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His Grotesque Swagger; or, Morgan Benson, The Black Joke, and the Nineteenth-Century Target Parade

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ABSTRACT

His Grotesque Swagger; or, Morgan Benson, The Black Joke, and the Nineteenth-Century Target Parade

This dissertation examines anti-Black race-based ideologies prevalent in early American musical theatre through a multi-faceted case study concerning Morgan Benson, a child actor of the early musical theatre stage, Target Parades of the long nineteenth-century, and The Black Joke. This is an excavation project, seeking to unearth conceptual underpinnings for The Black Joke, a euphemism for prostitution, sex trafficking, and race-based subjections popular throughout the eighteenth-century. Beginning with Benson's street and stage performances of the 1870s, this dissertation moves backwards to the 1730s to uncover how legacies of The Black Joke persisted across two continents for nearly two centuries. Ultimately, the dissertation seeks to stitch together various material artifacts of The Black Joke trace, returning, in the end, to performances of Morgan Benson and the impact his stage work had on audiences just prior to the turn of the twentieth century. This dissertation offers a methodological approach for treating archival scraps seemingly cast aside in the face of racial inclusion, daring to confront traumatic stories of anti-Black and race-based violence as they were offered to general publics as various forms of light entertainment.

Across an extended metaphor of walking on parade, this dissertation examines the labor of actors, street performers, and hired daily workers as they are caught out walking in and amongst the public gaze. The focus of this examination is placed squarely on sites of reception, seeking to trouble

how crowds, audiences - publics - were conditioned to receive abject performances of black subjectivity as a base condition of being. The argument advanced in this study claims audiences were groomed to delight in the appearance of black death as a form of entertainment, and, over time, were encouraged to collapse visible, scripted signs of targeted black death as a pre-condition for ontological blackness in the United States of America. Systematically moving backwards in time from the street and stage performances of Morgan Benson as a target-bearer for militia parades of Manhattan throughout the 1870s, to weekly occurrences of Target Parades in New York City from early- to mid-nineteenth century, to the development of The Black Joke in London during the eighteenth century, this dissertation locates an organizing conceptual and paradigmatic frame for not only Target Parades and the Target-bearer figure but also their eventual disappearance from archives of New York City, musical theatre history, and critical race studies. Together, these three bits of historical data form a prism through which reception for anti-Black sentiments on commercial musical theatre stages may be theorized. The grounded theory advanced in this dissertation offers theatre performance historians and genealogists a method for discovering previously veiled performances of Black actors within the professional apparatus of commercial musical theatre.

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PREFACE

This dissertation is for people who look like me. People who have been unfairly burdened with the task of carrying the target of other people's ire. This dissertation brings to light how and why other people who do not look like me have felt justified in attaching targets of their ire onto bodies such as mine. The goal of this dissertation is to afford others who look like me the release of unburdening targets placed upon them by other people who do not understand the harm, violence, and danger associated with making targeted objects out of other human beings. This is not to argue that people who look like me are not human, however historically defined. This is not to cast aside the forces of human subjection that have left me in such a position as to have to fight for my right to exist without being the target for someone else's burden. This dissertation is a revelation of historic situations and circumstances that have allowed for the targeting of Black men in the United States of America by non-Black individuals who neither feel complicit nor responsible for making others feel less than human. Whether or not such individuals are able to see themselves within this critique is not the aim, and, further, taking arms to prevent such reception from further continuances is not my goal. My goal is simply to let others who look like me know that the burden of being a Target-bearer of The Black Joke designed for other people's good humor is not our responsibility. We are valid in our wish to lay down the target; we are affirmed in our desire to no longer be The Black Joke.

Carrying the burden of The Black Joke as a prerequisite for belonging in the United States of America is a false myth placed upon Black people, specifically Black men. Unfortunately, a considerable faction of the populace feels otherwise, their education in history, popular culture,

media and entertainment further reifying the notion. Though by name, The Black Joke has all but disappeared from contemporary use, it will be argued that for nearly two centuries on both sides of the Atlantic, the concept and term circulated widely enough to cement a way of thinking for generations to follow that Black people, on site alone, are targeted for death. And while this dissertation will attempt to reveal through visual and discursive analysis the ends to which popular perception has been made to believe Black people carry the burden of racial subjectivity as a pre-condition from birth, ultimately the effects of a such a study rely upon the reader themselves. Inasmuch as this dissertation will show how outward perception exacts great power and influence over the lives of those subjected few so targeted, ultimately how one is received depends greatly on those standing in the space of reception. And this is what this dissertation is after, a deconstruction of sites of reception where The Black Joke and racial subjection have so conspired to mark bodies such as mine targets for other people's ire prior to being conceived of as a subject of our own delight.

for

William Horace Michael

(July 14, 1927 – September 18, 2019)

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FIGURES

I. Introduction: The Case of Black Suffering | 1886

When is walking an act of theatre? When is walking a melodramatic act? When is walking art? When is walking further evidence of "The Case of Black Suffering?" "The Case of Black Suffering" is a riff on Fred Moten's "The Case of Blackness," itself a "spin on the title of the fifth chapter of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, infamously mistranslated as 'the fact of blackness'."[1]

[1] Moten 2008, 179.

Moten argues that in the space between "the fact of blackness" and its more recent translation as "the lived experience of the black" there is the "case" of the thing itself - blackness - functioning "as a kind of broken bridge or cut suspension between the two."[2] Thinking of the case as a bridge between the fact and the lived experience of Black ontological being, Moten links Heidegger's philosophical ruminations of an empty jug to the thingliness of an objectified Black being: the object state of the empty vessel mirroring the existential void of experiential blackness. "'The Lived Experience of the Black' bears not only a lament over Fanon's own relegation to the status of object; it also contains a lament that it suppresses over the general annihilation of the thing to which transcendental phenomenology contributes...in what remains untranslatable as its direction toward the things themselves."[3]

In what remains untranslatable resides the case itself. This case, the skin of blackness, circulates as an "object in the midst of other objects" indexing for Fanon the psychological state of becoming "the thing against which all other subjects take their bearing."[4] And yet this case, the frame of the Black subject, represents to Moten "cause for black optimism or, at least, some black operations" where between fact and experience "the object vibrates against its frame like a resonator, and troubled air gets out. The air of the thing that escapes enframing is what I'm interested in—an often unattended movement that accompanies largely unthought positions and appositions."[5] The agency unleashed from an oppositional gaze, the veiw emerging from "largely unthought positions

[2] Moten 2008, 180.
[3] ibid, 184.
[4] ibid, 180.
[5] ibid, 182.

and appositions," possesses the radical charge of a Black subjective perspective conceiving of the world on its own terms.

This dissertation employs a methodology of walking to encapsulate a range of questions concerning purported phenomenologies of Black subjectivity, specifically inside the air such subjects may breathe as cases of Black Suffering.[6] First and foremost: how are Black subjects made to feel beholden to how it is they are seen while doing labor, especially when the labor being done is locked inside the mundane, is itself an effect of merely being seen while walking (to work)? When reception arrives ready-made because of other people's inherited, entrenched, and passed along observations of power and surveillance, how are those viewed upon subjects ever able to assert their own conception of embodied subjectivity? When is the mere act of walking an occasion for subjection? Saidiya Hartman's work on coffles and the performative insistence of race-based subjects being created through reception is recalled, for the theatre of Black subjectivity as it is played before an audience begins in such staged rehearsals of walking-as-enslaved labor.[7] The economic consequences of the coffle on parade, the auction block being the end of parades of free labor walking, demands serious consideration be given to legacies of Black subjects walking in public and the possibilities for subjectivity when given such a vexed and monstrous story of origin. That the Black subject emerged

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[6] Though serious consideration has been given to works detailing contours of Afro-Pessimism, a departure is taken in what follows in that the air of a breath locked inside the laboring Black skin on parade is sought for discovery and attention. Attached to the breathing materiality of a biological subject, it will be argued, there exists a potentially asserting itself as an essence of being within the commodification of raced bodies. This is not to say that such a breath may not have already been prescribed to a capitalist agenda of use and exploitation, or that such a breath itself weren't already co-opted toward purposes of capital wealth prior to expulsion and release. Merely, this dissertation seeks to locate wherein such a breath resides through bone, musculature, being, and skin. To recognize the play Black people play upon their awareness of not only having the impulse for breathing breaths but also the effects of such a breath having been breathed in a manner akin to knowing how all other beings - Black or otherwise - are able to breathe. See Moten 2008, 182.

[7] Hartman 1997, 32-36.

within a visual apparatus of slave labor on parade for the economic gain of others endows genealogical legacies of material Black skin the potential to always be seen as ghostly reminders of free labor walking, something more than merely subjects on display.[8] When is the being of Black subjectivity ever dislocated from visual perceptions of subjugated blackness as prescribed from inside the minds of others? When is the other ever caught-out for having misrecognized their own perceptions of Black being and where are there arenas staged for such redress? The evidence presented below seeks to link Hartman's work on the coffle to Target Parades of the nineteenth century to focus on lessons learned from sites of staged Black targets who rehearsed Black death. What power is enfolded within dynamics of surveillance activated by the appearance of a Black subject walking? And how much of that burden is bourn onto the purported Black subject themselves?

This dissertation locates where and when feelings for Black suffering were grown in the hearts and minds of audiences, in public on the street and onstage in front of an audience. How it is a feeling for Black suffering becomes engendered in the response of an audience as a performative response to scenes of targeting-as-theatrical enjoyment. The concern here is not for the making of Black suffering but rather how Black suffering is made to feel for others. The mobilization of Black suffering as an effect of the theatrical experience designed specifically to encourage audiences to feel a certain way toward Black subjects is what this dissertation seeks to discover. Examining instances of Black suffering within the frame of theatre gets at the creation of Black subjectivities, the making of Black subjects specifically to be thought of and captured in the public square first and foremost

[8] "Ghostly matters are part of the 'something more' because haunting is one of the most important places where meaning—comprehension—and force intersect." See Gordon 2008, 194.

by their very own skin, their monolithic blackness. This dissertation explores performative demands placed upon Black skin where Black skin is merely caught walking in public. To this end, the elemental act of walking in Black skin is considered as a matter for reception: how is the body caught walking made into a material Black object-cum-subject thing by accumulated histories of scripted rehearsals for witnessing Black suffering on parade.

Walking as a methodology immediately recalls constitutionals taken by Rousseau, Baudelaire, Dickens, Twain, Benjamin, and Thoreau.[9] Seemingly universal, though often dissimilar enough, these walkabouts deliver multiple takes of authored phenomenological being, accepting the event of passing through life unencumbered by labor as an already accepted granted right. The labor of producing intellectual thought while out and about on the stroll registers differently when the act of walking is itself enfolded within an imperative to produce oneself as a body engaged in acts of labor. The body out walking on parade as part of the slave trade coffle - "those shackled and bound for market being cajoled to sing" - presents a curious case for philosophical wanderings regarding the act of walking.[10]

The slave body is nothing if not that which is meant to labor. Labor on behalf of the owner, who conceives of the laboring slave body as one object amongst others. Before being owned, this enslaved body is brought to market, walked onto the platform of their own objectivity, the site from where their value as a property is to be determined and sold. Prior to arriving at the auction block, the slave body is walked to market where within the walking is a display of the slave body's potential worth as a commodity. The potential for labor within the walker is glimpsed by the buyer who can

[9] Joy 2014, 25n1.
[10] Hartman 1997, 32-33.

assess the body walking before them and assign a projected value onto that object walking, ideally in a profitable way. How the slave walks the coffle parade suggests how the property will profit the owner ready to buy. What is it to walk as a profit for those who are there watching, whether the one walking conceives of themselves as an object or a property walking at the behest of others to buy? When is walking the street already commensurate with an idea of one being a streetwalker for hire, the act of walking alone signaling that the body walking is already ready to be sold?

In the end this is a question that will be asked of Morgan Benson, research subject and stage-actor-cum-street-performer. Benson, an actor-performer of the proto-American musical theatre comedy stage, was first caught-out walking on the stroll of a Target Parade on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in the early 1870s. The occasion is succinctly detailed in 1955 by E. J. Kahn, Jr., writing that "Harrigan and Hart had watched covetously as [Benson] lugged a target through the streets in a bona-fide excursion, when [he] was ten years old, and whom they had promptly engaged to perform that chore in their sketch."[11] That sketch became the centerpiece of a theatrical dynasty, a combination responsible for innovations in the theatrical craft of musical theatre for nearly a century following. Describing their contemporaneous popularity, James H. Dormon notes that "(i)n the boisterous, sometimes raucous world of popular entertainment in Gilded Age New York, the comedy team of Edward Green Harrigan and Tony Hart (Anthony J. Cannon) reigned supreme."[12] As scholarship on musical theatre comedy and Broadway musical theatre emerged from mid-twentieth century on, Harrigan and Hart's place in foundation stories for the hybrid commercial-art

[11] Kahn 1955, 85.
[12] Dormon 1992, 21.

theatre form were all but solidified. Studies of their influence emerged relatively quickly, with Kahn, Jr.'s popular book soon complemented with critical study and doctoral investigation.[13]

At the scene of the "bona-fide excursion" where Benson was caught-out walking, Harrigan and Hart are seen "watching covetously" as Benson performs his "chore" for a pseudo-military parade. His chore, as Kahn, Jr. would have it, involves carrying a wooden target for men marching before him, armed and in preparation for an afternoon of target-shooting. The chore of Morgan Benson, fashioned after scores of enumerated men performing the same task for countless target parades of years before, had, by the time of Morgan Benson, become something of comedic sight gag. Capped in a widely worn period-appropriate hat, Benson's target-bearer figure reminded gathered crowds of the precarious situation of the Black male subject, the assumed target of a militia member's gun. That the walking Black subject might metaphorically be conceived of as the target for rehearsals of civil defense, the wooden bull's-eye target carried aloft makes the metaphoric material.[14]

How publics - crowds gathered in the social sphere for the purpose of watching parades, audiences gathered in the theatre for the purpose of watching reality onstage - objectify others in pursuit of their own pleasure is the matter of grave concern.[15] Specifically, what are the lengths

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[13] See Turner 1956; Burns 1969; Moody 1980; and Koger 1984. Harrigan and Hart's body of work has attracted historiographic interest, with their staging and performance of ethnic identities on stage prompting theorizations and critiques of the making of white subjectivities. See Sudhulter 1996; Aman 2009; and Granshaw 2007, 2014.

[14] "While I accept the theatre scholar's claim that there is a threshold between rehearsal and performance, I take the performance scholar's part in asserting that rehearsals are events in their own right, and insist, in opposition to most historians, that rehearsal is a viable category for explaining an empirical testing-out, that play-acting a possible future is significant evidence of how *civil defense planning* is expressed through emplotment, and that producing 'knowledge' about this particular kind of future through embodied exercises is an important aspect of Cold War history" (emphasis mine). See Davis 2007, 88.

[15] See Hartman 1997, 23-48. The spectre of violence attendant to sites of enjoyment crafted around the subjugation of raced bodies reveals "the affiliations of white enjoyment and black subjection and the affective dimensions of mastery and servitude" exhibited in both bona-fide target parades and the theatre of Harrigan and Hart.

publics move through to objectify others in their pursuit of joy? More importantly, how are horrific and traumatic scenes played out in public to obscure the suffering of others? The premise worked upon in this dissertation is that public consumption of Black suffering and targeted death have been made palatable through series of ongoing scripted acts of staged subjection. How Black subjects were integrated into public, civic society reveals stories of how enforced acceptance of Black subjection, subjugation, disavowal, removal, and death, was suggested as a pleasurable effect of maintaining a civil society.

Kahn, Jr.'s description of *The Mulligan Guards*, Harrigan and Hart's burlesque of The Target Parade featuring Morgan Benson's target-bearer, mentions the pompous swagger of a colored boy sauntering in the background of the former pair's adored stage antics. Indeed, across a range of press devoted to the theatre of the 1870s, Benson's swagger is continuously noted and highlighted as an integral feature of the popular ten-minute sketch. A *St. Louis Dispatch* press clipping from January 20th, 1886 defined Benson by his "unapproachable swagger", a moniker sent across national newswires as publics were altered to "The Boy of the Mulligan Guards—Dying in a Marion Street Tenement House." That even in death Benson's stage act of carrying death's target is generously cloaked in an "unapproachable swagger" signals a certain cross-wired effect of reception where the violence of death is received in the guise of boisterous outrageousness. What was Benson doing with his target, an object turning his parade walk into a chore of carrying death to its field of execution? How had Benson so cloaked his own targeted death to be able to perform its contours as a display of grotesque swagger?

