will utilize both “high” art pieces, such as Thomas Satterwhite Noble’s depiction of Margaret Garner in *The Modern Medea* (1867), as well as “low” art pieces, such as the fugitive slave advertisements detailing Bett’s journey. I will also be engaging with other visual art forms in my argument, such as drawings originally produced in anti-slavery publications. The use of historical art pieces from both pro-slavery and anti-slavery perspectives underlines the ways in which common undeniable truths emerge even from



Figure 1: Henry Bibb, “Oh my child my child,” (1815), print, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave* (Reprint of 1850 ed., New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), p. 115.

opposing perspectives, and how this commonality gives these historical claims deeper credibility. The comparison of these two distinct visual representations of infanticide, from the American South and from Canada, also entails an examination of the nuances between the two slave societies, while illuminating the common trauma of motherhood experienced by enslaved females in both locations.

While it is undeniable that all enslaved persons experienced the profound horrors of bondage, some forms of trauma were distinct to the female experience of enslavement, many of which were associated with maternity and motherhood. While white, upper-class men represented the nexus of power in slave-owning societies, enslaved black females were situated at the nexus of oppression. They were viewed not only as units of labor, but also as units of reproduction, integral to a system that commodified their bodies as vessels for production.²³¹ The intentional act of using enslaved persons to increase an owner's "property" (i.e. his labouring slaves) was called "breeding," and was common in many societies, including the American South.²³² Though slave-owners referred to it as "natural increase," it was often highly engineered; women could be intentionally bought or sold for their potential "breeding" qualities, and could be told whom they must procreate with, and when.²³³ Even in instances where the slave owners were less explicit, manipulation was often employed in an attempt to ensure that breeding output was consistently maintained.²³⁴ Such manipulation encouraged a hierarchy of fertility and division within enslaved communities, and such division furthered the owner's power and discouraged unified resistance.²³⁵

While both men and women were conceived of as "breeders," only women experienced forced pregnancy. Representative of a direct colonization of the body, such unwanted pregnancies transformed the enslaved woman into a machine of production for their owners. Despite the evident physical stress of pregnancy, women were often still forced to do rigorous work. This constant strain on the body, coupled with a diet that lacked in nutritional value, made pregnancy not only a physically difficult experience, but also a potentially fatal one.²³⁶ There are even records of horrific punishment and abuse that continued during pregnancy, and that could lead to miscarriage.²³⁷ One of the most traumatic details, however, is that a significant portion of pregnancies – whether or not they were intentionally engineered for "breeding" – were a product of sexual coercion and rape from slave owners. Such consistent abuse was widely supported by the social norms, political deeds, and the laws of the time, which held that "any child born to a slave woman became the property of her master...regardless of the race or social status of the father."²³⁸ These beliefs perpetuated a society in which abuse was deeply normalized, and could even be considered to produce positive outcomes (i.e. the expansion of the enslaved work force through impregnation). The experience of carrying a child to term that was the product of incredible sexual trauma, and then raising and loving that child, was undoubtedly a source of immense mental damage for enslaved pregnant women.²³⁹

After the harrowing trials of pregnancy, and the hardship of keeping a child alive in such a deprived environment, enslaved women were forced to face the hardest truth of all: that no matter their efforts, they had little to no control over the destiny of their child, or the maintenance of their family unit.²⁴⁰ At any point, a mother could, and likely *would*, be forcefully separated from her child through sale.²⁴¹ [fig. 1] This is evidenced in slave sale advertisements and in descriptions of auction scenes, as well as in images printed in anti-slavery publications. One such image, printed as part of an anti-slavery anthology in the United States, depicts these aforementioned horrors of slave auctions, and their implications for the stability of enslaved families [fig. 2]. The description below the image states: "Husbands, wives, and families sold

indiscriminately to different purchasers, are violently separated; probably never to meet again.” The many figures in the drawing all play significant roles in inducing a sense of horror in the viewer—the lovers being separated on the left side of the image as a white man threatens them with a whip; the small group of huddled women and girls in the bottom left hand corner who appear powerless in their distorted smallness and bowed faces;

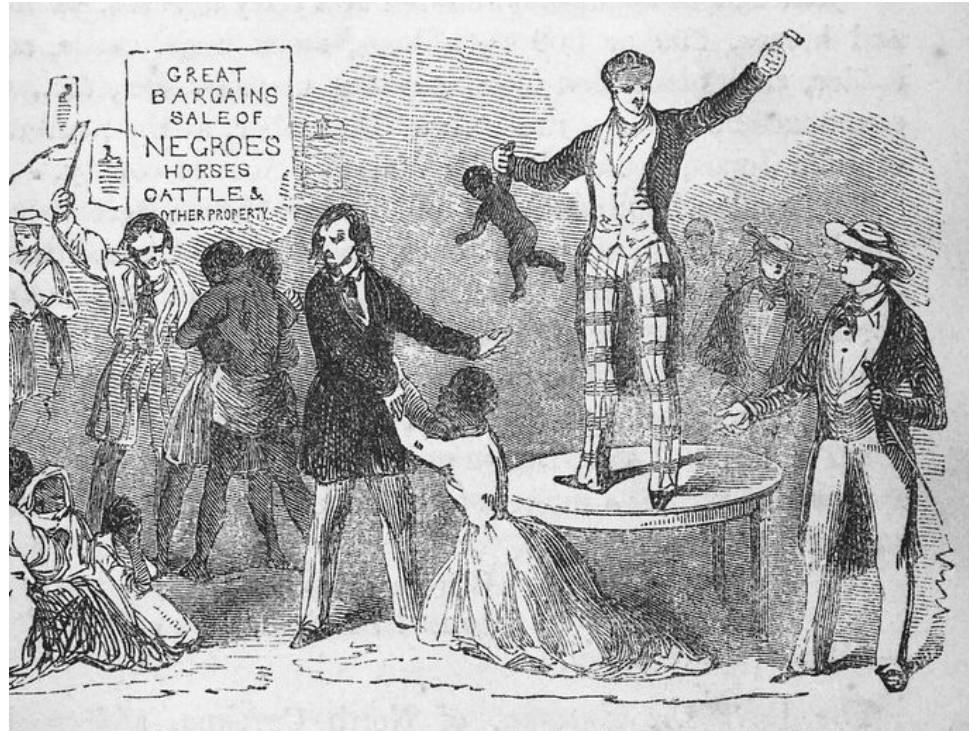


Figure 2: Wilson Armistead, “Husbands, Wives, Families,” (1853), print, Five hundred thousand strokes for freedom; a series of anti-slavery tracts, of which half a million are now first issued by the friends of the Negro (London: W. & F. Cash, 1853), p. 29.

the men in the upper left hand corner who casually fondle whips as they talk; the numerous yet fading faces in the right background which seem to symbolize the faceless mob that “watches” and implicitly participates in slavery; the casual stance of the man on the right, who smokes his cigarette, extending his hand to indicate that he may be the next buyer; and, of course, the begging woman who pleads for her child who is seen dangling by the arm of the white auctioneer. Despite the woman’s apparent pleas, the man, potentially her previous owner, ignores her with the distinct visual cue of his averted gaze. Meanwhile, her small child remains suspended above her head, naked, ready to be sold. Images such as this one, along with the many similarly themed pieces that were widely employed and distributed by abolitionist organizations, powerfully display the normalization of slavery’s horrors. Through these powerful visual sources, the instability and degeneration of the black mother-child relationship becomes all too evident.