Regarding the grotesque swagger of Morgan Benson, my question from the start concerns the felt experience of walking, as a thing done, in relation to how walking is taken, or seen, by others

as an act completed. So often has a Black child been caught out while merely walking down the street that the nature of the walk seems to matter, insomuch as their being Black matters in a direct relation to how they are being seen being caught-out by others. Being-caught out as a child recalls discourses by bell hooks on the precocious nature of Black children, their disciplining involving both a celebration of an inquisitive nature as well as the danger of being an inquiring Black subject. Talking back, an aural equivalent to the visual effect of being caught-out, meant, for hooks, "speaking as an equal to an authority figure…daring to disagree" and "sometimes just…having an opinion."[16] Though exposing herself to the condemnation of concerned elders worried about a precocious Black girl daring to speak her mind, hooks found "that initial act of talking back outside the home was empowering," an affirmation of the brilliance of her own mind denied to her by perceived reception of blackness as less than worthy of attention.[17] What hooks found along a path of rediscovery uniting her authorial presence on the page with the child talking back of her youth was that "that act of speech, of 'talking back,' that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject—the liberated voice."[18] hooks found a liberated voice in dangerous acts of talking back, an effect linked to Benson's daring swagger captured publicly in grotesque acts of being caught-out.

hooks writes of the danger of talking back, for "to make yourself heard if you were a child was to invite punishment, the back-hand lick, the slap across the face that would catch you unaware."[19] To survive in a society of anti-Black race-based perception often means the acquisition

[16] hooks 1989, 5.
[17] ibid, 9.
[18] ibid, 9.
[19] ibid, 5.

and display of performative sensibilities theorized by Iton, a play in respectability politics expressed as a means of staying alive. Those elders chastising hooks did so not only to control the adult impulses of a child but also to ensure the awareness of the child for the ways in which adults subject all raced subjects to threats of violence for merely being. "Questioning authority, raising issues that were not deemed appropriate" could mean real danger for the child bold enough to assert their voice in spaces were their kind of talk was not appreciated.[20] In the absence of speech, the look back of the Black child similarly invites threats of violence and targeted death. For a Black child to look back into the eyes of white reception has historically led to violent ends, the trove of lynching stories of the early-twentieth century often sparked by the audacity of a Black subject to return the stare of those watching. In the lead-up to violent deaths of youths such as Emmett Till, there is all too often a scenario detailed of a Black youth who dared to not only look into the eyes of those watching but also who dared to allow themselves to be seen in the act of gazing at the non-Black other. The audacity to look back made more outrageous by the arrogance of a Black youth to allow themselves being seen doing such.

In speech, being caught out registers in two ways in a manner made apparent through printed text. The similarly spoken condition of "being caught out" versus "being: caught-out" is suggested as follows: the former, in verb form, disclosing the phenomenological event of walking as an embodied experience; the latter, in noun form, representing the "caught" sensation of being targeted and trapped as one isolated and surveilled while walking. I propose a thinking of the experience of being: caught-out wherein an oppositional gaze is activated from within the position of being caught out. hooks theorizes an oppositional gaze out from her own experience of visually talking back. As a child,

[20] hooks 1997, 7.

hooks learned "(t)here is power in looking," as the "hard intense direct looks" of a Black child registered to her Southern community "as gestures of resistance, challenges to authority."[21] In her desire to stare (while also talking back) hooks cultivated a nuanced appreciation for what it meant to embody a position of denied ability, of having to stifle an impulse to be the one gazing upon a world subjecting her to a raced and gendered space of existence. hooks' oppositional gaze emerged as a response to monolithic constructions of the gaze, as a means of capturing her right as an embodied individual to not only be the one looked upon but also to be the one able to look back. hooks writes of how:

> Spaces of agency exist for black people, wherein we can both interrogate the gaze of the Other but also look back, and at one another, naming what we see. The "gaze" has been and is a site of resistance for colonized black people globally. Subordinates in relations of power learn experientially that there is a critical gaze, one that "looks" to document, one that is oppositional. In resistance struggle, the power of the dominated to assert agency by claiming and cultivating "awareness" politicizes "looking" relations—one learns to look a certain way in order to resist.[22]

Being: caught-out while being caught out encapsulates the experience of being seen on parade while simultaneously appreciating what it is to be seen.

Both valences of being caught out/being: caught-out are projected to capture the interior and exterior of Black subjects seen walking while out on parade. Tina M. Campt's offering of *A Black Gaze: Artists Changing How We See* complicates traditions of gaze theory to unleash "some of the

[21] hooks 2015, 115.
[22] ibid, 116.

multiple meanings of the gaze that are impossible to imagine when…understood as always already tethered to a prior injury or a structure of dominance."[23] Riffing on hooks' oppositional gaze, Campt invites thinking of an "open-ended choreography" of acts and practices that would constitute a Black gaze. "Recognizing that Black life is constituted through vulnerability to the overwhelming force of anti-blackness and white supremacy, and yet not capitulating to *only* be known by these same forces" clears space for a Black gaze that both sees and is seen. "The creativity, ingenuity, cunning, and courage that allow us to acknowledge the forces that would define us, and yet not succumb to that definition, is the modus operandi of a Black gaze."[24] To engage a Black gaze is to secure a response to the experience of being caught out that rejects Black subjectivity as stand-in position, a mode of ready-made engagement for a world already able to position its black participants as marked.

Campt's definition of a Black gaze stems directly from hooks' oppositional gaze, the historical framing of a monolithic gaze theory set in relation to Black subjects setting a stage for looking back as an aesthetic practice of resistance and denial. Campt writes of hooks:

> Recalling her own childhood, when daring to direct intense looks of scrutiny at adults was interpreted as a challenge to authority, she links this to a longer history of policing Black people's looks and the authority of the gaze that tyrannized enslaved Black communities which carried forward into Jim Crow America and continues to deny Black subjects the right to gaze. But hooks counters that this legacy of policing the gaze had the opposite effect as attempts to control their gaze made Black folks dare to look, while attempts to repress their gazes produced an equally rebellious

[23] Campt 2021, 22.
[24] ibid, 23.

> desire to look that she defined as "an oppositional gaze." She explains, 'By courageously looking, we defiantly declared: "Not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality." Even in the worst circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency.[25]

A Black gaze conceived of as possessing a utopian desire to change reality, the scene of a being: caught-out is portrayed here as a site of agency wherein an actor caught in the act of looking at themselves being looked at unlocks an ability to catch precociousness, to witness virtuosic acts of subjected Black walkers claiming their own subjectivity.

Ultimately, a coupling of looking back and being: caught-out while looking back, will "set into motion a choreography of practices" where Morgan Benson's grotesque swagger may be understood as a virtuosic act of altering sites of reception.[26] The divergent response of Benson's stage performance as one of both swagger and grotesque is argued as a bit of self-styling I theorize Benson to have authored. This leap of critical fabulation comes at a moment where we must allow for the archive to reveal to us features of stories not readily legible on the page. And yet, owing to a particular breaking down of historical context, there are possibilities that we must allow for concerning Benson's staged act simply due to an appearance of reasonable doubt. Refusing the foreclosure of such a thing never having had happened, Benson is theorized as being in control of his reception as the one with grotesque swagger. The possibility that some such thing *did* happen remains although

[25] Campt 2021, 37-38.
[26] ibid, 22.

there exists no means of offering such proof of Benson's agency.[27] We simply have the very real possibility that such a thing may have gone down. The critical fabulation exerted by Hartman in supposing love between two girls holding hands at the bottom of the ocean opens a door for what a Black gaze might know of an absented subject positionality. In "Venus in Two Acts," Hartman asserts pressure on the archive to deliver a factual "no" where such a fact could never be proven, allowing her to spark an idea in her reader's imagination that such a hand-holding may have occurred.[28]

This fabulation opens the mind of the archivist and what they are in search of, particularly when confronted with a possible avenue or path of discovery where, if followed, material evidence might thereafter emerge. Though records of Benson's stage act remain extant, it may be deciphered from his reception in press that his labor as an actor revealed a spilt-personality response from his audience, an acknowledgement of both the joy received from his work effected onstage while performing a chore of violent and deadly consequence.

On the tenth of April, 1876, the Theatre Comique presented Harrigan and Hart's "The Gallant 69th" by Edward Harrigan at the Bardavon Opera House in Poughkeepsie, New York. Morgan Benson was twelve years old. Poughkeepsie, NY is located 70 miles north of New York City, on the east bank of the Hudson River, 60 miles south of the state capital in Albany, NY. A mercantile city, Poughkeepsie is but one of nearly 90 cities visited by Harrigan and company on their national

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[27] Writing in 1980, Richard Moody reveals that "(e)nough of this early ten-minute sketch has been preserved to know how primitive it was, how much it depended on 'gags and business'" (46). At present, however, no such documentation exists. Absent proof of Benson's performance, a decision has been made by this author to strategically delay procurement of primary evidence detailing Benson's labor as a street performer and actor to sharply focus instead upon sites of reception where Benson was caught out. While this evidence, too, remains scant, enough circumstantial detail exists regarding nineteenth-century Target Parades and the concept of The Black Joke to justify delaying Benson's subjective embodied particularities in deference to an examination of those who were caught-out watching Benson perform his act.

[28] Hartman 2008, 2.

tour of 1875 to 1876. Harrigan and his partner, Anthony Hart, had found success on the variety stages of New York City since 1872, playing full seasons at Josh Hart's Theatre Comique at 514 Broadway in Lower Manhattan. However, at the close of the 1875 season, Josh Hart relinquished his position as Theatre Manager at the Comique, and Harrigan made the unorthodox decision of touring his variety bill across the nation in a series of one-night, week-long, and multiple week engagements at entertainment halls across the nation.[29] The company was engaged at the Bardavon Opera in Poughkeepsie, NY in early April, near the end of the year-long tour. By this time, Morgan Benson had already become a national sensation.[30]

The situation of the target parade was taken up by Edward Harrigan and Tony Hart as a variety burlesque, a ten-minute sketch lampooning the ineptitude of firefighters attempting to display military prowess. As will be discussed in Chapter Two, Black men were fixtures for parading Engine company brigades, charged with tending to overall maintenance and functioning of fire engine machines. In addition to providing support for volunteer firefighters, these men had the task of carrying targets out to the field for firing practice. Ultimately bringing an individuality to an otherwise banal circumstance of Black visibility, Morgan Benson achieved national recognition for his stage performance portraying the Target-bearer in Harrigan and Hart's burlesque. However,

[29] Moody 1980, 57.

[30] "All the patrons of Harrigan & Hart's old-time comedies will remember a little darky who followed the Mulligan Guards in their famous marches...He walked with a grotesque swagger that always brought forth the applause and laughter of the entire house. Harrigan was captivated with the swagger, and the boy became one of the institutions of the great combination. If boyhood were perennial the little darky still might have been an attraction of the Harrigan half of the divorced firm." Anonymous, 1886.

Benson is the rare individualized named subject amongst a sea of Black men who were generically accepted as laborers owing to the mere act of walking.[31]

"The Case of Black Suffering" that is merely walking in public finds another routine exceptional performance of being in the Morgan Benson example, wherein a theatre technician trained in the arts of street performance elevated a science of stage acting to effect a deconstruction of the site of reception. Benson's name is put forth as a reminder of the many names called out to mark the continual state-sanctioned act of targeted Black death. Benson's case is not exceptional, in that it resides with a host of other hashtagged names now coding the seemingly endless occasion of Black men who were killed while caught out walking. The hashtag, particularly as it has come into a linked familiarity with the Black Lives Matter movement of the early-twenty-first century, represents a significant development in the perceptions of Black being.

#blacklivesmatter was named hashtag-of-the-year at the twenty-fifth annual American Dialect Society's word-of-the-year contest, winning nearly 95% of the vote (in a category newly minted for 2014).[32] Word-of-the- year contests gained popularity at the turn of the twenty-first century, but the American Dialect Society [ADS] claims to have been the first to award a prize annually. Their word-of-the-year selection began in 1990 when the society, founded in 1889, chose *bushlips* (as in: "read my lips, no more taxes") as its inaugural word.[33] Subsequent choices have ranged from the topical

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[31] "The Ninth New York Regiment…an organization legitimately in the state militia, was not in the habit of quenching its thirst with alcoholic spirits while on the march, but when it paraded in honor of the visiting Grand Duke Alexis in 1872, its rear ranks consisted of an entire company of uniformed Negro bartenders, whose only weapons were ice buckets and bottles of champagne." See Kahn 1955, 82.

[32] In the word-of-the-year contest, *#blacklivesmatter* received nearly 90% of the electorate, garnering 196 votes compared to the 24 votes cast for the remaining four entries: bae, columbusing, even, and manspreading. See American Dialect Society. "2014 Word of the Year is '#blacklivesmatter'." January 9, 2015, accessed May 1, 2015. http://www.americandialect.org/2014-word-of-the-year-is-blacklivesmatter.

[33] Since 1990, word-of-the-year contests have become annual affairs for several outlets, including Oxford English Dictionary, Merriam-Webster Dictionary, and Dictionary.com. Though other contests enjoy greater

(*chad* in 2000, *bailout* in 2008) to the aesthetic (*metrosexual* for 2003, *red state, blue state, purple state* in 2004), and have, at times, bordered on the quizzical (*mom*, referring to the emergent political bloc of "soccer moms" in 1996, *Not!* in 1992). In a statement dated January 9, 2015, the Society described the "longest-running such vote anywhere" as "far from a solemn occasion" with no pretense toward "officially inducting words into the English language"; rather, their "acts of fun" serve to remind linguists, practicing and otherwise, "that language change is normal, ongoing, and entertaining." And yet, there appears to be a provocative claim embedded in the choice of *#blacklivesmatter* as the ADS word-of-the-year, an illegitimate grammatical provocation that outpaces content analysis of whether or not Black lives do, in fact, matter (or not).

What the Society registered in its 2014 vote is that the enunciative purchase of the hashtag registers as a linguistic force capable of transforming the complex concepts of a phrase, clause, or sentence into the verbal utterance of a word.[34] The membership overwhelmingly approved *#blacklivesmatter* as a lexical unit that "constitut[es] the basic units of meaningful speech used in forming a sentence or utterance" to express an idea or concept, term or expression. *#blacklivesmatter* articulates what the words Black, lives, and matter cannot be considered on their own terms. Assembled ADS voters "sat on air-conditioning vents and on the floor" crammed into a space that was "standing room only, with graduate students piled 10 rows deep at the back," and recognized

visibility than the American Dialect Society's selection, the latter maintains that they are the only organization whose choice is "not tied to corporate interest."

[34] Oxford English Dictionary defines a *word* as a "speech, utterance, verbal expression;" a *clause* as "a distinct part or member of a sentence, *esp.* one containing a subject and predicate;" and a *sentence* as "a series of words in connected speech or writing, forming the grammatically complete expression of a single thought." The question that I wish to bring into focus here concerns the transformation of a "complete expression of a single thought" articulated by the sentence into the "verbal expression" of a word. If the subject and predicate of the clause 'black lives matter' is collapsed into a single verbal expression, then, by comparison, how does the word Black, uttered figuratively, represent living matter?

#blacklivesmatter – the word, not the hashtag — in its ability to circulate as a single conceptual thought formed from a combination of words while nevertheless circulating as a word itself. In this sense, a question to be asked is how the hashtag functions to reconcile the potentially disparate concepts of blackness and liveliness vis-a-vis the thingliness of matter.

New Words Committee chair Ben Zimmer, who presided over the annual meeting, acknowledged the neologism of the clause in disguise: "By traditional standards, a hashtag that combines three words would not be considered a word." Yet he went on to comment that the ubiquitous nature of *#blacklivesmatter* in the American discourse of 2014 signals a need to address the influence that text-based communications is having on guttural speech acts in an age of social media proliferation. "Clearly the membership feels that it's a time to recognize that hashtags are an innovative linguistic form that deserve our attention." When *hashtag* itself was crowned word-of-the-year in 2012, the Society deemed it relevant not because of how the symbol attached to words already in existence (forming new sites of linguistic legibility), but more succinctly for how it has been made for use on Twitter as a social and political platform "to mark a topic or make a commentary." The selection of *#blacklivesmatter* as word-of-the-year in 2014 furthers an agenda begun in 2012 where the linguistic force of a hashtag symbol makes possible new cultural-conceptual meanings from a string of dissimilar words.

#blacklivesmatter, as a word, throws into disarray the notion that Black, a word uttered figuratively and alone, explicitly references a life that matters. Onstage, the visible Black body references and represents to audiences a case for the materiality of Black being, a coming together, codification and objectification of the situation of Black being offstage, on the street. By considering how the onstage, realistic demands of racial representation manifests itself in the performance of

Morgan Benson, I seek to illuminate the significance of separating histories of visual representation from experiences of its ocular occurrence. My goal here is to situate both the musical event and the codified hashtag for Black existence within conversations of legitimacy; this is to say to consider each - fact and lived - as illegitimate indicators of larger formal shifts occurring at the level of shared conceptualizations of visual difference. Morgan Benson's staged performance of carrying a target similarly disrupts simple recourse to race as color as matter, exposing how disparate concepts of race continually require (colored) bodies of difference to appear in order to allow for human subjectivities to be known.

What work is required to align names constantly and continually erased with the situational contexts through which those names have been deemed worthy for exceptional notation? Why symbolically mark a name and demand its continual utterance when there exists no requirement for comprehending the circumstances and situational contexts against which the name is made exceptional? There is seemingly no end to the names still yet to be discovered from lost archives, names of lost ones discarded on floors of racial subjection as legacy. When does the exceptional name become the rule for a particular quality of Black suffering?

The hashtag is a grammatical mark doing speech act work on a visibly-read page. The articulation of a phrase as read versus a phrase as said highlights a gap that exists in between saying and reading. I will argue that in just such a gap resides a case such as Morgan Benson's, an integral character of the musical comedy stage necessary for the times in which he performed. His act, his bit, his chore, originated as a street performance that was then brought onto the theatrical stage, making his labor as an actor much more difficult to assess. In his labor onstage, precisely in how it was received, a particular kind of exquisite genius is found owing to the strange particularities of art

imitating life. A particular strain of genius is to be afforded Benson's stage act reception, especially when considered through a lens of Western genealogies of acting science and the study of actors and their technique. Relating the work of a stage actor with the evolution of race as an embodied concept we find the virtuosity in Benson's theatrical performance. Aligning archives of Benson's reception in material histories of Broadway's musical theatre with discursive and dramaturgical histories for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century common vernaculars and jargons for race serves to afford Benson agency in imagining himself as conduit for the grotesque in possession of a well-earned swagger.

The self-choreographed movements of Benson's street performance inspired a staged dance captured between Benson's skin and the material objectivity of the wood target he carries. Captured in-between Benson's skin and the target he holds is the air of the thing escaping from Morgan Benson act, the fact of and the lived experience of his blackness. This dissertation fabulates Benson's dance with his stationary object as a radical performed act of defiance, a staring back at those institutional forces that would so casually link his walking waking life with a pre-ordained targeted death. "The Case of Black Suffering" is argued on behalf of Morgan Benson, a child actor in search of a restitution of reputation, a re-constitution of a particular trademark and copyright of originality owing to his performance of grotesque swagger on the stage of American musical theatre comedy. Such a case is being made not so much on behalf of the suffering itself, but rather on behalf of a virtuosic genius that bespeaks a spark of indigenous theatrical performance in play on the streets and stages of nineteenth century Manhattan. This dissertation argues for an archival appreciation of a utopian longing offered by Benson's miniscule archive demanding he be afforded agency, he being credited with doing the work to produce a mixed-reception response of delight and horror.

Zakiyyah Iman Jackson writes in the introduction to *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World* that "(t)here has historically been a persistent question regarding the quality of black(ened) people's humanity," a question that has led to an alignment of blackness, or Black things, with that of abject animality.[35] Jackson confronts "the perspective of a history of blackness's bestialization and thingification: the process of imagining black people as an empty vessel, a nonbeing, an ontological zero, coupled with the violent imposition of colonial myths and racial hierarchy" to displace "prevailing conceptions of 'the human' found in Western science and philosophy." Writing on "the continued disregard for black life in the Western world," Alexander G. Weheliye posits "Black life (as) that which must be constitutively abjected—and as such has represented the negative ontological ground for the Western order of things at least for the last five hundred years—but can never be included in the Western world order, especially the category of Man."[36] Weheliye notes that in his capitalization of Man he follows in a tradition established by Sylvia Wynter whereby Man points to and references "the modern, secular, and Western version of the human that differentiates full humans from not-quite-humans and non-humans on the basis of biology and economics," a precursor to Jackson's insistence concerning the coupling of abject animality and Black being (10). Wynter's construction of the human vis-á-vis Man, and the line of thought sparking from those who have followed in her wake, have brought succinct clarity to her foundational claim that "the overrepresentation of Man as if it were the human…legitimate(s) the subordination of the world and well-being of the latter to those of the former."[37] Concepts of 'the human', Man, abject animality, and Black thingliness demand a fundamental reconsideration of

[35] Jackson 2020, 1
[36] Weheliye 2014, 5
[37] Wynter 2003, 267

how Western epistemologies bring forth subjectivity in relation to Black being, asking how blackness could ever be construed from outside of the debased, thought to be separate from anything other than the grotesque.

Strains of Black suffering suffuse the works of Jackson, Weheliye, and Wynter, as confrontations with the structural violence of a world predicated on racial division are continuously exposed and deconstructed. Christina Sharpe's widely influential text, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, begins with a lengthy rumination on the author's personal encounters with familial death while in the process of composing her ground-breaking monograph. Turning to what Saidiya Hartman terms as the 'autobiographical example', Sharpe locates her personal suffering within a larger corpus of Black suffering to articulate a collective experience brought forth by living in the afterlives of slavery, a condition she terms as being in the wake.[38] The three personal encounters with familial death Sharpe articulates in her introduction force a question posed by Joy James and João Costa Vargas in "Refusing Blackness-as-Victimization: Trayvon Martin and the Black Cyborgs": "What happens when instead of becoming enraged and shocked every time a Black person is killed in the United States, we recognize Black death as a predictable and constitutive aspect of this democracy?"[39] James and Vargas, via Sharpe, caution their readers against permanent residencies in the space of Black suffering - as a condition for living - curtailing the risk of what Weheliye sees as the 'engendering' of the West through the reaffirmation of colonial structures that have so ordered comprehensions of Black subjectivity.[40] Sharpe's autobiographical intrusions into her critiques of blackness and phenomenology lead her to the following premise: "The ongoing state-sanctioned legal

[38] Sharpe 2016, 8
[39] James and Vargas 2012, 193
[40] Weheliye 2014, 5

and extralegal murders of Black people are normative and, for this so-called democracy, necessary; it is the ground we walk on."[41] Refusing to remain in an accepted position of suffering while Black, Sharpe asks her reader to consider that the very ground upon which Black subjectivity has been built was, and therefore always was and already is, conditioned to receive Black death prematurely as the very function of its existence. Construing Black life as Black suffering as "the history of Western civilization" turns Sharpe toward an imagining for "how we might begin to live in relation to this requirement for our death."

This dissertation takes seriously Sharpe's analysis that the ground we walk on is laced with a ready-made requirement for targeted Black death. And yet, this dissertation stops short of where Jackson, Weheliye, Wynter, and others lead, pausing to consider how it is that the very ground upon which we stand is so over-determined with a notion of Black social life being marked for pre-mature death.[42] Through a study of witnessing mere acts of walking while in public, this dissertation will assert Black life has been construed as being already marked for death: the horizon of walking Black life signaling in the eyes and minds of others a pre-conditioned assumption of Black suffering and targeted death. Through an elongated study of nineteenth-century Target Parades, and their relation to The Black Joke of the eighteenth century, this dissertation will apply a methodological approach to walking - the visible and visual reception of and for walking - to assert that not only is Black

[41] Sharpe 2016, 7

[42] Before slipping into claims stemming from Afro-Pessimism and Black Studies concerning already negated positions of Black social life, I press upon ideals Western subjectivity manifests via spectres of laboring Black bodies caught-out on public display. Interrogating reception for purported Black subjects, rather than those subject positions themselves, this thesis is concerned with how such subjects appear in public to others, in enjoyment of grotesque misrecognitions and misconceptions, allowing for projects of forced subjugation to continuously flow. See Hartman 1997, 23-25.

suffering rehearsed as a pre-condition for states of being Black, but, further, that walking-while-Black signals in the minds of others an imperative to shoot, a desire to kill.

Skirting past Afro-pessimist strains this question provokes regarding fungibilities of Black social life, focus is shifted toward an imagination for what this object-property-slave subject position might possess. Being perceived with having already digested what Richard Iton terms a 'performative sensibility,' anachronistically the slave might be assigned "the visual surplus" knowledge that comes with comprehension for "the internalization of the expectation that one is always potentially being watched."[43] While Simone Browne sees a radical potential locked inside the performative sensibility of Black subjects, arguing in *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* that "such a sensibility would encourage one to perform—in this case perform freedom—even when one was not sure of one's audience," there remains a critical distance from how it was initially conceived by Iton when *In Search of the Black Fantastic*. "The conscious effort to always give one's best performance and encourage others to do the same, and indeed to perform even when one is not sure of one's audience" is a performative sensibility that might reify Afro-pessimistic claims on a dearth of agency for Black subjects. However, for Browne, this desire to give one's *best* performance becomes a means for exalting the human out walking while in consequence of being perceived of as a target for exploitation and subjected free labor. Brown has fabulated such a concept historiographically on slave revolts of eighteenth-century Manhattan, imagining how the juridical space of the accused on trial makes room for Black subjects to perform *their best* for them by them.[44] What is it to have a

[43] Iton 2008, 105.
[44] Browne 2015, 77.

consciousness of 'one's best performance' while at the same time holding an awareness of one's own subjected state of reception as that of the enslaved?

The mix blend that is Benson's street performance onstage is a virtuosic turn, the reception for which runs in two directions at once. Grotesque swagger is term used to describe the performance of Benson given by critics reviewing *The Mulligan Guards* in the 1870s. The duel description offers at once the felt experience of audience fragmented by what was on display. For both the street and the stage are occurring at once in Benson's play, both the scripted and the improvisational are going down underneath Benson's chore of carrying a target onstage. The theatrical mirror instituted in Harrigan's combination has contemporary street life as its backdrop, making available the outside-the-theatre terrain for inspection onstage. The museum-like recreation of the street onstage turned the audience into a bit of a scientific lab, an anatomical theatre of sorts where the object for investigation was the theatre audience themselves. The effect of Harrigan's theatre, in terms of the social changes his theatre sparked, particularly in relation to the evolution of Irish-American identity in Manhattan, New York, was a direct result of Harrigan staging his audience's reality in its contemporary moment. The move into psychological realism on the twentieth-century stage was in part motivated by aspects of theatrical viewing that is seeing-one's-self onstage.

For Benson, as background to this experience, this meant merely recreating his street parade performance, however now contained within a set period of time (ten minutes) in a discretely marked space (the theatre stage dimensions). What had been a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree experience for Benson while out walking on parade along the streets of Manhattan (the parade route having a beginning and an end, a front and a back, with crowds on both sides as audiences of reception) now was singularly directed, aimed at one point of reception and address. Benson simply

had to work one crowd, instead of the parade route multiple. Further, what had been Benson's daily improvisational turn on the streets of Manhattan, a performative blend of legacy repertoires and Benson's own understanding of what works well upon his crowd, was now a sequence of well-crafted and synchronized bits scripted into a ten-minute burlesque sketch. And though script-text based evidence is extant, there is enough reason to suggest that within Benson's silent, improvisational act there was enough room for mugging within the scripted text - enough room for Benson to improv with his crowd silently - to have attracted enough attention to be noticed by the press. Attracting the epithet "grotesque swagger" Benson became a household name.

It is my argument that at the twinned cross-haired site of reception located between the street and the stage, the improvised and the scripted, a kind of performance-as-theatre resides masquerading a public space of a civilly-raced society. This performance-as-theatre, enacted by Black subjects as a means of negotiating the lived versus fact of Black being, offers the experience of blackness of public life in the United States of America as a play of recognition itself. Turning the matter of racial spectatorial sensation centered at the body of the Black human subject into a skilled dance likened to a court minuet, Benson's theatrical feat captures an audience caught looking at him as grotesque while simultaneously being spun away into rapture by his audacious swagger. Something like "grotesque swagger" bespeaks a confusion in the mind of reception, an indication of a bipolar site of reception that is solely an audience's own problem to work out. How the grotesque is reconciled with swagger is truly subjective, allowing for one to consider where on a spectrum of grotesque the swagger hits in all its own sway, making meaning for the one who is casting their response solely. That this term was recognized and readily reemployed across Benson's career means there were some something inside of that response that was legible for Benson's audience. This

response of grotesque-swagger made sense to Benson's audience as a means of describing how they felt about what he was doing. What he was doing was merely everything and nothing of what he had done before, on the street and on the parade, walking on Lower Manhattan. However, on the stage, this bit of walking in a hybrid scripted and improved theatricality, caught out his audience in-between swagger and grotesque.

There is a bit of the bitch in Morgan Benson's swagger, the animal nature of which is grotesque. Grotesque, defined as an "anticke or landskip worke of Painters" buried deep in the cave, where through "representations of portions of human and animal forms, fantastically combined and interwoven with foliage and flowers" lurks a creature of hybrid formation.[45] We have been afforded but little visual proof of Morgan Benson's grotesque swagger, those visual scraps collectively gathered here in three images presented below in Chapter Four. Even with such limited visual proof, I will nevertheless assert that Morgan Benson's swagger has a bit of the animalistic to it, insofar as Black subjects are linked to animality. Are there limits to the efficacy of suggesting that there is a discursive performative strategy to the enactment of the bitch? I immediately cite Hortense Spillers to contextualize the theory of thought to which this line concerning the bitch is written. I quote, in full, the first paragraph of her seminal study on race and psychoanalysis:

> Let's face it. I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name. "Peaches" and "Brown Sugar," "Sapphire" and "Earth Mother," "Aunty," "Granny," God's "Holy Fool," a "Miss Ebony First," or "Black Woman at the Podium": I describe a locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in

[45] "grotesque, n. and adj.". OED Online. December 2019. Oxford University Press. https://www-oed-com.turing.library.northwestern.edu/view/Entry/81794?rskey=DQax0r&result=1&isAdvanced=false (accessed December 23, 2019).

> the national treasury of rhetorical wealth. My country needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented.[46]

The bit of the bitch in Morgan Benson's swagger is just that, an invention, and yet I will argue America's Broadway musical theatre comedy needs it, in as much as his country needs it as well.

It must be noted that Benson's Target-Bearer matters in formal ways owing to generic definitions of theatre, performance, and the science of acting. What is virtuosic and worth mention here is how Benson's performance evaded death, straddled a tightrope of the humorous and the dangerous, the pompous and the theatrically comedic, insofar as an audience was not so overcome with rage at things grotesque to have to take up arms against his swagger. The taunt that was Benson's performance forever toed a line of inviting death, of waving the target with such finesse to attract the ire of someone else's gun. Benson's legacy suggests an afterlife for the Target-Bearer out on parade, an end of day conclusion where the target is set aside and the street-performer-theater-actor becomes his own. Here, at the doorway toward his own subjective interiority, Benson's subject slips from the page. There is where Morgan Benson is left to his own devices.

The effort here is to construct a methodological approach for discoveries of archival materials distractingly draped in color-based technologies of performing race in the United States of America. The purpose here is to describe how historic bits of evidence of race-based subjection obscure certain veiled perspectives of the lived versus factual experiences of both being Black and blackness alike. This complex interdwelling of four distinct positions (lived vs. factual, Black vs. blackness) coming into a singular embodied subjectivity produces a knotted tension of perplexed subjectivity that continually plays upon itself. In the theatrical mirror of actor and audience at the site of an actor in

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[46] Spillers 1987, 65.

performance there resides a particular race-based kind of labor that requires the actor to be doubly-made. First as actor, second as subject, this labor of the working actor caught up in race might be the occasion for recognizing the potential of a Black subject in an anti-Black world.

The Great Black White Joke Way names a mythical place in Broadway history, a purported avenue for bringing to bear a certain and particular admixture of race and American subjectivity pressed through a sieve of theatre, commercial entertainment, and exotic pleasure. The last is key, as it is the exotic, the freak show, that attracts a crowd. The attraction of the freak draws all into a space of common ground and public display, a place for presenting objectified things in a modern day parade. The Great Black White Joke Way; it begins with a problem of description. On the one hand, The Great White Way is one thing; on another hand, The Black Joke is quite another. And yet, it will be argued, both things intertwine, both things together provide the base ingredients for which an American musical theatre was born. The musical comedy of life intertwining with the grotesque horror of Black suffering created a song uniquely captured on the stage. How to describe a horrific event without re-inscribing the horror of the event? Particularly for those who are first learning of the event – the lynching, the murder, the death-as-spectacle that ultimately our collective national being must all become familiar with; how to begin with the swagger of grotesque horrors and not shock an audience into a bifurcated retreat divided along a line of Black and white?

Comprehension for how routine anti-Black sites of reception have been engineered to qualify Black subjects are targets is necessary and required. To be able to dismantle anti-blackness as part of the operational code of the United States of America these sites require consistent and continual deconstruction. Rehearsals of anti-Black performatives instruct by visibly marking and receiving Black male subjects as dangerous, as a threat, a target to be marked, admonished, depleted, and

destroyed. This dissertation presents a succinct history of just such an anti-black race performative through a backwards accounting of the figure of the Target-Bearer as it was materialized in the character of The Target-Boy as played by Morgan Benson first on the street then followed onstage. By focusing on reception for these parades, a strain of social conditioning is glimpsed in the weekly staged rehearsals of witnessing Black death on parade.

I begin with the following proposition: that of all the Black things scattered across the landscapes of historical time there exists but not one trait of a thing to which all other Black things accord. Said another way, in this time specific to the foundation of the United States of America, all Black things unite insofar as some other such subject is willing to define all things Black as they see them to be seen. There exists no room for the subject of Black identification to see itself out from under the cloak of Black belonging as such an ordering has been prescribed by the eyes of others. This is to assert as an important matter of study the role of reception in the institutionalization - and continuance - of a racialized worldviews. So long as the objective other is able to articulate, and overwhelm, their situational and contextual circumstances of seeing others as so overwhelmingly Black, then Black things will always be solely Black to the extent that that other calls out Black things such as only they see them.[47]

My disciplinary interventions build upon critiques from two areas of reception studies: Visual Studies (inclusive of visibility critiques in Art History, Media Studies, and Psychoanalytic readings of reception) and Literary Studies (using methods of authorial deconstruction in close

[47] "The cultural and political discourse on black pathology has been so pervasive that it could be said to constitute the background against which all representations of blacks, blackness, or (the color) black take place." This is to ask the question: what is to be studied when considering Black things? Are the things considered Black considered so based upon a perception of black belonging as it has been articulated from arenas of considerably non-Black things? See Moten 2008, 1.

readings and comparative analysis). Musical theatre performance is poised between multiple fields of critiques, as an artform whose trace is read both visually and literally. The archive of musical theater scholarship contains objects whose thingliness manifest through a variety of interpretive measures. The scripts, scores, design plots, and choreographic stage directions may be read as prompts to performance, the indicators for a how a performance is or was staged. Additionally, they may be read alone or with others to provide literary understanding for a plethora of concerns: how performance is documented, what notations are used to ensure longevity, as well as artistic textual content matter about the performances themselves.