To compound the traumas already associated with enslaved motherhood, female slaves were commonly used as wet nurses and caretakers for their owner’s (“fully”) white children.²⁴² Care taking for the owner’s children meant that the enslaved woman’s own children were often neglected, both biologically (deprived of breast milk) and physically (never present).²⁴³ The horror of such a situation goes deeper as Charmaine A. Nelson notes “the rearing of white children was literally tantamount to the rearing of a slave’s future master/mistress/oppressor.”²⁴⁴ The enslaved mother who “performed a tandem maternal duty” of raising her owner’s children and her own was forced to not only rear her oppressor, but to also raise a new generation of slaves.²⁴⁵ It is crucial to consider the horror of this version of motherhood, one in which the

enslaved woman and her body were used as a tool to reinforce a system that had created her own oppression, and that would inevitably oppress her children.

Through examination of the realities that existed for enslaved females in regards to maternity and motherhood, a stark image arises, one that portrays an existence marked by trauma and fear. The complete loss of bodily autonomy and rights, as well as the presence of incessant violence and deprivation, forces a redefinition of what pregnancy, and motherhood, really meant within the confines of slavery. The appropriation and exploitation of the female body left deep scars on the female psyche. And yet, to categorize these women's realities as solely ones of fear would ignore and fail to do justice to their engagement in forms of subversion and resistance, which will be explored later in this paper, as well as their ability to create new conceptions of family despite a society that disregarded this right.

A distinct example of this resistance to the destruction of the family unit can be found in a fugitive slave advertisement from Quebec in August 1798 [fig. 3].²⁴⁶ The advertisement is

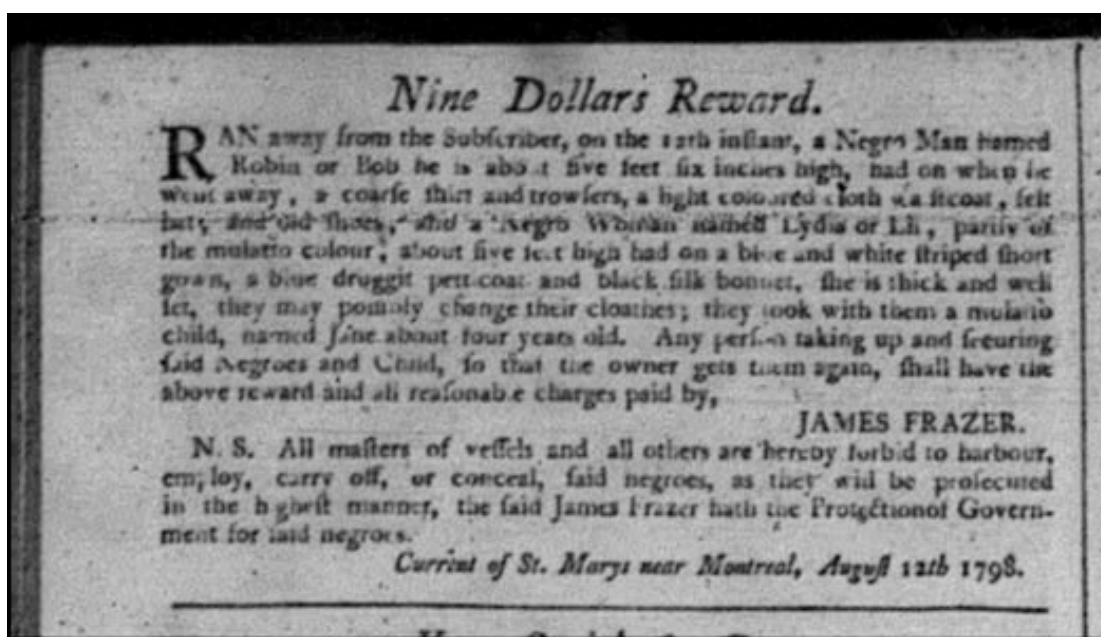


Figure 3: James Frazer, "Nine Dollars Reward," (1798), Fugitive Slave Advertisement, Montreal Gazette, scanned from the archives of Bibliotheque et Archives Nationales Du Quebec, Montreal, Canada.

highly unique in that it appears to be an account of an entire family escaping together. While their relationship as a family is almost impossible to prove, it can be inferred due to the relative rarity of men and women escaping together, let alone with a child. Of note is the racial description of each person—Robin as "negro," Lydia as "partly of the mulatto colour," and Jane as a "mulatto." Jane's described racial identity brings up the question of her parentage; the fact that Jane is considered lighter than her mother (she is almost surely Lydia's daughter), implies that Robin may not be her biological father, as he is darker than Lydia. Thus, it is possible that Jane was actually the product of a rape committed by James Frazer, their owner. The fact that they were all running together, however, supports the idea that, regardless of biology, they considered themselves a family unit. I choose to focus on this advertisement because it provides powerful evidence that, despite all attempts to destroy the existence of the enslaved family, some enslaved persons were able to resist this destruction, and form familial connections in spite of the



Figure 4: Thomas Satterwhite Noble, “The Modern Medea,” (1867), oil on canvas, 50.8 x 40.6 cm, The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

odds. It also proves that enslaved persons, despite the immensity of their experienced traumas, were still capable of developing relationships, with their peers, and with their children. This becomes important in the examination of Bett and Garner’s cases, specifically as they relate to infanticide.

In light of the historical evidence demonstrating the distinct realities of enslaved females, particularly in relation to maternity and motherhood, these two women’s stories of escape and tragedy require a nuanced discussion. By engaging with the historical art surrounding these cases, such complexity can be further investigated and understood. In 1867, Thomas Satterwhite Noble produced a famous oil painting depicting Margaret Garner’s recapture after her desperate bid for freedom [fig. 4].²⁴⁷ Margaret Garner’s attempted escape is a short, yet tragic, tale. On 28 January 1856, “one of the coldest nights on record for Kentucky,” Margaret, her husband Robert, and their four children, escaped into the night.²⁴⁸ Their aim was Canada, and their goal was freedom. But within 24 hours, slave catchers surrounded them and their recapture was imminent. In an act of desperation, Margaret slashed the throat of her infant girl and attempted to kill her three other children.

Noble’s painting, titled *The Modern Medea* (1867), a reference to the Greek myth in which an enchantress kills her children, is set in the moments just following Margaret’s horrific actions.²⁴⁹ The specific details of the painting give it power, and are insightful references to the historical context of trauma as discussed above. The scene is dominated by the standing figures—on one side, the slave-catchers, on the other, Margaret—yet the focal point of the piece

is the child, lying slain on the floor. In a painting that employs mainly dark colors, the child's purely white shirt draws the viewer's eyes, as well as the way in which the standing figures frame the fallen body. Both Margaret and the suited man point at the dead body, almost accusatorially; this repetition of the hand gestures draws attention. While only one of the man's hands is visible, both of Margaret's hands are outstretched and displayed, as if to mimic a pose of innocence. Notably, her hands are empty—the knife that killed her child is nowhere in sight. Despite the viewer's knowledge that Garner has slit her young girl's throat, Noble's specific placement and depiction of both figures' hands implies confusion as to who is responsible for the death of this child. And while Garner stands clearly in the light—she does not hide from the truth of her actions—the men are contrastingly painted in shadows, as if to imply a darkness and dishonesty in their characters. Their faces also become increasingly faded and nondescript toward the edge of the painting, as if these men could be anyone, and are merely representations of a specific, powerful role in society.

In contrast, Margaret is vividly depicted, and the white of her ragged clothing demands the viewer's attention. The fabric is worn and battered, representative of the experience of deprivation and poverty. A red cloth, illustrating traditional African head wrapping techniques, covers her hair. This practice was commonly misunderstood by slave-owners, and could be employed by women as a subtle act of resistance.²⁵⁰ The red scarf on Margaret's head ties her visually to the red of the blood surrounding the head of her deceased child, linking the subtle act of defiance (head wrapping) to a much more consequential, and horrific, form of resistance. Two of her children cling to her clothing, as if trying to climb closer to her. Her eyes and body do not seem to respond to them, though, as she instead engages with the men she faces. There is a literal visual distance between her and her children, one that seems impenetrable in Noble's image. Lastly, she is depicted as standing in the corner, no route for escape easily visible - this choice of placement can be read as Margaret being literally "backed into a corner" and devoid of all other options.