I read from within two fields of study, visually and literarily, to comprehend how genre concerns are brought to light by the placement of the musical in-between discipline categories. Taking the musical as an interdisciplinary object, semiotic coding of the musical both in performance and as an archival text illuminate the importance of reception as a critical node through which race is examined. The visual appearance, or surface, of the musical reads to art historians in terms of its scenographic elements. The costuming, lighting, and scenic apparatuses of a musical run concurrent with art historical approaches concerning the placement of the American Musical Theatre object of within a study of history. Literary documents recalling audience experiences bespeak the musical on the page as a discursive text.

The approach taken toward the visual appearance and visible recognition of Black subjects, historically, is built upon studies of twenty-first century subject formations rooted in Black Studies, Critical Race Theory, Media Studies, and Art History. I turn to influential works such as Darby English's *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness* (2007) and *To Describe a Life: Notes from the Intersection of Art and Race Terror* (2019) to consider how hypervisibility and the destruction of Black

life impacts characterizations of Black subjects on the musical theatre stage. Leigh Raiford's *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle* (2011) similarly brings to fore intersections of Black life and anti-Black racism, treating the photographic image as a legislating object in the reception of Black subjectivity. Raiford's treatment of technological interventions in the documentation of Black life complicate how images of Musical Theatre performance frame Black lives as purely surface, absent of substantive matter or inner life.[48] Studies on surveillance, such as Simone Browne's *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (2015) similarly influence thinking on how the Black subjects are framed in musical theatre scholarship.

Interdisciplinary historiographical interventions, predicated on critical fabulations rooted in Black Studies, when conjoined with performance genealogies from within discrete disciplinary boundaries, intervene in the repetition and revision of anti-Black racist thought. Describing her methodology of critical fabulation, Saidiya Hartman explains that "[b]y playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story, by re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view, I have attempted to jeopardize the status of the event, to displace the received or authorized account, and to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done" (2008, 11).

Structurally, this dissertation circles the event, never quite capturing what might be thought of the center, the active groundswell, where, from underneath, things such Target Parades as events or Morgan Benson as subject emerge. Instead, this dissertation looks to the borders of actual things

[48] Martin Gottfried's *Broadway Musicals*, initially published in 1979, typifies popular 1970s coffee table photographic studies of the American Musical Theatre. In the penultimate chapter of *Broadway Musicals* entitled "Black Musicals," it is difficult to locate an organizing logic for how the Black Broadway musical is visually presented. The manufacturing of a generic definition for the American Musical—The Black Musical—is predicated on graphic visual imagery textually aligning racial visibility without discursive critical reflection. See Gottfried 1979, 328-339.

occurring to frame the arrivals and exits of audience members coming along to bear witness to such events and subjects. How the crowd tips into the event, finds themselves before a subject, is the focus here. Presenting first circumstantial evidence surrounding Morgan Benson's street and stage performances in 1873 followed by an origin story for the origins of Target Parades in Manhattan during the early 1830s, this dissertation moves backwards to capture the birth of conceptual underpinnings of how to receive the sight of Black men walking out in public. It will be argued in Chapter Two, *Bearing the Burden of Bad Taste*, that The Black Joke anchors the fabrication of Black-Men-as-Targets, a concept rooted in visual rhetoric and theatrical performance stylings of Georgian England, London specific. Critical fabulations of how The Black Joke was thread through visual ephemera and discursive texts of the early-nineteenth century London and Manhattan provokes a consideration of historic situations such as Target Parades of nineteenth-century Manhattan. To conclude, avenues for further investigation will be offered concerning reception and affect in relation to theatrical representations of historic situations in light of pedagogies of racial performance onstage.

To get to The Black Joke, however, there needs be a reverse chronology; a backwards deconstruction of accumulated histories preventing clear insight into The Black Joke's evolution. First, and most recently chronologically, Morgan Benson has been introduced. His legacy as part of Broadway's Musical Theatre is presented in consideration of how the form developed because of his comedic musical theatre performance. Inspiration for Benson's routine is historically located in Target Parades of the mid-nineteenth century, a street phenomenon discussed widely in Chapter Two. As Benson's stage performance was a direct consequence of Manhattan's Target Parades of the 1830s to 1880s, the Target Parade is discussed next. The Target Parade, in part, was inspired by The

Black Joke, a euphemism in circulation in England for nearly a century and a half prior to the time it was associated with Target Parades of Manhattan. Chapter Three brings texture to the concept of The Black Joke by offering material evidence of where and when the joke was brought to public attention. Bringing a visual analysis of The Black Joke vernaculars in eighteenth-century London sets the stage for not only Target Parades on Manhattan streets, but also Morgan Benson's grotesque swagger on the proto-Broadway musical theatre comedy stage.

The example of Morgan Benson in Harrigan and Hart's *The Mulligan Gaurds* serves as an example of how reception for Black (things) people is encoded from childhood within an anti-Black thought. The visual apparatus wherein Benson is captured not only grounds the initial thought, but movement onto the musical comedy stage allows for an arena where the initial apparatus, Benson-with-target, may be developed and matured into its furthest deadly iterations. Morgan Benson performing with his target in the street and on stage reveals a dense history of racial subjection that not only gives rise to Target Parades as an event, but also the event burlesqued. The Target Parade, as a burlesque, stages the event of racial subjection so as to carry forward the encrypted code of The Black Joke phenomenon. There is the event, The Target Parade, which was already conceived of in anti-Black race-based subjection allowing for the coded encryption of The Black Joke to be trafficked through it.

While this is an excavation project in search of what exists behind the name of Morgan Benson, attention is due Benson and is his labor as a theater performer. Benson's arrival on the stage of an emerging musical theatre comedy in 1873 is framed by the synchronous arrival of a vaudeville team newly formed: Harrigan and Hart. Edward 'Ned' Harrigan was a performer of the burlesque stage, working with Anthony Hart in entertainments typical of the immediate post-Civil War theatre.

Creating two-person skits, the duo worked in blackface minstrelsy in acts touring across the nation, often settling in Chicago or New York for full theatrical seasons. By 1872, Harrigan and Hart had locked into a formula for their stage work, portraying a variety of characters typical of life on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Harrigan drew from a body of ethnographic research to present characters of Irish, German, Jewish, and Black descent; group formations presented in idiosyncratic situations relatable to a viewing audience. Often portraying everyman characters, the popularity of Harrigan and Hart's entertainments was due to the mirror reflection of life their theatre sought to exploit.

In winter of 1872, Harrigan took the situation of the target parade and excursion as the setting for his next entertainment. Beginning with a song, "The Mulligan Guard", Harrigan lampooned the militia formation at the heart of the target excursions, parodying the Irish captain and his inept crew (singularly played by Hart) as they engaged in a firing practice. The song was immediately sold and circulated, becoming a popular tune sung on the streets and in bars for the remainder of the century. The song was a centerpiece for a ten-minute burlesque staged by Harrigan in 1873, a variety act turn that would spawn an institution of Mulligan plays. The Mulligan Guard series would become the prototype for musical comedy entertainments of the twentieth century, with Harrigan's street life stories engaging a family-friendly audience that would anchor Broadway musical theatre product throughout the form's mid-century Golden Age.

Though Harrigan and Hart worked as a team, their initial Mulligan Guard sketch was a three-person affair. Harrigan retained the formal component of the Target-Boy character, introducing a character onstage that mirrored the real-life situation of a Black man carrying a target. For Harrigan's entertainment, this character was played by a ten-year old boy, Morgan Benson, a street performer

Harrigan had seen in a Target Parade in 1872. Harrigan employed Benson in his stage act, asking the young performer to restage his street performance as part of scripted stage sketch. From 1873 to 1879, Benson toured with Harrigan and Hart to great acclaim across the nation, enacting his Target-Boy performance. Benson became known as "the boy with the grotesque swagger," delighting audiences with his pomp and circumstance as he strutted across the stage. Without dialogue, Benson's performance was essentially an elongated sight gag. And though Morgan Benson has been left on the cutting room floor of American musical theatre history for nearly a century and half, the historical context of Benson's reception and the few scraps of Benson's image remaining require much further consideration.

This dissertation filters Morgan Benson's grotesque swagger through buried histories of The Black Joke to isolate how performative theatricalities of the joke persist upon Black bodies without deference or reference to The Black Joke altogether. The goal is to excavate a term, a name, for a concept underwriting the continuance of Black subjection in the United States of America. The effort is undertaken simply to reveal what has been excised from the archive, to restore through material evidence those bits of the forgotten Black Joke and the ideas still emanating from this erased discursive space. Stitching together scraps of the cutting room floor, a backwards genealogy gets us to the place of the concept, the name of The Black Joke. Seemingly rich with contemporary evidence of great use, The Black Joke trafficked the globe as a universal ideal bridging worlds of entertainment and commerce via racial and sexual subjection on public display. The effort here is to reveal the name of The Black Joke and its conceptual landscape, inviting further research, study, and investigation for how pervasive this name was and just how and why it has put all erased from archives of history and race.

In the histories collected here I argue for a conceptual history of the New York stage, The Great Black White Joke Way, calling for a further unification of our understanding of theatrical reception in relation to developing synchronicities of racial digestion on the nineteenth-century stage. From here, we may not only glimpse racial hierarchies in development in real time but also a hardening of a social relations relating to race. Comprehension is sought for how stage works aid in an audience's developing sense of itself as the supposed sole subject for reception. The development of the Target Parade from the street to the stage marks a developmental path for growing affects of racial performance. Ultimately, this dissertation concerns Benson's case, his breath of air, between his mortality and virtuosity, death and legacy. When marked for death what time is there to leave a legacy for remembrance? Is not the legacy already cut short by the target placed upon the back?

To this end I seek to trouble use of the word Black as a descriptor of human subjectivities. How does the word Black fail when employed as descriptive for groups of disordinate human beings? How does this word survive in its failure to describe a particular human subject discretely? How did it come to pass that Black, as a floating signifier, transforms perceptions of different human subjectivities while feelings about those perceptions of difference further occlude comprehension of Black as a floating signifier? How does one word, loaded with discursive meaning adapted over time, transmit its meaning across time in such a way that successive generations are able to transmute associative meanings for the word while endlessly fixing its referents to a state of precarious human subjugation? How can one word come into meaning as a present-tense learned visual association applicable to contemporary society that nevertheless sticks itself (or has been stuck to) a historical time where such bodies were slaves now free? What is to be done with this word Black?

With this work I strive to demonstrate how linguistic and semiotic concepts of Black male figuration have overshadowed the performance labor of individual performers of the musical theatre stage, obfuscating potentials for how (Black) Americans might be perceived as autonomous actors both on the theatrical stage and in the street parade. Race and visuality are at the core of this research. Still, in my efforts to reach a public who may not always seek to center race as orienting their view toward history, I engage The Black Joke as a thematic frame for engaging with historical research. As a trope primarily based in a gender identification, the play on race that the name of The Black Joke invokes allows for productive and generative means of engaging with multiple publics. To this end, I grow my research agenda toward those productive interactions that The Black Joke may stimulate despite, and in the face of, racial discourse.

The problem addressed by this study is the need for a complex understanding of individual subject positions locked inside of group formations, or monoliths, of Black identity. Grand narratives of history offer contemporary readers fluid comprehension of raced individuals, aligning individuals of various times and places in a generic understanding of racial belonging. As identity-based studies have emerged in the past fifty years chronicling contributions to the art form, there exists a need to understand how such identity group formations limit understandings of individual subjects as idiosyncratic characters. When we address the musical from positions of identity-based subjectivities, reconciling those subjects as individuals rather than proof of the existence of racial categories, there is a demand to know how such subjects are formed as a matter of historical writing.

An objective of this dissertation is to model a critical methodology for identity-based studies of American musical-theatre performance history. In Chapter Four this critical methodology is rehearsed. My interests are twofold: first, how the American musical theatre studies, locates, and

describes its subjects from within identity-based historical study; and second, how to theorize inclusive and complex models of historical research for identity-based performances rooted in American musical theatre. Both imperatives call to an aesthetic and generic approach to the musical in form. At this moment in our contemporary discourse, we are faced with the challenge of not only understanding the coordinates of musical theatre histories from within multiple positions of subject identity, but with an additional understanding for how such positions are always tenable, always fluid even from within themselves. This dissertation seeks to challenge the concept of a stable Black character located onstage in musical theater performance, historically, by offering a history for the appearance of this character onstage in direct relation, or perhaps, counter-relation, to the creation of an African-American or Black subject on the street.

Chapter Two, *On Parade with The Inevitable* Negro, is about fire and militias, targets and guns, with the parade ground and the event of the parade being both an actual and discursive space for objectifying Black (male) bodies in public civic society. Spectatorship of Target Parades offers a theatricalized occasion for making the Black body in the image of threat and danger. I offer in this chapter instruction in how the institution of fire safety created space and an occasion to portray Black men as threats by aligning the target and the man carrying it. Rehearsing the target shooting as a sideshow entertainment to the act of fighting fires is important to note here. As a condition of doing this work, there must be the thing protected that requires the target practice, that thing being the control of fire. Fire is conceived of first as a natural condition of the world. Colonizers perceive fire as a threat to the urban community, and work to control it. Controlling fire runs parallel and alongside protection of property, both private and public. The activity of protection is rehearsed as entertainment for those fight fire.

Chapter Two traces the origins of a volunteer fire company in New York City. The men of the engine company would eventually take on the banner of The Black Joke, branding themselves The Black Joke Guard in tribute to their own labor as shipbuilders during the War of 1812. The men of volunteer Fire Engine Company Number Thirty-Three were stationed in Sacket's Harbor, NY, having been hired by shipbuilders from Lower Manhattan. Protecting the American front against encroaching English naval forces from across Lake Ontario these men built ships from 1812 to 1814 far away from their New York City homes. A sense of camaraderie was fostered amongst these imported workers, solidifying a bond that already been in place since the founding of the engine company in 1807. Though the success of their Black Joke is thinly referenced in accounts of the war, there was enough of a triumph in their shipbuilding efforts to rebrand their fire engine company after their prized warship.

Following a fire in New York City in 1824, the fire engine of Company Thirty-Three was replaced and a new Engine House was secured. The men of the company chose to brand themselves in this instance as The Black Joke company, having their new fire engine painted "a niggardly black" with a pictorial image of The Black Joke ship emblazoned upon its side. Throughout the 1830s and into the 1840s, The Black Joke fire engine company were notorious throughout Manhattan, earning a reputation for brute strength and institutional organization emblematic of New York City's fire safety municipality. As the joint coordination of fire safety, police protection, and city political governance adhered in the volunteer fire-fighting efforts of the nineteenth century, The Black Joke fire engine company stood as an exemplar of coordinated municipal strength and power. Finally, in 1863, The Black Joke fire engine company was central to events that sparked the Draft Riots, an event marked by the terrorizing and brutal killing of citizens of color for nearly a week.

The Black Joke Fire Engine Company were the first to set out on a target excursion, a nineteenth-century phenomenon of New York City. Target excursions were firing practices organized and practiced by men of Manhattan seeking to enhance their prowess as armed citizens. Following the War of 1812, militia men were confronted with their own limitations in firearms, a liability that needed correction for the protection of local, regional, state, and federal interests. Men organized in the form of militias to enhance their abilities with guns, taking off on weekend excursions to the open fields of northern Manhattan, Brooklyn, and New Jersey, expressly for the purposes of target practice. Target excursions were funded operations, whereby men in organization - as assembled members of volunteer fire companies, for example - were financially supported by political figures seeking clout and power in city politics. Tammany Hall machines were bolstered by target excursions, the organized parades and firing practices becoming platforms where political figures could bring together constituents in a uniform manner.

Excursions were preceded by parades throughout Lower Manhattan, where militias would march to the homes of benefactors and stage informal rallies on their behalf. At such occasions, target companies would champion the cause of their political figures, becoming emblems of the social and political agendas of those who financially supported the armament, dress, and libations of a motley crew. The Black Joke Fire Engine Company began this tradition circa 1830, sparking a weekly tradition that would last for another fifty years. A formal component of these target excursions, the target parade, featured a small band at the start followed by men in drill formation, concluding with a Black man carrying the target to be used for firing practice. By 1859, a commentator for The New York Times would question why the inevitable negro was guaranteed whenever men took to the streets to parade.