The employment of a postcolonial, feminist, art historical reading of this painting connects many of Noble's visual choices with the historical realities of Margaret's life, and that of many enslaved women. The painting's portrayal of the unnavigable distance between Margaret and her children is representative of the way in which enslavement distorted the mother-child relationship, and normalized children to the lack of parental presence. Even more notable is the way the painting's visual choices seem to imbue Margaret with a sort of innocence and frees her of explicit responsibility for her actions. I would argue that Noble's depiction of the scene represents an understanding of the deep complexity of Margaret's actions, which can only be fully understood in the context of her enslavement.

This context of enslavement is also relevant while engaging with Bett's narrative. Bett's story takes place in Quebec, Canada. Studying her experiences presents a unique challenge; in comparison with the United States, there is significantly less research on the institution of slavery in Canada.²⁵¹ Because of this, Canadian historians are forced to utilize relevant research from other nations, and argue the validity of such connotations. Thus, in the analysis of Bett's narrative, I have drawn upon research based on slavery as it existed in the American South and argue that despite the differences in the enslavement practices of the American South and Canada, enslaved females in the two regions shared many common experiences of trauma. An important factor to consider in this argument is that many enslaved persons in Canada were originally from the Caribbean or America, and were not actually born in Canada itself.²⁵² Thus, they had already experienced many of the traumas of slavery before even setting foot in Canada.

The society they would have encountered when they arrived, however, was undeniably different than that of the South. The most prominent differences between the two regions were the amount of enslaved persons utilized and the kind of work in which they were employed. The American South was a society based around plantations, and thus they depended on large amounts of enslaved persons to work the fields. Canada, in contrast, concentrated its enslaved persons in cities, and as they were often used as domestic workers, fewer workers were needed.²⁵³ Some historians argue that because plantation economies required many more workers, enslaved women were more frequently subjected to breeding practices than those in economies like Canada.²⁵⁴ Whether or not this is true, it is undeniable that the reproductive capabilities of enslaved females in both societies were commodified, and that any differences to such commodification were due to the fact that “exploitation was established according to the needs and interests of the slave-owning class.”²⁵⁵

While breeding may have been more prevalent in the American South, it is almost certainly not true that enslaved females in Canada experienced less sexual violence or coercion. The very nature of domestic servitude required constant close proximity to slave owners, proximity that could have made sexual mistreatment all the more frequent.²⁵⁶ Also distinct to Canada, enslaved females were often isolated from each other due to the nature of their labour. In contrast, relationships between enslaved women were a critical means of survival, and resistance, in the American South.²⁵⁷ In light of these comparisons, the majority of historical research on enslaved motherhood in the American South can be credibly applied to Canadian slavery, and to the specific case of Bett.

Bett’s narrative takes place in Quebec, and, just like Margaret, it begins with a cold March night and a decision to run towards freedom. Very little is known about Bett—her story has yet to be fully examined by historians. The entirety of knowledge surrounding her narrative comes from two slave advertisements, placed months apart in the *Quebec Gazette*. Through the examination of these advertisements, which are a form of unauthorized portraiture, art historians can gain valuable insight into Bett’s experiences, and their connection to the greater traumas of female enslavement.²⁵⁸

The first advertisement, placed on 6 March 1787 gives details of Bett’s escape [fig. 5]. She is described as an “eighteen years old” “wench” who speaks three languages. Most importantly she is “big with child, and within a few days of her time” - Bett is pregnant. Fugitive

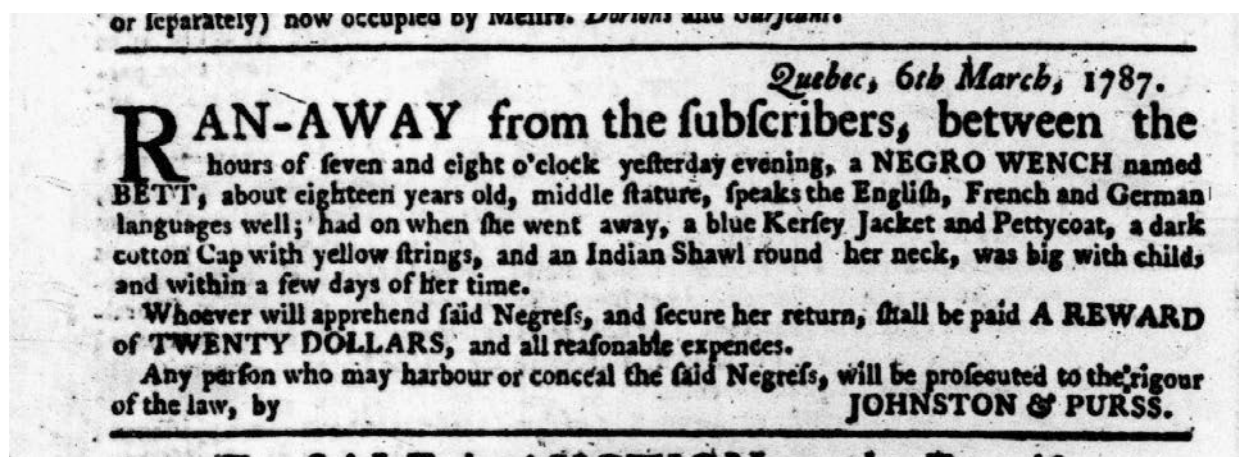


Figure 5: Johnston and Purss, “RAN AWAY from the subscribers,” (1787), 6 March, *Quebec Gazette*, Scanned from the archives of Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, Montreal, Canada.

slave advertisements about pregnant women are incredibly rare, and this appears to be the only one ever to be printed in Canada.²⁵⁹ The necessary physical endurance and fortitude required for an escape would have been unthinkable for most pregnant women, let alone someone so close to her due date. Given the circumstances, an escape like this one would have required immense courage, and was likely precipitated by abuse and significant fear.

The specifics of Bett's recapture are unknown, proven only by the presence of a second advertisement, this one posted for her sale [fig. 6]. The change in description of Bett from the first to the second advertisement is remarkable. She goes from being described as a "wench" to a "healthy, active negro woman," and her knowledge of multiple languages, which had initially been seen as sinister, is now portrayed as a valuable asset. Most notably, she is described as "very handy in the care of children." Within the span of months, Bett has gone from being a heinous escapee and accused child murderer (discussed below), to a desirable slave and the picture of a successful caretaker. This manipulation of the truth was wholly unremarkable in the twisted world of slavery. Interestingly, the sale advertisement is devoid of both Bett's name, and those of her owners. This represents an intentional choice to distance the advertisement from her history, and theirs. The analysis of these two historical art pieces provides a basis for recreating

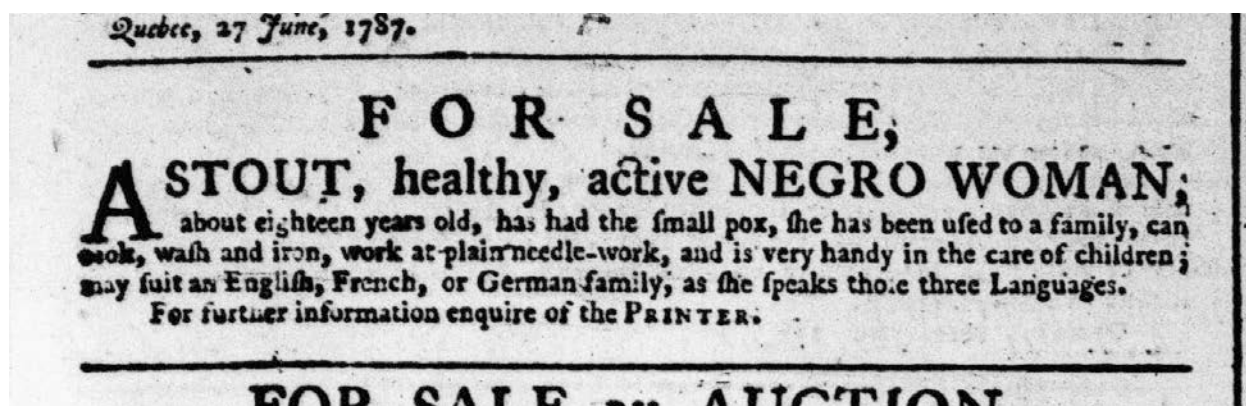


Figure 6: Anonymous, "FOR SALE A STOUT," (1787), 27 June, *Quebec Gazette*, Scanned from the archives of Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, Montreal, Canada.

Bett's narrative, and gives evidence of the complex and immensely skewed norms of the period.

It is clear that we will never fully know what events transpired during the time between these two advertisements. However, there is evidence showing that in this interim period, Bett was tried for the murder of her child. The specific details of the court proceeding remain unknown, but it is clear she was acquitted.²⁶⁰ It is impossible to retroactively know whether she was responsible for the death of her newborn child, or whether or not the child was born alive. There are many scenarios that could quite plausibly explain the child's premature death.²⁶¹ It is very possible that the immense strain the attempted escape placed on Bett's body caused her to miscarry, or that the baby died of malnutrition or natural causes. There is also the potential that upon her recapture she was severely punished and the fetus was damaged. In an attempt to cover this up, her owners may have accused her of murder. It is also possible that Bett killed her newborn child.

Infanticide, defined as the killing of an infant, particularly one's own child, is a horrifying act with tragic consequences.²⁶² Infanticides were not common in enslaved communities, but they did occur, as is evidenced by the stories of Margaret, and perhaps Bett.²⁶³ Infanticide was in many ways an uncommon response to commonly experienced traumas. To

fully understand the complex reasons infanticide occurred, historians must examine specific cases within the context of the daily horror that precipitated, and perhaps necessitated, such serious actions. As was evidenced in the first half of this paper, enslaved females experienced horrific trauma on a daily basis. Such exposure to regular violence and dehumanizing conditions normalized horror and redefined definitions and expressions of morality. In this incredibly skewed reality, it is possible to conceive of slave infanticide as an expression of resistance.²⁶⁴ This returns agency to those who have been stripped of power, and situates infanticide as an act of reclamation of choice, and of their children.²⁶⁵ In a system that denied mothers the ability to protect their own child, infanticide becomes one of the only methods to truly guard an infant from the inherent horror of enslavement. Moreover, how does the weight of murder change when violence is a normal element of daily life, when infant mortality rates are already staggering, and when life itself seems a version of hell? In the face of such constant, and normalized, horrors, infanticide becomes easily rationalized as a necessary act of love.

Margaret stands tall and indignant in Noble's painting, and etched on her face is not a look of remorse, but one of anger.²⁶⁶ The body suspended between the two groups of figures seems to be imploring the viewer to reconsider on whom rests the burden of guilt. Is Margaret Garner responsible for her child's death? Is Bett at fault for the passing of her infant? And if they are not at fault, the viewer, and society, must question: who is? While this inquiry may never have one concrete answer, it is my belief that through the retelling of these tragic tales, we begin to seek accountability for the horrors of slavery's past, and for its present repercussions. Through the examination of these two women's stories, and their interwoven relationship with the history of enslavement, and the history of art, it is my intent to honour their complex narratives.

ENDNOTES

²²⁸ I would like to thank Charmaine A. Nelson for sharing copies of the Quebec fugitive slave and slave sale advertisements with me, as well as for directing me towards these particular advertisements.

James Johnston and John Purss, "RAN-AWAY from the subscribers," *Quebec Gazette*, 8 March 1787; transcribed in Frank Mackey, "Appendix I: Newspaper Notices," *Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal, 1760–1840* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), p. 329.

²²⁹ Anonymous, "Guide to African American Resources at the Cincinnati History Library and Archives: Margaret Garner, 1834-1858," *Cincinnati History Library and Archives*, <http://library.cincymuseum.org/aag/bio/garner.html> (date of last access 29 November 2017)

²³⁰ Mackey, *Done with Slavery*, pp. 308-09.

²³¹ While enslaved men were also commonly used as units of reproduction, I would argue that the experience of forced breeding was uniquely traumatizing for women because of the hardship of pregnancy and the responsibility of raising the child post-delivery.

²³² Ned and Constance Sublette, *The American Slave Coast: A History of the Slave-Breeding Industry* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2016)

²³³ In her book Marie Jenkins Schwartz discusses the way in which "women's childbearing capacity became a commodity that could be traded on the open market" and how enslaved women lost control of their own bodies. She emphasizes how status as a good "breeder" made an enslaved female more valuable, and was often highlighted, while sometimes only implicitly, in slave sale advertisements. Marie Jenkins Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave: Motherhood and Medicine in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006)

²³⁴ The implicit manipulation of enslaved females to ensure continued reproduction took many forms, all with the goal of incentivizing pregnancy. This was often done by giving rewards to women who were pregnant or who had already delivered a child. Rewards varied, but often came in the form of less labour, better food, and/or special privileges. Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: Norton, 1999), pp. 99-100. A particularly garish example of this manipulation can be found in Matthew Lewis's *Journal of a West-India Proprietor*. Matthew Gregory Lewis, *Journal of a West-India Proprietor: Kept During a Residence in the Island of Jamaica* (London: John Murray, 1834), pp. 125-26.

²³⁵ Charmaine A. Nelson, Slavery, Geography and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Marine Landscapes of Montreal and Jamaica (London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), p. 250; Maureen G. Elgersman, Unyielding Spirits: Black Women and Slavery in Early Canada and Jamaica (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), p. 56; Schwartz, Birthing a Slave.

²³⁶ Anonymous, "What Was Life Like Under Slavery," Digital History, http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=2&psid=3040 (date of last access 29 November 2017); Jennifer L. Morgan, Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery (Philadelphia, Pa., 2004), pp. 56–61; as noted in Diana Paton, "Enslaved Women and Slavery Before and After 1807," History in Focus: the Guide to Historical Resources, <https://www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/Slavery/articles/paton.html#6> (date of last access 1 December 2017)

²³⁷ Schwartz details a particularly horrific incident in which punishment for a pregnant woman consisted of "digging a hole in the ground and having a woman lie face down with her swollen abdomen in the hole before a beating began." Schwartz, Birthing a Slave, p. 136

²³⁸ Charmaine A. Nelson, Representing the Black Female Subject in Western Art (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 53.

²³⁹ Nelson, Representing the Black Female Subject, p. 45.