Chapter Three, *Bearing the Burden of Bad Taste*, introduces The Black Joke. The Black Joke, as a song, is incorporated into Charles Coffey's ballad opera "The Beggar's Wedding" in 1729, sparking a century-long trend of incorporating the tune into theater and dance presentations with lyrics altered and tailored to each occasion. Edgar V. Roberts suggests that Coffey's version of the tune stands as the first recorded printing of The Black Joke, while prior versions exist sub rosa.[49] Indeed, The Original Black Joke sent from Dublin to London in 1720 offers evidence of ballad sheets in circulation prior to Coffey's ballad opera, suggesting the song's popularity prior to its incorporation into theatre and dance repertoires. Roberts argues that bawdy inferences of the song prevented wider circulation initially, with Coffey's printed version of the tune standing as a respectable version. The Original Black Joke retains an initial reference of the joke as a name for female genitalia.

Beginning with The Black Joke as a tune, Chapter Two chronicles development of the joke in reference to female anatomy across the eighteenth century. In the works of Hogarth we find The Black Joke as floating signifier in images meant to signal an environment of lewd sexual behavior. Print engravings from Hogarth, specifically in his visual narrative series The Rake's Progress, presents The Black Joke as a ballad sheet sung by revelers engaged in various acts of sexual pleasure. An engraving from 1743, *The Discovery*, presents the situation of The Black Joke in the form of a bedtrick, where the female body at the center of a sexual conquest is exchanged for another in the darkness of the bed chamber. The joke as presented in *The Discovery* is played upon a paramour seeking to bed a mistress only to discover another body in the mistress' place. That body, at the center of *The Discovery*, is a dark-skinned woman - the opposite of the mistress thought to be residing

[49] Roberts 1962.

in the bed. The engraving, from which a mere ten to twelves copies were printed before the plate was destroyed, is subtitled with a quote from Ovid: "Qui Color albus erat, nunc est contrarius albus (What was once white is now the opposite)."

While Hogarth's *The Discovery* makes no explicit reference to The Black Joke, the situation of sexual pleasure and the playing of jokes recall the trickery of female genitalia suggested by the tune. The overt reference to color, with the woman at the center of the image taking the place of an absent white mistress, recalls the colored association the tunes carry forth. The Black Joke sparked several companion pieces throughout the eighteenth century, with alternate lyrics for the tune describing, variously, 'The Nut-brown Joke', 'The White Joak', 'The Brown Joke', and 'The Grey Joke'. The meaning of the joke, with its reference to female anatomy and sexual pleasure, combined with color-coded descriptions of the joke's embodiment, sparks a discourse concerning color and taxonomy - the ordering of flesh by color - that anchors this dissertation's understanding for how The Black Joke implicitly conjures meaning for racial embodiment.

Following Hogarth, The Black Joke finds meaning in glossaries and dictionaries of mid-to-late eighteenth-century English circulation. Across several editions of Grose's dictionary of vulgar and cant terms, we find definitions of The Black Joke relating the female genitalia to monetized transactions. As Grose's dictionaries were meant for a specific audience, namely those gentlemen of a particular class seeking to traffic in the low, the occasion for encountering The Black Joke were highly sexualized engagements. These engagements specifically are related to prostitution and the commoditization of the female sex. Several dictionaries go so far as to define The Black Joke as the female commodity.

From Grose's dictionaries we come to Byron's reference of The Black Joke in a satire written in 1812, The Waltz. Byron's satire critiques the Hanover line of English royalty, critiquing the intrusion of German influence on the English manner. The Waltz is written as apostrophic hymn, an ode to a form of dance gaining wild popularity in London circles at the start of the nineteenth century. Byron's distain for the dance is evident in his satire, his staging of a ball where the dance is performed bringing an occasion to mock a simpleton's understanding for the dangers of the waltz. In an preface to his satire, Byron has his embedded writer of the hymn describe the waltz on display as a Black Joke tune. The setting of the waltz in the context of The Black Joke testifies not only of the tune's popularity and salient circulation in English society at the turn of the nineteenth century, both high and low, but also to the generic status of the tune as a referent to sexual gratification and pleasure.

Chapter Two closes with The Black Joke as a christened name for slavers taking to the Atlantic Ocean in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Evidence of The Black Joke explicitly tied to the slave trade reifies an eventual development of the joke in relation to racial discourses. While initially conceived of as play in pleasure, a naming of body parts along the path to gratification, The Black Joke eventually comes to signify colored bodies trafficked in the Atlantic Ocean. Whether or not such an inference to colored bodies was in play prior to The Black Joke ballad song of 1720 has yet to be discovered. Still, by mid-nineteenth century The Black Joke not only described the trafficking of bodies in connection to slavery across the Atlantic Ocean but also a sensorium of affects relating to the materiality of the body in such circumstances.

Chapter Four, *When Morgan Benson Slayed the Bit*, presents possible avenues of further research and discovery instigated across chapters one and two. Drawing upon histories of The Target

Parade and The Black Joke, Morgan Benson is reintroduced to frame arguments concerning his labor as a working actor. The science of Benson's work is considered, taking into account the various registers of representative acts Benson's stage work encompass. A legacy of The Black Joke as interpreted by the men of Engine Company No. 33 and the Target Parade Target-Bearer figure instantiated by those same men, Benson's multi-faceted performance plays on not only prevailing concepts of targeted death but also the ingenuity of a child precociousness left to flourish. Anticipating the introduction of psycho-realism on Broadway's musical theatre stages of the twentieth-century stage, this final chapter considers what it means for Benson's bona-fide real world persona to traffick in the burlesque, to portray a marked target for death as a bit of side-show entertainment. Weaving Freud's Black Joke through ruminations of Benson's legacy, the study concludes with an attempt to capture Benson as a working actor, a possible genius of the theatrical stage.

II. On Parade with The Inevitable Negro

On March 14, 1824, a fire beginning at the shipyard of Adam and Noah Brown eventually spread to the yards of Browne & Bell and Isaac Webb & Co. This shipyard fire sets in motion a series of events that gives birth to The Black Joke as an American phenomenon. The early morning fire resulted in a city fire engine being destroyed. The fire is the triggering event that sparks the

purchase of a new fire engine which will become The Black Joke. Disbursement of fire engines in New York City, the role of volunteer fireman serving on behalf of the city, and the placement of the fire engines houses throughout the city, all play a role in constituting The Black Joke as a symbolic mascot of civic responsibility in New York City. Governance in New York City has constituted fire safety as a communal concern amongst the populace, however the burden of responsibility is levied against differing segments of society in different ways as rules for fire safety are instituted. This chapter considers the various actors and events responsible for maintaining fire safety in New York City, particularly the colored residents working as volunteers for Fire Engine company Thirty-Three.

When the men of Engine Company Number Thirty-Three lost their beloved fire engine, 'The Old Bombazula,' in the great shipyard fire of 1824, the city replaced it with a modern, all-Black, two-hand pump—a modern marvel they quickly named 'The Black Joke.' The engine was named after another feat of modern technology, a privateering schooner from the War of 1812, built in the same shipyard obliterated by the fire of 1824. The men of Thirty-Three paid tribute to ship and engine by painting images of both on the body of their new engine: 'The Black Joke.' When paraded in ceremonial marches of the 1830s and 1840s, 'The Black Joke' served tribute to Engine Company Number Thirty-three's emergent legacy.

The replacement of the fire engine in 1824 sets into motion a series of events that ultimately concludes with a nationally recognized performance of swagger from a ten-year old colored boy in the era of Reconstruction. This performance, originating on the theatrical stage, influences critical discussions on race and reception at the turn of the twentieth century, ultimately forming a new public figure I have entitled "The Target-bearer." This figure arises from

a mixture social and performance cultures.

First instance of a dark-skinned, or non-white, body formally conceived of as belonging to an institution of fire- fighting on the island of Manhattan is arrives with the Target-bearer figure of early nineteenth-century volunteer militia target excursions. Inaugurated by Engine Company Number Thirty-three of New York City's volunteer fire department in early 1830s, the target excursion was a civic-social event whereby local citizens mustered, paraded, drilled, and marched out into the wilds of Manhattan. Engaging in acts of target-shooting exercises and marksmanship competitions, the volunteer firefighters of company Thirty-three held their first target excursion for the purpose of practicing their shooting techniques. Firefighting volunteers were relieved of other municipal service, particularly serving on juries or enlisting in militia service. As such, they received no training in the arts of military defense and the practical use of firearms at times of war.

With militia efforts during the war for independence and the war of 1812 proved only near-successful, citizens were made acutely aware of the need to train oneself—bearing their own arms—in the defense of personal and communal property. The need to prevent the natal nation-state municipality from outside occupation extended the use of firearms from simple hunting and recreational use into a far more complex civic institution; the subjective requisite to take up arms stemmed from both a political concern over the intrusion of federal government in the matter of local defense and the desire to protect ones' wealth. Weary of a federally funded army, local citizens denied both the state and the federal government from imposing a military force on the island. The volunteer militia served as the solution, requiring the mustering of an army only in times of recognized military defense. Still, able to recognize the need for proper armament during times of

called service, citizens took it upon themselves to muster and drill in the arts of military training to be adequately prepared for times of military service.

Further, with acquired wealth permeating the island at the start of the nineteenth century, citizens had a vested interest in the health and wealth of their personal property. The community-minded feeling of shared wealth through individual or personal propriety, spurred a desire for men to be as adequately trained and ready to defend as possible. It was under these conditions that the firemen, men who were not a part of the cities volunteer militia, took it upon themselves to go the additional step of organizing citizens who were not a part of the militia rolls to gather and muster, and thereby recognize, their second amendment rights as a personal act, not as an act of governance.

The Target Parade matured as a homosocial space for rehearsing forms of armed American citizenry in the new world democracy. Influenced and instigated by several factors, including mercantile involvement with the war of 1812, private-public safety concerns in the face of fire, rapid city expansion north, and the growth of immigrant populations, The Target Parade illuminated nativist versus immigrant ideals of belonging in the newly founded America. The space of the Target Parade extended through the streets where men mustered, drilled, and paraded in full regalia, into the engine houses where men gathered before and after target excursions, and into the natural settings of wilderness where men took up shooting practice and performed masculinity as a given right of inclusion. The Target Parade and its subsequent excursion, where the Target-bearer was prominently displayed, vividly draws into materiality the world of the immigrant-volunteer-citizen of Manhattan and the private-public partnerships that were advocated by means of their walking efforts. As a community of immigrant and nativist fire-fighters were

bound together by the enactment of target excursions, the Black male body was identified and labeled as a collective target to be shot.

An editorial titled "The Inevitable Negro" in *The New York Times* on October 18, 1859 details an observation made the previous day at New York City's Triennial Volunteer Fireman's Parade: "No target excursion ever goes out without a colored target bearer." The Target-bearer persona enters as a character solely portrayed by a Black male body, marking the visible appearance of blackness as intimately tied and standing in relation to municipal service for Manhattan's fire and defense safety apparatus. My question concerning the Target-bearer is how are we to reconcile the formal appearance of a Black body in the realm of civic service on behalf of fire-safety alongside material histories regarding the labor of dark-skinned subjects in the act of fighting fires? Blacks were present at the scene of fire throughout the history of Manhattan. At times, Blacks themselves were imagined to be instigators of destruction using fire; at other times they were protectors and savers of property possibly lost in fire. In the nineteenth century, we see Blacks functioning in and around the fire house, working on behalf of the city as they tended to fire engines and implements of fire safety. How, then, are we to imagine the Black body when it is employed by fire fighters to act as a target for their pseudo-militaristic exercises? What explains the shift from tangential figure offering aid to a cause that they were never fully implicated in to being the targeted center of a bullet's aim? At the scene of the target excursion, is the Black male body constructed as friend or enemy to the civic line of defense?

The enemy designation of the Black male body was all but solidified through the target excursion, ultimately uniting both the militiaman and the firefighter over and against the body of blackness. As the Black male left behind the mantle of slavery, their bodies were codified as an

enemy target within. The former property was now a threat to be apprehended. The firefighter's target excursion, an unsanctioned gathering of militia forces not recognized by the city but fully allowed under federal government second amendment rights, begins with the making of targets out of the unaffiliated Black bodies still in circulation on the island. The metonymic slip from negro body to walking target initiates a new era of legally- sanctioned predatory acts against the formerly enslaved. In this light, municipal service now extends to the eradication of Black male bodies in Manhattan.

This chapter conceives of fire in a friend-enemy dichotomy in relation to the Black residents of Manhattan in the early nineteenth century. Tracing the regulation of fire safety for citizens and free inhabitants of the island throughout the eighteenth century, the chapter considers how Black residents were excluded from an ideology of communal property wealth. Relating how the city created a volunteer fire department in 1738 paid by public taxes and private commercial ventures, the chapter attempts to address how black residents were addressed in relation to protecting an ideal of the public good.[50] City ordinances did not figure the Black resident into the equation of fire safety, yet, as residents living on the island, they were impacted by the continual threat of fire destruction. As the public grew accustomed to a city-ordained force charged with the task of protecting public and private property, the Black slave was often cited as an instigator of fire as threat to the public good. Whether real or imagined, the black resident who was thought to be capable of preventing the destruction of fire was a myth, in no way were blacks thought able to protect city property from the wrath of fire. Still, Blacks living on the island were present at the scene of conflagration, demanding a consideration for how black residents were thought to be

[50] Dunshee 1952, 39.

configured in the protection of public and private property. Concerning the civic responsibility of fire safety in Manhattan, is the Black resident a friend or a foe?

The English had continued the practice of bucket brigades first implemented by the Dutch in 1648.[51] Ordinances of the late- seventeenth century reveal the extent to which citizens, residents, and persons on the isle of Manhattan were charged with the duty of maintaining fire safety objects in their private dwellings. On Wednesday, November 25, 1691, it was so ordered that "Euery house in Towne that hath three fire places prouide two Leather Bucketts and Euery house of fewer fire places one Leather Buckett," to be installed and ready for inspection by New Year's Day.[52] Upon each bucket, it was ordered, there is to be placed a mark with the letters of the landlord for the residence. If in default, each land owner is to forfeit six schillings, paid by the tenant charged with the default, for use by the City. Bucket brigades remained in place in Manhattan through to 1820.

As the threat of fire was first quelled through hand-to-hand movements of water, technology advanced to require less in the way of active duty. Imagining the movement of water from hand-to-hand transfer to machine and hose, individuals were able to remove themselves from the labor of moving water and instead were afforded an opportunity to watch the parade of water. What occurs in this shift in spectatorship may be thought through a methodology of walking. Thinking choreography and the embedded demand to not only move water, but to walk alongside the movement of water as a spectator sport. Where is this simple act of walking with water as it moves by machine already an act of performance? Where is walking, as an act, something that even at its most bare, at its most basic, taken to be viewed

[51] Costello 1997. 9, 21, 51-57.
[52] Osgood, Keep, et. al. 1905. Vol. 1, 254-255.

from without and always subjected unto the gaze of others? Who gets to walk freely in public, and what do they look like? Or does what they look like even matter?

Moving from the movement of water by hand-to-hand flow, as each individual moves the water with their own hands, to moving the water by machine, free from manual labor, a parade route is carved. In doing so, the act of moving water becomes something to watch, an event to witness as those former laborers - residents and citizens of the bucket brigade - became spectators as wardens, hooks, ladders, and machines took over the fire safety apparatus. With the need for each individual to have to *do* something to make the water move now gone, publics were now able to watch how water was moved. This brings about a spectatorial act to the event of fire safety. What was once a group activity was now an audience-actor event. The people were now afforded the room to watch fire safety happen. Who was doing the fire safety was a question still be figured out, how the machines were to be handled a question yet to be firmly answered. But the imperative was no longer the publics in terms of labor, the work of quelling the fire – in so far as it had been a public responsibility – was now off the citizen in terms of water supply.

The threat of fire was compounded by the density of the colonial settlement in formation. Whereas the Lenape were itinerant inhabitants of the island, moving from site to site as weather and communal needs dictated, the Corporation was compact; by 1630 a mere 300 peoples resided in less than one square mile of the island.[53] This density, and the reliance upon lumber as a primary building material, meant that the threat of fire was exponentially dangerous.[54] Thatched roofs atop wood-frame houses meant that a fire could spread rapidly from one location to another,

[53] Kammen 1996, 38.
[54] Dunshee 1952, 32.

threatening to decimate an entire swarth of corporate living in one fell swoop. The Dutch were aware of this threat, and from the start made fire prevention a chief concern for all situated in New Amsterdam. The company town fought the threat of fire with the installation of a mandated bucket brigade: all residencies were to be outfitted with a bucket in case of fire.[55] In the event of fire, all members of society would form a line, from water source to the fire, and buckets of water would be passed to extinguish the flames. Buckets were to be sturdy, not worn, and easily accessible. Upon penalty of the Corporation, buckets were to be placed by the door in case they were needed by someone outside of the home. Easy access to the bucket was necessary for all members of the colony. The company continued to dictate how the bucket brigades were to be managed, stipulating in 1658 that all buckets be made from a local leather source, again under penalty or fine if not complied.

Concerning fire safety as it relates to the formation of the New World colony on Lower Manhattan, what responsibility did the enslaved laborer have in the process of fighting fire? Slaves slept in a communal dormitory located northeast of the colony settlement. From just north of what today is Wall Street, slaves traveled to Lower Manhattan for daily work. Their place of residence would have been outside the environs of New Amsterdam, making the threat of fire not a primary concern for their residence. Additionally, the storing and housing of buckets would have been little assistance to a fire occurring at the base of the island. Further, the enslaved lived in dormitories owned by the Corporation, they maintained no monetary or legal claim to their property. The fines and penalties incurred by landowners and home settlers not in possession of readily available buckets would not have pertained to the enslaved. As the Provisional Orders stipulate, and the ensuing

[55] Costello 1997, 11

doctrines from the directors of New Amsterdam make clear, fire safety was a principal concern for the health of the Corporation, and as such, fire safety was a principal concern for all who reside in the company town.