²⁴⁰ Post-delivery motherhood did not prove any easier than pregnancy for enslaved women. The conditions for raising a healthy child were hard to meet. There was consistent malnutrition in enslaved communities, which resulted in a high infant and child death rate. In fact, half of all enslaved infants died during their first year of life. Anonymous, "What Was Life Like Under Slavery" (date of last access 29 November 2017). While this statistic is already quite stunning, even starker examples can be found, such as the Gowrie plantation in South Carolina, where 90% of enslaved children died before they reached age 16 (not including stillbirths/miscarriages). (Anonymous, "Charles Manigault's Gowrie: A Starting Point, or, Discrepancies in the Lives of a Master and His Slaves," South Carolina Information Highway, <https://www.sciway.net/afam/slavery/gowrie.html> (date of last access 29 November 2017). There was also forced child neglect, as mothers were required to return to work very soon after delivery. In an attempt to care for their children, women in plantations would bring their babies to the field or would rush back to feed their child while not working. Babies were left in the scorching sun, susceptible to animals and other dangers, while tired mothers laboured for hours. [Henry Bibb, Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave, reprint of 1850 ed. (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), pp. 116–17] This is visually represented in fig. 1, an image originally produced in an anti-slavery publication. Despite the love and connection that enslaved mothers felt for their children, children were undeniably an added burden and source of anxiety in the daily lives of enslaved females. White, Ar'n't I a Woman?, p. 113.

²⁴¹ This is evidenced in slave sale advertisements and in descriptions of auction scenes. One advertisement from 1797 describes the sale of a twenty-two-year-old woman, who "has a child about 9 months, which will be at the *purchaser's option*" (italics mine). This description implies that the buyer can decide if they would like to purchase the woman with, or without, her child. US Anonymous, "FOR SALE, a remarkable smart healthy," Rising Sun, 12 August 1797, New York; found in Hudson River Valley Heritage Online Archives, Hudson River Valley Heritage, <https://www.hrvh.org/cdm/ref/collection/hhs/id/558> (date of last access 29 November 2017). Similar evidence of such disregard for the sanctity of the enslaved family can be found in the descriptions of slave auctions; one man described an auction scene in which a woman "refused to give up her little one" and "pleaded for mercy" until finally the "child was torn from the mother." Bibb, Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, p. 202. To further complicate such horrors, the sale of one's child was sometimes used as an intentional form of punishment towards the mother or parents. Lecture, Charmaine A. Nelson, "Racing Childhood," Harvard University, Cambridge, USA, November 2017.

²⁴² A less examined, yet notable, aspect of the trauma surrounding wet-nursing is breastfeeding itself. Breastfeeding can be considered an intimate act of love and connection between mother and child, and yet enslaved women were forced to transform even this somewhat sacred experience into yet another service to their owner.

²⁴³ Art historian Charmaine A. Nelson has noted that such resource scarcity and forced neglect meant that enslaved children were "born into deprivation." In other words, from the moment of birth, their lives were marked by the absence, not presence, of many elements crucial to their development. This also meant that the contemporary Western conception of childhood (as a time of innocence, lack of responsibility, and happiness) never existed for enslaved children. (Lecture, Nelson, "Racing Childhood," November 2017)

²⁴⁴ Nelson, Representing the Black Female Subject, p. 45.

²⁴⁵ Nelson, Representing the Black Female Subject, p. 44.

²⁴⁶ In this paper I will not explore the individual histories of Robin, Lydia, and Jane. However, there exists some specific research done on Robin's life, as he was part of a critical trial in the history of Canadian slavery. For more information: Mackey, *Done with Slavery*, pp. 29, 30, 32, 40, 50, 56-60, 62-3, 65, 75-6, 78, 119.

²⁴⁷ For more on Noble's life and motivations see: Anonymous, "Biography," *Thomas Satterwhite Noble Website*, <http://www.thomassatterwhitenoble.org/biography/> (date of last access 1 December 2017)

²⁴⁸ Deborah M. Walters, "Re(dis)covering and Recreating the Cultural Milieu of Margaret Garner," *Gendered Resistance: Women, Slavery, and the Legacy of Margaret Garner*, eds. M. E. Frederickson and D. M. Walters (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2013), p. 3.

²⁴⁹ The Editors of the Encyclopedia Britannica, "Medea: Greek Mythology," *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Medea-Greek-mythology> (date of last access 1 December 2017)

²⁵⁰ Lecture, Charmaine A. Nelson, "Slavery in Canada: Fugitive Slave Advertisements as Unauthorized Portraits," Harvard University, Cambridge, 2017.

²⁵¹ A few possible reasons for this: many Canadians are not aware that slavery ever existed in their country. While the horrors of slavery were just as present in Canada, by sheer numbers there were many more enslaved persons living in the United States, and thus there is more focus placed on that society. Canada's population is smaller than that of the United States, and so it follows that there are by definition less Canadian historians. (Learned through conversations with Charmaine A. Nelson, 2017)

²⁵² Elgersman, *Unyielding Spirits*, p. 73.

²⁵³ Elgersman, *Unyielding Spirits*, p. 71.

²⁵⁴ Maureen G. Elgersman argues that "in colonial Canada, there was less emphasis placed on the exploitation of their reproductive abilities than those of Black women in other parts of the Americas." Elgersman, *Unyielding Spirits*, p. 13.

²⁵⁵ Elgersman, *Unyielding Spirits*, pp. 75, 168.

²⁵⁶ Elgersman, *Unyielding Spirits*, p. 31.

²⁵⁷ Elgersman, *Unyielding Spirits*, p. 93.

²⁵⁸ Lecture, Nelson, "Fugitive Slave Advertisements," 2017.

²⁵⁹ This claim is based solely on the fact that despite many efforts, I was unable to find any others.

²⁶⁰ Mackey, *Done With Slavery*, pp. 308-309.

²⁶¹ For more information on examples of an alternate reason: Michael P. Johnson, "Smothered Slave Infants: Were Slave Mothers at Fault?," *The Journal of Southern History*, vol. 47, no. 4 (November 1981); Karol K. Weaver, "She Crushed the Child's Fragile Skull: Disease, Infanticide, and Enslaved Women in Eighteenth-Century Saint-Domingue," *French Colonial History*, vol. 5 (2004)

²⁶² Anonymous, "Infanticide," *Oxford Dictionaries Online*, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/infanticide> (date of last access 1 December 2017)

²⁶³ Deborah Gray White states, "These cases present atypical behavior on the part of slave mothers. Runaway and truancy data suggest mothers cared dearly for their children." Her evidence supports the irregularity of infanticide. However, I question the idea that love for one's child and infanticide are mutually exclusive. White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, p. 88. Further examples of infanticide in enslaved communities can be found in J. M. Allain, "Infanticide as Slave Resistance: Evidence from Barbados, Jamaica, and Saint-Domingue," *Inquiries Journal/Student Pulse*, vol. 6, no. 4 (2014).

²⁶⁴ The different methods of resistance that were employed by enslaved women, such as contraception, abortion, running away, etc. have been heavily researched, and can be further explored in the following books and articles: Allain, "Infanticide as Slave Resistance"; White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, p. 84-85; Nelson, *Slavery, Geography, and Empire*, p. 251; Elgersman, "Unyielding Spirits," pp. 101, 120, 104.

²⁶⁵ Allain, "Infanticide as Slave Resistance."

²⁶⁶ Garner never expressed remorse. She stated, "if they had given her time she would have killed them all - that with regard to herself she cared but little; but she was unwilling to have her children suffer as she had done." (Anonymous, "Finding the Ghost of Beloved Part 7: The Article that Inspired Toni Morrison," *Black History*, <http://blackhistory.com/content/158567/finding-the-ghost-of-beloved-part-7-the-article-that-inspired-toni-morrison> (date of last access 1 Dec 2017)

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PLATE LIST

Figure 1: Henry Bibb, “Oh my child my child,” (1815), print, Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave (Reprint of 1850 ed., New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), p. 115.

Figure 2: Wilson Armistead, “Husbands, Wives, Families,” (1853), print, Five hundred thousand strokes for freedom; a series of anti-slavery tracts, of which half a million are now first issued by the friends of the Negro (London: W. & F. Cash, 1853), p. 29.