When the enslaved were eventually freed and afforded property rights in 1644, their homes were located far north of the city center.[56] Strategically apportioned land lots that buffered the fort of New Amsterdam from invading forces from the East and North of the city (primarily the English from the East and the French from the North), the threat of fire to the freed enslaved was solely of their own concern.[57] The company dictates for bucket brigades and community action was not extended to these properties outside city walls, as they were outside of the formal settlement wall. Though they worked in the colonial center they resided outside the colony wall, troubling their status as residents of the company town. Fire was a threat for all, and yet only some were made to pay penalty for not compiling with the ordinances of corporate rule. While the enslaved need to protect their own land from the threat of fire, their land is outside the bounds of the corporate town. The enslaved and formerly enslaved maintained a curious relation to the corporate concern for fire safety in New Amsterdam; without a monetized stake in the corporate colony, the free-enslaved are not bound to protect the settled corporate land from destruction by fire. And by not being charged with an official capacity in the organizational structure for maintaining fire safety, the free-enslaved carries no impetus for protecting the corporate land from destruction by fire.

New York City Volunteer Fire Department (est. 1737)

[56] Moore 2005, 42.
[57] Berlin and Harris 2005, 8-9.

Enslaved populations in Manhattan have retreated to the use of fire in several rebellions to claim their freedom. That fire is a principle tool for rebellion against slave dominated societies in the New World is more than mere happenstance. The relationship between enslaved populations and the notion of property is vexed, with lines of ownership blurring across the bodies of human beings being trafficked. The previously afforded land grants were systematically stripped away from the formerly freed slaves, and the idea of free black property owners was all but extinguished from the imaginations of popular thought.[58] Still, the role of black subjects in regards to fire safety was barely addressed as a public concern. Throughout the eighteenth century, coinciding with the enforcement of slave code dictums, rules and ordinances pertaining to fighting fire on the island of Manhattan were enhanced, formalizing the relationship between citizens and residents in relation to the protection of their shared investments in private-owned properties. What began as a communal project, based in the bucket brigades of the Dutch in the 1600s, becomes a corporate institutionalized practice of fire regulation directed and managed by select committees on order of the Common Council.

On May 6, 1731, the council put forth the order to purchase two fire engines that arrived nearly a year later. The proposal was set forth as a capital raising venture, asking for a levy to be placed on all landowners, citizens, and residents of New York City for the following three years to be able to purchase two new fire engines, imported from London. The proposal specifies precisely who is thought to need such an expense and thereby be eligible for taxation. As stipulated, all

[58] Moore 2005, 53.

"Free holders, Inhabitants, Residents, and sojourners within the Said City" are liable to levy and tax of all real estate and properties in possession. In total, the City sought to raise three hundred and ninety pounds, nine shillings, and four pence half penny for the engines, an amount subsequently approved by the city council. When proclaiming the three-year taxation, the city council stipulated that the fire engines to be procured were "for the Publick service." Counter to how hooks and ladders were furnished and supplied to the city public, and paid for by the City outright, the fire engines, being of a greater expense, were paid for by taxed residents of the city.[59]

Both machines arrived in the City just prior to the council meeting of August 17, 1732, wherein it was ordered that the Company reimburse merchants Stephen De Lancey and John Moore a sum of two hundred and four pounds twelve shillings for delivery of aforementioned machines.[60] Late-summer arrival of the two engines sent from London set into motion twin sets of additional city council orders, each concerning care and maintenance of the new machines. The first, concerning storing and use; the second, concerning appearance. An order set November 1731 maintained that hooks, ladders, buckets, and fire engines, too, are to "be kept in Convenient places within this City for Avoiding the Peril of fire."[61] This ordinance specifies for the first time on public record a demand for safety equipment against fire be held by the City of Manhattan in places readily accessible to all residents. It would take another two decades before private insurances against the wrath of fire were successfully implanted in the burgeoning northeast of the United States, yet now a clear line was emerging between the practice of citizens and residents providing their own private buckets stored at home for bucket brigades to the public-use of an engine

[59] Osgood, Keep, et. al. 1905. Vol. 4, 54.
[60] Osgood, Keep, et. al. 1905. Vol. 4, 149. See also Dunshee 1952, 39.
[61] Osgood, Keep, et. al. 1905. Vol. 4, 82-83.

specifically ear-marked for fire safety.[62] The use of the materials procured for the purpose of fire safety are deemed community property. Though the engines were paid for through public taxation, the hooks and ladders through budgeted city expenses, and the buckets paid by private individuals, all items were required to be readily available and located in such a place as was convenient for the safety of the entire City.

It would be a misnomer to decree that the public paid for the engines, as only a segmented part of the public were taxed for the purchase. Still, in stating that the engines were to be put into "Publick service," the residents for whom the engines were to be of use were of greater number than those who were required to pay its expense. Again, the imperatives of fire safety segmented the public in such a way as to expose where investments in protecting private and public properties from damages became a matter of public concern. Those residents, primarily Indian slaves, enslaved Negroes, and free Negroes, who were not eligible for taxation are nevertheless the beneficiaries of the fire engine's safety. Though Indian slaves, Negroes, and free Negroes were primarily residing outside of the city limits, those individuals who lived in the homes of property owners within the city limits required protection from the dangers of fire. Without fiscal responsibility, Indian slaves, Negroes, and free Negroes theoretically benefitted from the purchase of the fire engine while lacking real estate or propertied value to necessitate their footing the bill. The council's designation of the fire engines being "for the Publick service" counters stipulations made by council concerning which individuals were responsible for paying their expense.

A significant shift in the management and payment of fire safety occurred in October of

[62] Wainwright 1953, 247.

1706. Council minutes relate the following: "Order'd that Alderman Vanderburgh doe provide for the publick use of this City Eight Ladders and two fire hooks and Poles of such length & Demensions as he Shall Judge Convenient to be used in Case of fire and that he bring in an Acct. of the Charge thereof in Order to be satisfyed for the same."[63] Whereas previously the buckets of the bucket brigade were stored in individual residential dwellings, procured through private means, and put into public use, the eight ladders and two fire hooks and poles of Alderman Vanderburgh were paid for by the City and provided by a private citizen. If the responsibility of possessing those objects necessary to fire safety had remained in the hands of the city's residents, the financial responsibility is begun to shift toward a taxed City expense. At the following Common Council meeting held on the 21st of January, 1707, Alderman Vanderburgh was reimbursed nineteen pounds, two shillings for hook and ladder expense.[64] This practice continued into the following decades, up to the purchase of fire engines in 1731. Before then, however, alderman were tasked with the responsibility of procuring hooks and ladders as it was deemed sufficient for the needs of the City, in response the city reimbursed those aldermen in full.

By 1697 it had become apparent the bucket brigade alone was no longer enough to thwart the growing concern of destruction by fire. The city had grown nearly five times in size since the fortification of the lower tip of the island in 1621. The aggressive growth of the city center placed residents near each other, a fire could quickly spread across an entire swarth of the city. While building materials had progressed to stone and brick into the beginnings of the eighteenth century, thatched roofs and Dutch wood-framed structures still dotted the urban setting. It was

[63] Osgood, Keep, et. al. 1905. Vol. 2, 278.
[64] Osgood, Keep, et. al. 1905. Vol. 2, 316.

paramount that neighbors took great care in the building and burning of fires as they were all implicated in the damage a fire might cause.[65] As such, the city ordered in 1697 that each ward produce two inspectors tasked with the burden of inspecting chimneys for all structures. On a weekly basis, inspectors were required to inspect the chimneys and hearths of all residences, public and private, to identify where any defective contraptions may exist that might place the city in harm's way. In addition to providing the council with reports of any defective chimneys or hearths, inspectors were asked to oversee the improvements of all defections. Tenants and landowners were subject to penalty for non- compliance with the ordinance, the amounts so stipulated in the council minutes.

Instituting a practice of requiring specific council members to inspect private dwellings in 1697 began the formal practice of fire safety as city-wide organizational concern, freeing individual citizens from the civic responsibility of preventing destruction by fire. The order of 1697 tacitly organized a municipal fire safety apparatus instigating the negotiation of public and private spaces on the island and the growth of a municipal council for social safety networks. Whereas the upkeep and maintenance of chimneys and hearths in private dwellings hewed toward an individual prerogative, the proximity of neighbors demanded a public interest in how the private dwelling is safely maintained considering public concern. Further, that this concern should extend beyond the call of maintenance and move into the realm of penalty displays a certain imperative on behalf of the City as to how its residents shall live. The choice to live in a particular manner, insofar as it relates to the burning of fires, is regulated, and monetized in accordance with the city council demands. The designation of the chimney inspectors marks a movement from community-

[65] Dunshee 1952, 39.

wide interest in fighting fires to a citizenship requirement in the realm of fire safety.[66]

With the establishment of English rule in 1664, a series of Laws and Orders were put into effect that formalized the relationship between free negroes, slaves, and Indian slaves in New York City. These three distinct groups were specified repeatedly in the series of orders put forth by the Common Council.[67] Routinely, minutes from meetings relate how the relationship of the Free Negro and Slave were to be codified in the city. Stipulations concerning the numbers of negroes that may gather in a group, where they may gather, and on what day and at which time they may gather, were detailed in the code. How, when, and if negroes may entertain, or be entertained, were specified by the code, including whether such entertainment were to occur in the home spaces of free negroes. Penalties for public intoxication, lewd behavior, or making noise were stipulated for all residents of New York City, with particular notice, fines, and penalties being given for slaves and free negroes. All of these particles of public life were ordered for black residents, and where public life was not so dictated, owners of slaves were called in to account for the behavior of their property.[68]

Life under English rule was ordered for all segments of society, the crown having an influence on all manners of public interaction and the accumulation of private wealth. What makes this ordering particularly interesting is how codes were put into effect for the various segments of society. An oft repeated list in the minutes of the Common Council are the Laws, Orders, and Ordinances. Regularly addressed, this list was continually updated as needed by the

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[66] Osgood, Keep, et. al. 1905. Vol. 2, 20.
[67] Osgood, Keep, et. al. 1905. Vol. 3, 30.
[68] Surveys of minutes dating from the establishment of English rule through to the revolution of 1776 detail regular instantiation of acts meant to delimit movement of non-citizen residents of New York City. Browne 2015 details laws concerning the movement and gathering of Black residents in Manhattan under English rule, specifically focusing on candle law requirements for Blacks travelling at night. See 76-83.

demands of life on the island. The title heads for the list are most telling, revealing how the city council, under order of the crown, chose to segment and direct their colonial population. Appearing toward the top of the list are laws concerning "strangers" and "freemen," ordinances "regulating and keeping streets clean" and "none to retail liquor without license." Further below are laws that pertain to "preventing fire" and "penalties on chimneys on fire," as well as "concerning hooks, ladders, and buckets." Immediately following, there is a category labeled "Negroes, several orders concerning them."[69]

The tabulated laws and ordinances governing the island remain in effect through to the formation of New York as an independent state of America, the above-stated headings appearing in common council minutes through to the early nineteenth century. What the headings reveal, in their continuity, is a government sponsored taxonomy used for assessing the residents of Manhattan as a governed body.[70] Outsiders, "strangers," are deemed a particular lot, as well as "hucksters" and "Indian slaves." Subject areas of interest to the council, "liquor licenses," "market stalls," "swine," "timber, stone, bricks, lumber," designate those particular material goods of which the corporate governance has taken specified concern.[71] Ordinances concerning fire and negroes are sequentially ordered repeatedly throughout city council minutes, forcing an appearance of a dichotomy between fire safety and the lives of the enslaved. As residents of New York City move through an era of corporate surveillance and colonization under the crown, the headings of laws and orders reveals where and how surveillance becomes law.

With laws concerning negroes specified under their own heading in the listing of City

[69] Osgood, Keep, et. al. 1905. Vol. 5, 37.
[70] Osgood, Keep, et. al. 1905. Vol. 1, 223-225.
[71] Osgood, Keep, et. al. 1905. Vol. 1, 85-87.

Council ordinances, the rules pertaining to fire safety are set in relation to black residents. This is not to say that the rules of fire safety did not apply to black residents; rather, the ordinances of fire safety were conceived of by the governance without particular concern for negroes. When the English set about a series of laws and ordinances regulating the organization of fire safety on the island of Manhattan, following precedents established by the Dutch West India Company in the seventeenth century, they did so without concern for black residents. Black residents, or Negroes, were a discrete heading in the listing of laws and orders for New York City. Negroes were of a concern entirely of their own. An entire series of codes, rules, and laws were enacted concerning the circulation of Negroes throughout the space of the island.[72] The laws of fire safety that were put into place by the governing forces of Manhattan set aside the negro concern to regulate public-private property concerns. The negro resident is conveniently set aside in interest of public and private property concerns, the entire enterprise, or subject heading, not being identified - at least by the governing forces - as one of their concerns.

As Christopher Moore notes in his essay surveying the early years of colonial life on the tip of Lower Manhattan, enslaved workers were primarily charged with the task of clearing the land for settlement.[73] To erect a functioning society at the edge of the island, land had to be cleared for a variety of reasons: to plant and harvest crops, to roam imported livestock, to construct mills for manufacturing, to establish town infrastructure. Lumber, wood and timber fabricated from trees cleared across the island was the primary construction material for the colony. Ships were

[72] "Latern laws made the lit candle a supervisory device—any unattended slave was mandated to carry one—and part of the legal framework that marked black, mixed-race, and indigenous people as security risks in need of supervision after dark. ...Any slave convicted of being unlit after dark was sentenced to a public whipping of no more than forty lashes, at the discretion of the master or owner, before being discharged." See Browne 2015, 78-79.
[73] Moore 2005, 31.

fashioned from lumber, houses were erected using lumber, hearths for warmth and cooking were fueled by lumber. In addition to other harvested field crops used for the installation of the growing town center, lumber represented a highly flammable though easily accessible resource for transforming the colony.[74]

In the seventeenth century, fire was a steady source of heat, power, and light, forces essential for the arduous task of settling the island terrain. Fire was also a necessary adversary in the development of Manhattan as it grew to become a major commercial trading post in the burgeoning New World economy. Destruction of property byway of fire was a stark reality for the residents of New Amsterdam. Fire was both an asset and a liability, a means of sustaining life and of destroying property. It was used to clear land and to destroy structures that were beyond repair.[75] It was employed as weapon, a force to wreak havoc and chaos on residents and business alike. Fire was a force to be controlled, and it was imperative that the settlement find a way to prevent fire from ultimately destroying what was in creation. In many respects, fire was a major influence in how the island was to be settled.[76]

Prior to the arrival of the corporation - most notably marked by Henry Hudson's explorative survey of the region in 1609 - there were already established habitations sites and communal outposts nurtured for centuries by the island's indigenous populations.[77] The fortification designs, prepared and executed by land surveyors of the Dutch West India Company stationed at the New Amsterdam post, contrasted sharply with the already developed migrational

[74] Berlin 2003(a), 14.
[75] Dunshee 1952, 32.
[76] Kammen 1996, 65.
[77] ibid, 23-26. See also Moore 2005, 35.

patterns and seasonal dwellings of indigenous inhabitants spread across the island and in the surrounding regions. The Lenape, primary inhabitants of the region, travelled across what is now considered the five boroughs, in a yearly, cyclical rotation. Their yearly migration patterns coincided with the turning of the seasons, exploiting changes in weather to best benefit the planting, harvesting, hunting, and fishing of new crops. The Lenape were dependent upon an ecological system centered at the tip of Manhattan that spread north, east, and west throughout modern-day New England and the upper Mid-Atlantic states. To maintain a balance of crop, livestock, health, and sustainability, communal habitats were widely made available to ensure safe dwelling when, where, and as needed by circulating tribes. This circulatory working of the land stood in great contrast to the Dutch West India Company design for Lower Manhattan. Treating the tip of Manhattan as a place for outpost trading, a place not necessarily concerned with human co-habitation, the designs for Lower Manhattan were primarily insular and meant to fortify and protect material goods being trafficked across the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. Corporate interest in Manhattan was not tethered to a localized eco-system; rather, the coffers of banks and by-laws of corporate entities located on the other side of the ocean determined the harvesting of life in this New World.[78]

In the early years of the Corporation the post at the tip of Manhattan was a mere fortress. From Hudson's initial water survey in 1609 to the establishment of the Geoctroyerde West-Indische Compagnie, or West India Company, in 1621, the trade post served as a base of

[78] See Kammen 1996. Chapter One (1-22) provides an overview of indigenous communities circulating throughout what is now considered New York City, New York State and portions of Connecticut and Vermont. The various tribal affiliations are detailed along with those relations bearing directly on the founding of Manhattan as an outpost for the Dutch West India Company.

operation for captains - of both industry and the sea - to survey the properties seemingly available for takeover.[79] Hudson's discoveries, such as they were, sparked a run on Manhattan throughout the following decade, with rival captains making the voyage across the Atlantic to map out territories, waterways, plant and animal life, and the native populations with whom trade could be established. With the incorporation of the Dutch West India Company in 1621, the Dutch established a monopoly over trade with west Africa and the Americas, furthering wars already in progress with Spain, Portugal, and England.[80] The fortification of the island would have to expand into a year-round operation of local merchants, traders, and laborers if the Dutch were to maintain their position of power in the region.

From 1621 on, ships from the Netherlands became a regular sight at the trading post on Lower Manhattan. Understanding that populating the trading post was necessary for the establishment of a permanent outpost in Manhattan, colonists, primarily displaced Walloons from Leyden who were unable to settle at other ports along the New World Atlantic coast, began to arrive in 1623.[81] These new inhabitants of the island were working on behalf of the Corporation, yet their primary function was not to engage trade but rather to establish a permanent residence for the Dutch in the New World. In 1624, Provisional Orders sent from the Corporation were established to organize colonial life in New Amsterdam.[82] The purpose of these orders was to set into motion a series of regulatory practices designed to enhance the wealth of the West India Company. The corporation designated where colonists would live, where they would farm, how

[79] Shorto 2004, 37-39.
[80] ibid, 38.
[81] Kammen 1996, 28.
[82] Berlin 2003(a), 13.

harvest was to be distributed - first for the company and then for individual prosperity. The dictates of the Corporation were organized company first, meaning that all functions and activities of the colonist's life were meant to further the progress of the corporate interest. As the Dutch fought to maintain a monopoly on the growing trade economies of the Atlantic Ocean, colonists worked to establish Lower Manhattan as a new instance of Dutch society.

To grow the fortress from a fortification to a colonized residency, development plans were put into place to harness the land. To supplement this growth activity, the Corporation brought on designated labor whose sole purpose was to transform the island. Beginning in 1624, New Amsterdam introduced slave populations into the community of traders, colonists, and landed gentry to perform the necessary labor of transforming the wilderness of the island into a colonized settlement.[83] The origins of this initial slave population is contested, with a growing consensus agreeing that the slaves brought to Manhattan were captured sailors from Spanish and Portuguese fleets. It is possible that the slaves may have been part of stolen cargo traveling to Brazil from the West Coast of Africa, the human property having been shipped under Spanish or Portuguese flags. Still, the responsibilities and status of the first eleven men brought to the island as unpaid labor suggest a certain degree of acculturation in the trans-national trade wars of the early seventeenth-century. Of the men, Big Manuel (Manuel Gerritsen), Little Manuel (Manuel Minuit), Manuel de Reus, Little Anthony, Garcia, and Paulo were all of Angolan descent.[84] Their names, coupled with the descriptive 'de Angola,' suggest that their journey to Manhattan brought them through the theatre of war in Spain and Portugal. These men transformed Manhattan from an outpost to a

[83] Moore 2005, 31-36.
[84] Moore 2005, 31. See also Berlin(b) 2003, 39; Berlin and Harris 2005, 6; Shorto 2004, 83.

thriving settlement, and coupled with imported women of African descent, they raised families. Ultimately, the enslaved populations of Manhattan integrated themselves into the corporate structure of New Amsterdam, procuring land near present-day Greenwich Village and eventually purchasing their freedom from corporate enslavement.

The Provisional Orders set by the Corporation in 1624 specified the role of the enforced laborer, in terms that were wholly corporate.[85] The work of the enslaved was functional, meant to grow the organizational institution of the company.[86] The social aspect of colony life was dictated by the orders, and hewed toward a Dutch sensibility of live and let live. Enslaved populations were able to bring forth complaints before governing institutions. They were able to harvest crops for their own use, after tributes were made to the company. They held positions in colonial life, albeit positions deemed lowest in Dutch society. Additionally, enslaved populations were called into military service, often acting as buffers between the corporate entity at the tip of the island and native forces to the north.[87]

With the introduction of the parade as a feature of moving water for fire safety happening at brink of the eighteenth century, publics are now able to conceive of the event of fire safety as a public display. Not only is the event of a fire an occasion to demonstrate safety on behalf of the governed state, it is also a moment to portray a sense of civic cohesion and the bringing together of an outfit. Outfit in both the organizational structure now charged with the task of machinery and safety intervention, but also, and more relevant to the point here, material appearance. How does fire safety look on parade? To answer this, a return to the beginning and the introduction of

[85] Berlin 2003(b), 30.
[86] Moore 2005, 31-35.
[87] Berlin and Harris 2005, 8.

the fire engine into the City. Having marked the twin orders brought about by the introduction of the fire engines – care/maintenance/storage and visual presentation – in relation to the coming together of the outfit, I now turn to the space of storage for the machine: the Engine House.

The fire engines, being of a considerable size, were eventually in need of a permanent location in the City where they might be stored, repaired, and maintained. It was decreed on December 1, 1731, that the two fire engines were to be stored in City Hall. "Alderman Vangelder and Alderman Roosevelt" were to form "A Committee to Employ Workmen to fitt up A Convenient Room in the City Hall of this City for securing the Fire Engines of this Corporation with all Expedition."[88] The concentration of activity in Manhattan was still centered on the lower tip of Manhattan. The initial footprint the Dutch provided, with the Fortification on the Western edge of Manhattan dominating economic, political, and military activity for the settlement, remained intact through the early 1730s. In the immediate aftermath of English rule in the former Dutch settlement, land grants were swept up by the city for municipal use. The practice of trading land parcels for government use, in turn granting landowners parcels of land in still undeveloped areas of Manhattan, continued throughout the turn of the century and into the first half of the eighteenth century. With a wide expanse of land tracts still underdeveloped on the island, there was seemingly no end to the property yet to obtain by men already holding land parcels on the lower tip of Manhattan. The growing influence of government on the island coincides with the slow acquisition of properties formerly held by private citizens. With the purchase and storing of the fire engines in City Hall in 1731, the public use of government properties paid for by the public under the administration of government appointed officials begins. This arrangement of

[88] Osgood, Keep, et. al. 1905. Vol. 4, 122.

fire engine, handlers, administration, and public use demonstrates how social services were beginning to be institutionalized in New York City, further throwing into question where and how those individuals not recognized by the City as residents, citizens, landowners, or sojourners were protected as material bodies living in the City, though not accounted for at the level of representation in government records.

Once it was established that the engines were to be permanently stored in City Hall there arose a need for the engines to be continually maintained. On January 2, 1732, it was established that a committee be formed, of no less than four members, to hire a person (or persons) to tend to the fire engine. The order reads as follows: "Ordered Mr Mayor and Any four of the Members of this Court be a Committee to Employ a Person or Persons forthwith to put the fire Engines in good Order, and also to Agree with proper Persons to look after and take Care of the same, that they may be allways in good Plight and Condition & fitt for present use."[89] Though it was not suggested in the order above, the council further resolved that the person so ordered was to be paid a yearly amount for the services provided in relation to the engine. Care and maintenance of the engines was to be paid for and handled by the individual tending to the machines, with the yearly paid amount designed to cover all expenses. The first individual charged with the care and handling of the machines was Anthony Lamb, and for his services was paid 12 pounds for his services, paid quarterly. In the common council minutes of April 6, 1733, we see Mr. Anthony Lamb enumerated as "Overseer of the Fire Engine."[90] Whereas the committees created for inspecting chimneys and hearths and overseeing buckets in private residences were established for

[89] Osgood, Keep, et. al. 1905. Vol. 4, 128.
[90] Osgood, Keep, et. al. 1905. Vol. 4, 177.

the purposes of oversight, the position of Overseer of the Fire Engine represents a specific job, paid in full, created for the purposes of a municipal service.

It is worth noting that on December 8, 1732, payment was made to Mr. John Roosevelt in the amount of one pound, nineteen shillings and seven pence half penny for his work painting City Hall and the Fire Engines housed within.[91] Over the next century and half, New York City made a great show of their fire engines, parading them with regular frequency for a variety of commemorations and memorials. As the Fire Department grew, engine companies would take great pride in their engines, decorating them in unique and fantastic ways to demonstrate strengths and myths of the engine's company. In the mid-nineteenth century, Fire Engine parades were city-wide events, with companies traveling from all along the Eastern Coast to participate. The ornamental nature of the fire engine is significant and deserves further research. At the outset it may be said that the technologies of the hand-pump engines, their development into the steam engines of the 1820s, and the capabilities of these machines to overrun the destructive power of fire, lend credence to an idea that the engines are representative of a type of invested pride. The first engines procured by the City came from London, as inventors in London had patents for the technologies required of these engines. Once the engines arrived, inventors in New York City began their work of creating fire engines that would rival London machines, and in time they were successful in creating an American hand-pump machine. Private citizens were the first to employ these American-created machines, storing engines on their private properties to protect their business and personal interests. During the lead up to the American Revolution, city officials were working with private individuals to outfit privately held fire engines for use by

[91] Osgood, Keep, et. al. 1905. Vol. 4, 164.

the general public. In exchange for lending their machines to the City, private individuals received tax incentives and land grants to offset the cost of maintenance and upkeep. Centrally located businesses stored fire engines on private properties that were used by city-funded fire engines in the event of fire.

Storing of fire engines was a practical concern for the City. Not only were the machines of such a size that structures were required to safely store and maintain the engines, the engines were also required to move to fires as they arose throughout the city. Storing the engines in a place that was centrally located was paramount, as timing was a great consideration for effectively getting a fire under control. When a fire bell was rung, engines had to be pulled out of storage and moved to the location of the fire. Additionally, those enlisted to fight the fire had to arrive at the fire from their various locations to handle the hand-pump machines. The logistics involved in getting the engine to the fire and assembling the fighters to work the machine were significant. On April 15, 1736, the city ordered that a "Committee for Building the Workhouse do imploy Workmen and provide Materials for Building a Kitchin, Oven and Washhouse to the said Workhouse, in such manner as they shall Judge necessary and convenient for the use of the said Workhouse ; and that they also cause a convenient House to be made, contiguous to the Watchhouse in the Broad Street, for securing and well keeping the Fire engines of this City."[92] This order stipulated that not only would the engines be stored near the Watchhouse, bringing together the municipal work of police service and fire service, but also that the storehouse be outfitted with amenities conducive to a productive workspace for the men serving as police and fire guards. The outfitting of engine houses for fire workers begins here. This development is

[92] Osgood, Keep, et. al. 1905. Vol. 4, 319.

significant as it demonstrates how fire safety was becoming a material institution for the City. The fire engines, paid for by specified segments of the City populous, were now to be housed in a separate storage facility, and maintained by a yearly- employed individual, in a government supported workhouse that aided in the organization, assembly, and distribution of a fire fighting work force. While public investment in a fire safety is generally considered a community concern, as demonstrated the bucket brigade ordinances still in effect, the apparatus supporting the activity of fighting fire is becoming a joint responsibility: landowners, citizens, and free inhabitants foot the bill for services that are supplied and provided for by the City. City governance has become responsible for maintaining the threat of fire, paid for by public funds. By tracking minor developments in the formation of a fire safety organization, we can learn how the city prioritized its response to the threat of fire on behalf of the public good.

Following the procuring of fire engines, sheds to store them, and a workhouse to comfort the men fighting fire, a need arose to formally adopt a department responsible solely for fighting fires. On Friday, November 4 of 1737, the City adopted a clause to establish a force, to be called "the Firemen of this City" to "Work and Play the Fire Engines within the same."[93] The Corporation was to appoint "four and twenty Able bodied Men Inhabitants within this City" who would work as said Firemen. Further, "as A Recompence and Reward for that service may by the same Law be Excused and Exempted from being Elected and serving in the Office of a Constable or being Enlisted or doing any Duty in the Militia Regiment Troop or Companys in the said City or doing any Duty in any of the Said Offices during their Continuance as Firemen

[93] Osgood, Keep, et. al. 1905. Vol. 4, 403.

as Aforesaid." [94] Since the era of Dutch corporate rule, citizens were charged with civic responsibilities, most prominently keeping Watch. With the creation of the Fire Department in 1737, the idea of civic service extends - all men serving were doing so in the capacity of volunteer - and is deemed equivalent to the long-established practice of men doing service as part of the night watch on the Island. The exemption the clause provides, that men serving as Firemen be excused from duty in militia regiments, troops, or companies in the City, as well as from serving in Office, equates the level of service thought to be provided by fire safety. The protection of the city is now extended to fighting the threat caused by fire.

On Tuesday, September 19, 1738, the first volunteer Fire Department of New York City was sworn in to the public record.[95] Minutes provide a full rooster of the men chosen to be Firemen, with their profession and wards notated. The records are divided between citizens and inhabitants, land ownership being the dividing line between the two groups of men. It is restated in the orders for the Firemen at their swearing in that their service as fire fighters exempts them from serving in any other municipal capacity on the island. Under the rules and regulations for the Fire Department the following clause established the conditions through which Firemen would be asked to perform duties outside of fire fighting:

> That in Consideration of the good services of the Said Firemen to be by them done and performed (Pursuant to the Act of General Assembly aforesaid) such Firemen so Elected, Nominated, Appointed, and Registred as Aforesaid, shall be freed, Exempted and Priviledged from Serving in the several Offices of A Constable,

[94] ibid, 404.
[95] Osgood, Keep, et. al. 1905. Vol. 4, 436-438.

> Surveyor of the Highways, Jurys or Inquests, or serving in the Militia or any of the Independant Companys within this City Except in Cases of Invasion or Other imminent danger.[96]

"Except in Cases of Invasion or Other imminent danger" the Firemen were exempted from militia service. This clause would influence the development of individual gun rights nearly a century later, but at present it is worth noting that the exemption of Firemen from service in a military capacity produces a specific type of male camaraderie in New York City in relation to public service. The fortification of the wall and the Fort in Lower Manhattan during Dutch rule, and the continuation of watch service during the reign of the English crown, unified a certain class of men as it concerns the ideals of protecting private and public property. Neighbors had investments in their properties and land as owner and landlords; the watch was a means through which public interest could be maintained. With the advent of a Fire department, the protection of public good was now centered against a force of nature in its ability to decimate public and private property. Whereas the watch protected citizens and residents from other human interferences, the fire department protected material goods and property from damaging forces of nature.

The continued settlement of the land brought about conflicts with indigenous populations and enslaved populations as well as with the forces of nature that settlers sought to overcome. Fire was a threat, aided by the flammable nature of materials used to build and grow the settlement on the island. While the watch, in accordance with governance, tampered the threat of human destruction and crime through laws and criminal prosecution, the fire department, organized late

[96] Osgood, Keep, et. al. 1905. Vol. 4, 440.

in the development of the City's municipal force, relied on human force, intuition, strategic design and will power to battle the ravages of fire. The Fire Department was in possession of a great power, having the ability to effectively, or not effectively, let a fire burn and cause great damage to the property of the City, both private and public. As the department grew in size, and engine houses were stationed throughout the city in various wards and unsettled lands, the effectiveness of a engine company was measured not by how effective they were in fighting fires, but in how effectively an engine company manipulated the threat of fire to mold the development of private and public property.

The Great Fire of 1776 marks a break in the progressive history of New York City, as the British took control of City. The British occupation of the island would last throughout a majority of the revolution, with much of the civil ordinances and laws thrown into chaos as the city was under military control. Following the British retreat and the establishment of New York as a free state in the new American republic, governing entities reinstated municipal services in keeping with pre-revolutionary era rules. As the city prepared to expand northward, already established practices concerning fire engines, engine houses, and the men of the New York City volunteer fire department were adapted and rewritten in accordance with the needs of a rapidly growing city.

Engine Thirty-Three (est. 1807)

What follows is a case study for one volunteer fire engine company on Lower Manhattan. By detailing the initial requests for the establishment of the fire engine company, the procuring of an engine for said company, the stationing of a company of men to serve on behalf of the engine

company, and an assessing the effectiveness of the engine company to faithfully protect the residents, businesses, and properties of the engine company jurisdiction, I detail how private merchant interests manipulated fire safety concerns to create a lucrative mercantile district for a select immigrant population. Development of the East River waterfront coupled with advancing technologies in the shipping industry demanded a manipulation of fire safety institutions to further the interests of a select few.

The fire of 1824 began early Wednesday morning in the steam sawmill of Noah Brown's shipyard on Manhattan Island. In one hour's time it had completed its task. In the end the fire would claim victory over three shipyards, two brigs, two steamboats, and a city fire engine; all told, estimated insurance claims totaled forty thousand dollars. For the shipyard owners, Adam and Noah Brown, Charles Brownne, and Isaac Webb, the loss was greater than a monetary total, for the industry they had been cultivating on this far-flung marshy land just east of mainland Manhattan would now have to be redeveloped from the ground up. In some ways the fire had been aptly timed, coinciding with massive land overhauls that were solidifying lower Manhattan as urban development moving north across the island. The marsh lands, forests, and inlet waterways of Manhattan Island, the acreage constituting the hook of Lower Manhattan, were always profitable for merchants tied to mercantile industry, yet progress could only reach so far given the structural limitations of the wetlands. To fully extract the true wealth of the land the area would have to be filled in, rebuilt from the ground up. The fire, occurring when and where it did, meant that landowners would now be able to industrialize the land for the latest technologies of steam and urban manufacturing.