Figure 3: James Frazer, “Nine Dollars Reward,” (1798), Fugitive Slave Advertisement, Montreal Gazette, scanned from the archives of Bibliotheque et Archives nationales du Quebec, Montreal, Canada.

Figure 4: Thomas Satterwhite Noble, “The Modern Medea,” (1867), oil on canvas, 50.8 x 40.6 cm, The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Figure 5: Johnston and Purss, “RAN AWAY from the subscribers,” (1787), 6 March, Quebec Gazette, Scanned from the archives of Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, Montreal, Canada.

Figure 6: Anonymous, “FOR SALE A STOUT,” (1787), 27 June, Quebec Gazette, Scanned from the archives of Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, Montreal, Canada.

ANNOTATED: TOTEM TRANSFER AND THE MAPS OF SHAWNADITHIT
Molly Wieringa (Harvard University)

On 6 June 1829, a young woman living in what is known today as Newfoundland died of tuberculosis.¹ Her name was Shawnadithit, and she is remembered today as the last of the Beothuk peoples, a Native tribe on the island. In the last third of her short three-decade lifespan, she lived as an unpaid servant in the household of a man directly involved in the drawn-out and violent extermination of her people. During this period, she was “loaned” to an anthropologist by the name of William Cormack, and during her time with him, she created a number of maps that were simultaneously representations of physical geography as well as narrative pieces documenting her personal observations and experiences within the space [fig. 1, fig. 2, fig. 3]. Although care must be employed when ascribing meaning to an historical object, I define these maps as works of art, with the help of Sébastien Caquard: “More than just data, artists express understandings, fears, hopes, emotions, and perceptions about places and people through maps, and these dimensions are essential for fully understanding our relation to places in the world today.”² Shawnadithit’s representation of space is perhaps one of the clearest historical examples of such expression through cartography, and, as such, can be scrutinized as historical art. While reading her maps, I argue that we must consider them both subject and conduit, the result of an unusual collaboration that had unintended consequences.

The maps demonstrate a history with the Beothuk point of view at the foreground. The very existence of these maps is a result of a collaborative process that bridges the distance

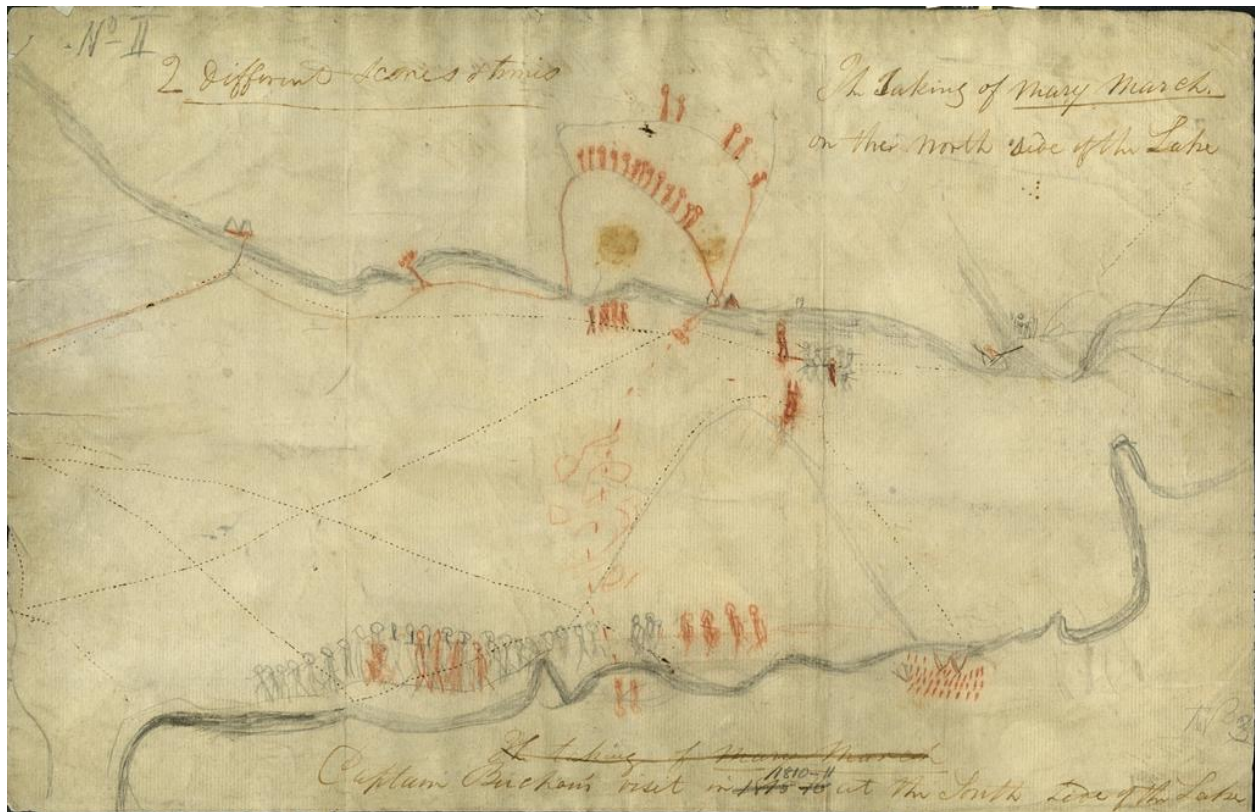


Figure 1: Shawnadithit, Sketch I, “Captain Buchan’s Visit to the Red Indians 1810-11 When the Two Marines were Killed,” VIIIA-555, pencil on paper, courtesy of The Rooms Corporation of Newfoundland and Labrador, Provincial Museum Division, St. John’s, Canada.

between the “other” and “I.” However, from creation to end product, these maps must be read with intense criticality and a comprehension of the necessary distance between the scholarship and the motivations and culture of Shawnadithit herself. She was a woman poised on the immediate edge of cultural contact, and I would argue, an unconscious player in the strongly Eurocentric “tragedy of culture lost.”³ Her maps, which preserve a perspective so rare as to be almost unique, must serve as a conduit for nearly all that is to be known about the Beothuk people, and as such have by their very existence, allowed that perspective to be appropriated into the present Canadian national identity.

The Maps and the Makers

Cartography, like any creation, can serve as a reflection of the culture from which it came, and it is therefore important to remember that the maps produced by Shawnadithit are fundamentally different than the maps to which the colonizers around her deferred. Maps produced by sailing explorers of the day reflect the dominant European cartographic style of the time - a practice of accuracy and precision in boundary marking combined with a convenient, deliberate blankness within those boundaries. Representing land in this fashion allowed explorers and subsequent colonists to label the “new” space as empty and available. The attention to detail in European maps reflect a scrutiny of the landscape and a thorough understanding of the physical region around them that is rather damning when one considers their failure to recognize the Native populations already present. Matthew Sparke refers to this concept as “anticipatory geography,” and argues convincingly “such visualizations from a distance become critical in choreographing the colonial expansion of early modern Europe.”⁴

In contrast, the maps drawn by Shawnadithit tell of a different worldview, one that encompasses physical geography, living history, and personal observation. Each of the maps she produced includes identifiable and accurate landforms as well as overlapping narratives of travel and interaction. Not only are various people physically represented on the page, but both the European parties and the Beothuk clans are inscribed, in black and red ink respectively. The depth of experiences illustrated within a physical space so accurately demarcated implies, as Polack concluded, the seriousness with which a hunting society like the Beothuk would have considered and cartographically represented the space around them.⁵ The very existence of Shawnadithit’s maps invalidates the European assertion that the “New World” was uncharted, unseen, and unrecognized territory. In the words of Sparke, “Shawnadithit’s cartographic work survives as a rival geography that directly contests the disembodied abstraction of the colonial maps.”⁶ However, while her maps stand as a challenge to the underlying assumptions of colonialism, hers are not the only hands that played a role in the creation of the final product.

William Epps Cormack trained as an anthropologist at the University of Edinburgh before embarking on a crusade to furnish “an authentic history of th[is] unhappy race of people [the Beothuk], in order that their language, customs, and pursuits might be contrasted with those of other Indians.”⁷ While searching Newfoundland fruitlessly for the remnants of the Beothuk tribes, Cormack heard tell of Shawnadithit, who was living as an unpaid servant in the house of John Peyton Jr., an established planter on Burnt Island.⁸ By 1827, Cormack had given up his search of the island and returned to St. John’s, where he founded the Beothuk Institution with the intent of “educating” Shawnadithit “for the purpose of transforming her into a native informant.”⁹

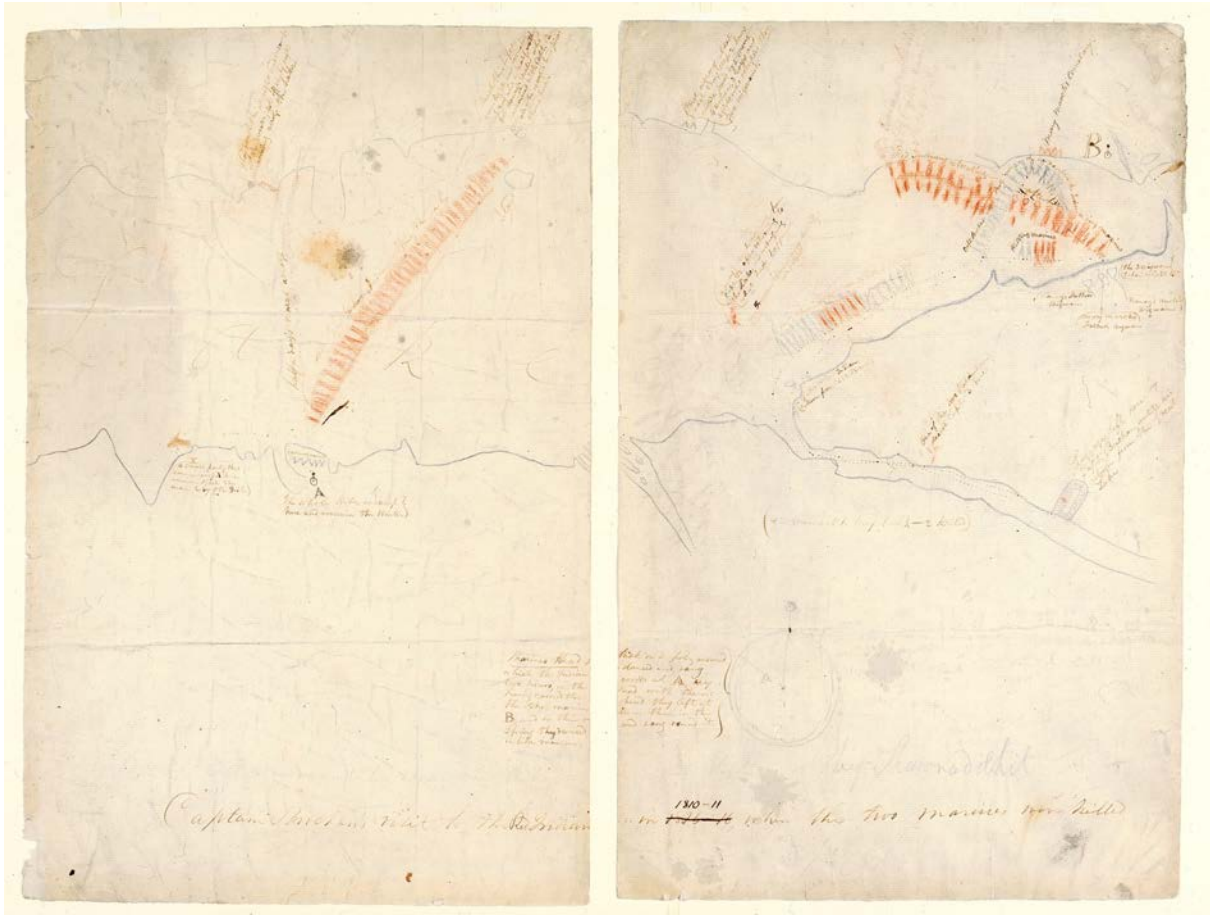


Figure 2: Shawnadithit, Sketch II, “Captain Buchan’s Visit in 1810-11 at the South Side of the Lake/ The Taking of Mary March,” VIIIA-556, pencil on paper, courtesy of The Rooms Corporation of Newfoundland and Labrador, Provincial Museum Division, St. John’s, Canada.

There is ongoing debate as to the nature of Shawnadithit’s time with William Cormack. Sparke emphasizes the personal motivations of the anthropologist and the effects that so-called colonial “superiority” almost certainly had on Shawnadithit, portraying her as an accessory to Cormack and as a conscripted informant, whose little remaining agency found an outlet in the maps she produced under duress. Polack attempts to complicate this picture, reminding the reader that while Shawnadithit’s life was certainly one of pain and hardship, she presented the anthropologist with “gifts of a braid of her hair as well as pieces of granite and quartz”¹⁰ when he left Newfoundland. Additionally, while Sparke focuses on the inhibition of expression Shawnadithit may have undergone amongst those who attempted to impose their own language and understanding over hers, Polack argues that she was a woman adept at creating, who may not have objected to the opportunity to put pencil to paper.¹¹

Regardless of the personal relationship and despite the colonial power dynamics between the cartographer (a title properly applied to Shawnadithit) and the anthropologist, it cannot be denied that Cormack not only facilitated and encouraged the creation of the maps; he also played a hand in creating them. The annotations written by Cormack are impossible to ignore. They are positioned, for the most part, around Shawnadithit’s lines and figures, and often simply denote an action or figure that might be unfamiliar to a colonialist gaze. Polack notes the interesting grammatical tone most of the annotations take - he writes in the present continuous tense, as

though “attempt[ing] to imaginatively enter Shawnadithit’s point of view; it is as if he accompanies her as she revisits the spaces of memory.”¹² What impact does this “accompaniment” have on the future history of the maps themselves? Did Cormack have a right, from his position of power, to pursue an entry into Shawnadithit’s worldview? Does Canada today have that right, to attempt to fold her maps into the country’s historical identity?

The Maps as the Bridge

The collaboration, amicable or forced but surely riddled by the power dynamics of colonialism, created something new - a fascinating, unbalanced and perhaps unique merger of two cultures. Cormack’s explanations, which annotate Shawnadithit’s geography, proffer an incredibly complex new area of study. Primarily, the intention behind them is to explain, to collect data, and to analyze events for anthropological study. Consequently, Cormack has filtered Shawnadithit’s perspective through his own, despite whatever care he might have taken to remain objective. By “translating,” Cormack has positioned the maps for a colonial audience and established a normative colonial scholarship, a scholarship that has since placed Shawnadithit “into the pantheon of Canada’s famous figures”:

“A pantheon that otherwise includes explorers, fur traders, politicians and railwaymen whose more general discursive duty in death remains as heroes and heroines in the romanticization of the very processes that caused the genocidal demise of [N]ative people such as the Beothuk in the first place.”¹³

A key to the establishment of Shawnadithit’s place in this pantheon, the physical existence of her maps has allowed for what Barbara Godard terms a “totem transfer.”¹⁴

By repositioning Shawnadithit’s maps for a colonial readership, Cormack, true to his primary goal, set up a method of encounter between the remnants of the Native culture of the Beothuk and the burgeoning dominance of the colonial settler. However, as Godard argues, “it is through this encounter with the Other who is Native to this land that a ‘totem transfer’ occurs and the stranger in North America ‘goes native’ to possess the land, to be Native.”¹⁵ The situation was only worsened by the relatively extensive, although piecemeal, history of the Beothuk people compiled by James P. Howley, an acquaintance of John Peyton’s, in 1915. Howley reproduced Shawnadithit’s maps and sketches, and preceded them with letters to and from William Cormack, as well as knowledge obtained from the Peytons. It is merely another lens, even more subjective and narrow, by virtue of being yet another step removed.¹⁶ But his work also became the basis of Beothuk scholarship, a source trusted above Shawnadithit’s maps and sketches themselves, which in the context of European cartography and informational validity, were both “inferior” and unsubstantiated by any written account.

Given their important anthropological and ethnographical origins (a perspective likely unique to the colonial viewpoint), Shawnadithit’s maps have been absorbed into the collective of Canada’s national artifacts, spurring the countrywide acknowledgement of this “Canadian” folk heroine. They are the literal, physical totems that have been transferred in a second round of colonial conquest. By claiming these maps as *Canadian national artifacts*, remnants of a Canadian past and an historical anchor of Canadian identity, the Canada of today - a country no less colonially-derived than any other present day American nation - has extended a second ownership of the land, and appropriated a Native identity as a national one. The maps, through



Figure 3: Shawnadithit, Sketch IV “Last Remnant of the Beothuk at the Exploits River. Beothuk Camps on Lakes inland from Badgers Bay and on the Exploits River, in the Winter of 1822-23,” VIII A-558, pencil on paper, courtesy of The Rooms Corporation of Newfoundland and Labrador, Provincial Museum Division, St. John’s, Canada.

the “translations” provided by Cormack, became the conduit for a removed and continuous form of colonialism.

The combination of Shawnadithit and Cormack as drafter and translator reflects the drastic change and collision of cultures occurring in colonial Canada - “a new colonial geography”¹⁷ - and helps explain the appropriation of Shawnadithit’s worldview as a part of the national identity. It is a partnership that builds bridges into both cultures. But also, by nature of the inherent and perhaps extreme imbalance, acknowledging the maps as such a combination challenges scholars to read them critically, to demythologize as Sparke does, and to be cautious about any tendency to “anthropologize.”¹⁸

The Maps, a “Tragedy of Culture Lost”

Shawnadithit’s role as a Canadian heroine is one of the informant, the helpful Native woman who remains separate, either through death and perception as a sort of “sacrificial victim”¹⁹ or through “exotic distance.”²⁰ She and her maps are an attempt to include the Native

peoples who inhabited the land we now know as Canada, but one dependent on the inability to truly bridge the gap between cultures. Inclusion via appropriation of identity is possible *because there are no Beothuk remaining to object*. So then, in all of this, who can speak for them? Who is allowed to interpret Shawnadithit's geography and critique Cormack's annotations? Carl Leggo would argue that everyone does:

"The stories of the Beothuk are not reclaimable. The Beothuk once spoke and sang in their own voices. But they have not spoken for more than 150 years, and they will not speak again [...] There is nobody to interrogate the ways they are represented except the people who choose to re/present them. The Beothuk are the silent Other, unattainable, unknown, transcendent, no more than a trace remains. It is easy to mythologize and fictionalize and make them in any image we want - they are a blank and clean slate, a *tabula rasa*."²¹

As long as there continues to be scholarship concerning the Beothuk, and as long as there are people who seek to rectify or understand the "tragedy of a culture lost," the explanations, narratives and perspectives that are not Beothuk will be superimposed on Shawnadithit's maps. Leggo's point may be that such projection should be continuously acknowledged - the stories we seek will always bear the touch and interpretation of the white colonialist.²²

ENDNOTES:

¹ "On This Day," *National Post* (Ontario, Canada), 6 June 2006.

² Sébastien Caquard, "The Map as Art: Contemporary Artists Explore Cartography," *The Canadian Geographer*, vol. 55, no. 2 (2011), p. 268.

³ Matthew Sparke, "Between Demythologizing and Deconstructing the Map: Shawnadithit's New-Found-Land and the Alienation of Canada," *Cartographica*, vol. 32, no. 1 (1995), p. 6.

⁴ Sparke, "Between Demythologizing," p. 2.

⁵ Fiona Polack, "Reading Shawnadithit's Drawings: Transcultural Texts in the North American Colonial World," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, vol. 14, no. 3 (2013), p. 9.

⁶ Matthew Sparke, "Mapped Bodies and Disembodied Maps: (Dis)Placing Cartographic Struggle in Colonial Canada," *Places Through the Body*, eds. Heidi J. Nast and Steve Pile (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 308.

⁷ Sparke, "Between Demythologizing," p. 11.

⁸ Sparke, "Between Demythologizing," p. 11; Polack, "Reading Shawnadithit's Drawings," p. 7.

⁹ Sparke, "Between Demythologizing," p. 7.

¹⁰ Polack, "Reading Shawnadithit's Drawings," p. 7.

¹¹ Sparke, "Between Demythologizing," p. 11; Polack, "Reading Shawnadithit's Drawings," p. 7.

¹² Polack, "Reading Shawnadithit's Drawings," p. 11.

¹³ Sparke, "Between Demythologizing," p. 3.

¹⁴ Barbara Godard, "The Politics of Representation: Some Native Canadian Women Writers," *Canadian Literature*, no. 124-5 (1990), p. 190; also cited in Sparke, "Between Demythologizing," p. 7.

¹⁵ Godard, "The Politics of Representation," p. 7; Sparke, "Between Demythologizing," p. 7.

¹⁶ In her essay "Reading Shawnadithit's Drawings," Fiona Polack illuminates some of Howley's editing habits, including "a tendency to elide Cormack's missteps, [while he] reproduced Shawnadithit's progressive alterations" (Polack, "Reading Shawnadithit's Drawings," footnote 95).

¹⁷ Sparke, "Between Demythologizing," p. 11.

¹⁸ Sparke, "Between Demythologizing," p. 11.

¹⁹ Sparke, "Between Demythologizing," p. 8.

²⁰ Polack, "Reading Shawnadithit's Drawings," p. 3.

²¹ Carl Leggo, "Who Speaks for Extinct Nations? The Beothuk and Narrative Voice," *Literator: Tydskrif Vir Besondere En Vergelykende Taal- En Literatuurstudie/Journal of Literary Criticism, Comparative Linguistics and Literary Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1 (1995), p. 38.

²² Leggo, "Who Speaks," p. 38.

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PLATE LIST

Figure 1: Shawnadithit, Sketch I, “Captain Buchan’s Visit to the Red Indians 1810-11 When the Two Marines were Killed,” VIIIA-555, pencil on paper, courtesy of The Rooms Corporation of Newfoundland and Labrador, Provincial Museum Division, St. John’s, Canada.

Figure 2: Shawnadithit, Sketch II, “Captain Buchan’s Visit in 1810-11 at the South Side of the Lake/ The Taking of Mary March,” VIIIA-556, pencil on paper, courtesy of The Rooms Corporation of Newfoundland and Labrador, Provincial Museum Division, St. John’s, Canada.

Figure 3: Shawnadithit, Sketch IV “Last Remnant of the Beothuk at the Exploits River. Beothuk Camps on Lakes inland from Badgers Bay and on the Exploits River, in the Winter of 1822-23,” VIIIA-558, pencil on paper, courtesy of The Rooms Corporation of Newfoundland and Labrador, Provincial Museum Division, St. John’s, Canada.