Paying tribute to the successes of the past demand particular types of investment from those paying tribute. For the men of Engine Company Thirty-three, what do their tributes, particularly the naming of their fire engine "The Black Joke," reveal about their collective investment in the past? What legacies are to be enacted through such tributes? In this case study I consider the slow accretion of institutional legacies for New York City firefighting culture, performing a micro-history on the men of Engine Company Number Thirty-Three at the start of the nineteenth century. Reading newspaper, travelogues, and city documents, I trace how the Engine Company sought to honor their lost objects through installations of new technologies. As a final analysis for the chapter, I consider the placement of the fire engine in city parades at mid-century and the lingering effect this has on the bodies of Black men on Manhattan.

I use the event of the shipyard fire at Adam Noah and Brothers shipyard on March 14, 1824 to describe the community ties interwoven in the shipping industry, and the danger fire proved to local economy. Putting fire at the center of civic concern and municipal service, I describe how the character of a neighborhood, or ward, is brought into material existence via the local fire engine company. Beyond heeding the call to protect the area from the danger of fire, these communities of men gathered and instilled a sense of local pride into the neighborhood. Spaces such as the Engine Houses, docks, and ferry slips, recreational activities such as parades and picnics, and turf wars between feuding engine companies and the merchants who support them all play a part in ascertaining the spirit of local character developing on Corlear's Hook.

Minutes for the Common Council of the City of New York dated May 25th, 1807, recognize a petition brought forth by Abraham Cannon and other inhabitants in the vicinity of

Corlear's Hook "praying that a Fire Engine be stationed in that quarter of the City."[97] Later, in minutes dated June 15th, 1807, it is resolved that the City's Fire Engine No. One, previously situated at the Methodist Meeting Square on Lower Manhattan, be transferred to Corlear's Hook - that fire engine having been replaced by a larger engine now stationed at Engine House Number Four. Council minutes note "that the Chief Engineer deposit the Engine in such place as may be most conducive for the protection of that quarter of the city."[98] Corlear's Hook, a parcel of land jutting out onto the East River of Manhattan just North of the island's southernmost tip, was an instrumental site of New York's emerging mercantile industry. An expanse of wild acreage mixed with marshland, dense forestry, a fresh water collect, and amble land for planting and harvesting, was, by 1807, a curious mixture of rural plantation life tinged with the burgeoning urban classes of wealth and landed gentry that would define the city for the next century. These two city council entries dated from late spring-early summer of 1807 begin a curious chapter in the history of The Black Joke, a history bound to the insemination of Fire Engine Company Number Thirty-three on Manhattan's Corlear Hook of the seventh ward; an engine company otherwise known as 'The Black Joke Guard.'

The fire engine recently relocated to the seventh ward was immediately supplied with an engine company, the council having appointed ten men to serve on its behalf. From council minutes dating July 13, 1807, "New Engine Company at Corlaers Hook" is created, with the following individuals serving on its behalf: "Thomas Timpson, David Cannon, Benjamin Hill, Samuel Hopkins, Peter Van Colt, Jonathan Lownsbury, Coles Dean, William Powell, Isaac Halsey,

[97] Peterson and Matteson. 1917. Vol. 17, 434.
[98] ibid, 462.

Thomas Winship."[99] This was the thirty-third fire engine that the city had in its employ, the new engine company numbered the same. While the minutes do not specifically name the new fire engine on Corlear's Hook Fire Engine Company Number Thirty-Three, an entry from one month later, on August 17, 1807, makes the connection. Minutes report that "Joseph Parker, Carman, of 7th Ward was appointed Fireman" for "Fire Company N° 26 in the place of Peter Van Colt, transferred to N° 33."[100] From this we may declare that the engine requested by Abraham Cannon and the other inhabitants of Corlear's Hook was not only furnished, but outfitted with an entire company of men serving on behalf of New York City's Volunteer Fire Engine Company.

Further complicating the origin story of The Black Joke fire engine company is a petition from Brown and Bergh, proprietors of shipyards located on Manhattan Island, concerning the tract of land enclosed within Corlear's Hook. The young businessmen and mercantile merchants have proven instrumental in the development of this area of Manhattan, owing to a prestigious legacy of mercantile success is the burgeoning Americas. Since 1807, Brown, Bergh, Bell, and Webb have petitioned successfully for water grants along the Corlear's Hook waterfront. Their aim, to develop the land into stable shores capable of being outfitted with docks, shipyards, and ferry slips. The changing technologies in the shipping industry, primarily having to do with the introduction of steam technology, has opened a booming landscape of possibilities for the development of the waterfront. Accordingly, the men have requested a permanent site for the fire engine that has been recently relocated to their district, thereby moving the engine from the private concern of the shipbuilders and their docks, to a more publicly centered locale wherein it

[99] Peterson and Matteson. 1917. Vol. 17, 498.
[100] ibid, 524.

may be of use to all members of the public flocking to this developing area of Manhattan.

From September 26, 1808, the following request was heard and passed: "A Petition of Adam and Noah Brown and C. Bergh proprietors of a Fire Engine employed by them for the use of Ships, requesting per mission to erect a building for the same near Gouverneur Street, in which case they are willing that said Engine may be applied for the extinction of Fires ; was read and granted under the direction of the Superintendant [sic] of repairs."[101] This petition signals a private-public investment in the instruments of fire safety on Corlear's Hook. Brown and Bergh erected an engine house to store the engine recently located to this part of Manhattan. The engine was to be used by the city for protecting all properties in the seventh ward district of Corlear's Hook. Additionally, the house were this was to be stored was to be erected on private property. While the engine was for use by the public it was very much an instrument of the private shipbuilders.

It is worth noting the importance of stationing a fire engine on this tract of land that was very much still in development in the early 1800s. As shipbuilders, workers were using combustible materials to outfit their ships, to heat their workspaces, to light their spaces. Fire was all around them and the threat posed by fire was a legitimate concern for all seeking to grow an enterprise on this part of the Island. The businessmen growing their property and water rights along the Hook knew fire safety was imperative, not only as a deterrent from harm and injury, but also as a means of fortifying their business interest and wealth. Fire was a weapon. It may have been enacted on competing businesses as way of eradicating competition or clearing land for new enterprises. Throughout the era of British rule, colonists saw not only the destructive power of fire, but also

[101] Peterson and Matteson. 1917. Vol. 17, 272.

the political and financial maneuvering that manipulation of fire could bring. The Great Fire of 1766 demonstrated the destruction fire could bring, particularly when it may have begun as an act of arson. The British occupation of New York City, though never really in doubt as many residents fled the City prior to forces taking hold of the streets, was strategically upheld by the destruction of the fire. Nearly one-third of the City was comprised by the fire, the one-third housing the financial district and seat of government power, as well as the homes of the more affluent residents. Fire was not only a threat, but a powerful weapon in the strategic settlement of the island. Having a fire engine on Corlear's Hook from the start of its development was a strategic move meant to safely insure investors that fire would be manipulated in a means beneficial to their business interest. Outfitting the engine with a company of men and a fire house secured on private business property, further insured that Brown, Bergh, et. al. would have protection from the danger of fire as well as a means to manipulate the spread of fire to their benefit.

A month following the erection of a fire house near Gouverneur's Street by Brown and Bergh, the city council took up the clause introduced by the Fire Department Laws and Regulations in 1737. The council crafted a register of all men serving on behalf of the Fire Department, creating an official book to be stationed at City Hall furnishing the names, professions, and wards for all men in service. All men, residents, inhabitants, and landowners, were required to serve on juries as well as in militias, should such service be required. Exempting Fire Department volunteers from such service crafted a particular ethos around the act of fire fighting, an ethos on par with protecting the City from foreign threat. The militaristic arm of the City was equated with the threat of fire, in that two distinct forces were established to deal with the two different, though tangentially related threats. Protecting the City from foreign adversaries,

very much a reality in the immediate aftermath of the Revolutionary War, was as much a concern as the threat posed by the enemy within, the unwieldy fire. And though destruction by fire may be caused by acts of arson, the fire department was tasked simply to battle the fire. They were not meant to serve as jurists in the trails of a fire's origins. In many ways, fire fighters were third-party participants in acts of war being waged by arson across the city. Further complicating this dynamic was the slow rise of insurance schemes and speculation investments throughout the 1810s. The city was growing and expanding, becoming a global player in the mercantile industry. Fire was a homegrown force put into use to influence economic and real estate markets as the city moved northward. Firefighters were on the ground, extinguishing or ignoring flames as best befits the proprietors and landowners on whose land the fire was being fought.

In 1810 a new fire engine was delivered to Corlear's Hook. A larger machine, the council determined that the Engine Company was in need of more men to outfit the Engine House. On February 10, 1810, Council notes disclose that "James P. Allaire Brass (founder, Walnut St 7th ward), John Woolsey (cartman, Lewis Street Tenth ward), Jonas Brush…James Chilson…William Craft…Thomas Beekman…Daniel Barker…Aaron Vanderbelt…being additional men granted in consequence of a larger engine having been assigned to the Company" were now attached to Engine Company Thirty-Three. In the year prior, the shipbuilders on Corlear's Hook had further solidified their hold on this part of Manhattan. [102] With plans afoot to expand the City northward using a grid design for the remained of the Island, landowners and businessman petitioned the City to further enumerate land parcels and water grants on Manhattan Island and the surrounding Corlear's Hook. In a uncharacteristic move, council members allowed for landowners and

[102] Peterson and Matteson. 1917. Vol. 21, 90.

merchants to draft detailed maps of land lots and water grants, having discussed amongst themselves who owned what parcels of land, and to submit those plots to the City for approval. The council agreed and the land-water grants were officially documented according to the wishes of local private investors. The control seized by the proprietors of this area of Manhattan was complete, having been able to craft their own land divisions for recognition by the City as well as being able to compel the City to enact municipal service for their area in the size and place that they best saw fit. This was a benefit for the City in that an extremely lucrative portion of the Island was being developed with little oversight from governance to profitable ends.

The Fire Engine company was enhanced three years later, an additional ten men were added to the fold with a larger engine also being supplied to the company. By 1813, the company comprised thirty men with "a new Engine of not less than 6 Inches Calliber."[103] The Engine Company was an institution on Corlear's Hook, the protection the engine and the men who worked it supplied was embedded in the district, a part of the fabric of what was becoming a hugely profitable shipbuilding quarter of the City. The War of 1812 increased this development tenfold, with government contracts being awarded to Brown, Bell, Bergh, and Issac Webb. Shipbuilders crafted vessels to sail out of New York's harbor for the war fought mainly on the seas. In the winter of 1812, Henry Eckford, along with Brown, delivered to Sackett's Harbor in upstate New York a company of men to build maritime vessels for the North Atlantic theatre of war, including men from Engine Company Number Thirty-Three. This period of building was significant for crafting a sense of camaraderie amongst the men of Corlear's Hook. At both their Engine Company house near Gouverneur Street and at their shipyards at the Northern New York

[103] Peterson and Matteson. 1917. Vol. 26, 530-531.

border, these men built machinery that was directly influential in the new nation's defense of itself. The sense of pride these men held for their participation in the war efforts was long-lasting, as will be shown by the naming of the Black Joke fire engine nearly a decade later. Further, the financial benefits of wartime contracts afforded to Brown, Bell, and company exponentially expanded growth on Corlear's Hook.

Following the war, merchants and landowners continued to develop Corlear's Hook, turning the former marshland into a proper extension of the City's interior. Shipyards were bustling, the effects of the War creating an inroad for American merchants in the trade economies so reliant upon the water. Technologies, primarily steam, were starting to revolutionize the process of shipbuilding - several of Fulton's creations were launched from docks on Corlear's Hook. The former wetlands between Manhattan Island and the mainland were slowly filled in. Relying on slave and prison labor, the task of firmly enjoining the Island of Manhattan to Manhattan Island and Corlear's Hook, was completed over the course of nearly three years. By 1820, Corlear's Hook was a profitable haven of shipworkers, shipbuilders, ferry slips, and other industries associated with trade on water. With the successful first wave of development complete, businessmen on the Hook began to explore their next path of development. The promise of a canal connecting the interior of the United States to the ports of Manhattan promised an entirely new market for merchants and builders on the Hook. The demand soon to be placed on shipbuilders and merchant traders meant that further development would be necessary if demand was to be met. Again, as before, an early indicator of growth in this section of Manhattan was marked by the request for additional fire safety measures.

Early in 1823, Adam Brown requested that an additional fire engine be placed on

Manhattan Island. Brown's logic, so far as it revealed in council minutes, relays that the growth of the area and the spread of properties across the fully developed region require that additional machines be outfitted nearby so that engines may arrive at fires in a timely fashion. The council's swift reply is telling, for it provides an insight into how the area was being protected from the threat of fire. The city had furnished but one Fire Engine Company in this section of the city; Fire Engine No. 33 was the local engine company, their house located on a shipyard of former engine company member James Allaire. The five or six engines that the council references were private engines, owned by private business owners, and therefore, in the eyes of Brown and company, were not to be relied upon for serving a greater public good when it came to fire safety. The land and water grants afforded to Brown and his cohort extended from present-day Delancey Street to just north of Houston Street.

It was unimaginable in the eyes of Brown that one fire engine was sufficient to protect such a large acreage of shipbuilding properties. Additionally, with competing merchants entering into the market in this area, there was no insurance that fires on their land, potentially set by acts of arson, would be protected by engines of competing private business owners. Brown sought the City's protection, as it had done nearly fifteen years prior; the large investments made by Brown and his fellow businessmen seemed to warrant further protection from the City. The city did not agree and the request was denied.

A year later, almost to the date, Brown entered another petition into the record for an additional fire engine to be housed on the Hook. On February 16, 1824, "A petition of Noah Brown and others for the establishment of an Fire Engine on Manhattan Island or its vicinity was

read and referred to the Committee on Fire Department."[104] Once again, the Fire Department Committee denied the request and Brown was denied protection for his booming shipbuilding industry. Fortunate, then, for Brown and others was the shipyard fire of 1824 that ultimately led to the establishment of an additional fire engine house. The council minutes relate details of the fire, specifically as it relates to the loss of the Fire Engine of Company 33:

> The Committee on the Fire Department presented the following communication on the Subject of a Fire Engine destroyed at the late fire at Manhattan Island The Chief Engineer having reported to the Committee on the Fire Department the Loss of one of the Corporation Engines by the late fire at Manhattan Island Your Committee in Conformity with their duty have made the necessary enquiries as to the manner of the loss, which they are happy to say was in no manner owing to the negligence or carelessness of the Company but on the Contrary the men who had her in charge did everything in their power to get [294] *her in charge did every thing in their power to get* her removed from the fire but with out being able to Effect it in time to prevent its destruction Your Committee therefore are induced to recommend that the Company be furnished with a new Machine after those now building and engaged to other Companies are finished for which purpose they beg leave to offer the following resolution Resolved that the Superintendent of Repairs cause a new Engine to be built to Supply the place of N° 33 recently destroyed.[105]

Newspaper accounts of the fire provide further detail about the incident, particularly how the fire

[104] Peterson and Matteson. 1917. Vol. 50, 537.
[105] ibid, 648-649 (emphasis in original).

engine was lost to company.

'The Old Bombazula,' the unofficial name for Engine Company 33's fire engine, was lost in the fire. It would appear that given the location of the fire, in the shipyard of Adam Brown, and the quick spread of the fire, through to the neighboring shipyards of Charles Browne and Issac Webb, the Engine Company needed to strategically position their engine to halt the dangerous flames. The engine was positioned between the East River and the shipyard of Webb, just south of the fire's origins. Due to the quick movement of the flame, the firefighters found themselves surrounded by flames on the North and West and the East River to the East. At a certain point in the quick destruction, the firefighters had to make a choice between saving their engine, and thereby subsequently ceasing their attempt to fight the fire or continuing to fight as the flames closed in around them. While firefighters fought the flames, dockworkers attempted to save the ships that were near completion in the dockyards. Two ships were launched, one being a new steamboat belonging to Robert Fulton, however both were unable to remain afloat. After attempting to save the ships, orders were called to abandon the operation and suffer the loss of the fire engine as well. The burnt heap of the fire engine was found in the East River later that day, while the firefighters working to stop the flames had to be fished out of the water.

This was a great loss to Brown and the members of Engine Company Thirty-three. Not only was property lost and damages sustained, but their strength of pride of being able to fight fire in this district of Manhattan was also in question. The result of this, however, was a retreat by the council as to how the area was to be outfitted with fire engines. It was immediately determined that a new fire engine was to be built to replace the one lost in the fire. This was to be expected given the permanence that Fire Engine Company 33 had in the district. As the council ordered a

new engine to be built, the company was assured that they would be furnished with the latest technology of steam-powered engine. In a sense, the engine company received both a replacement and an upgrade for the materials previously destroyed. Further, it was determined by the council, that an additional engine and fire company would be furnished in this part of Manhattan. This is what Brown and company had demanded from the start, and now, owing to a conflagration that decimated lucrative private property and wealthy public-private investment, it was a request that would be approved. Brown got what he wanted, albeit at a great personal loss. It is worth noting that while insurance paid only a partial reimbursement on the property lost, the rebuilt shipyards - now fully outfitted with up-to- date maritime technology (including the first dry dock on the American eastern seaboard) - were exponentially superior to other competing shipyards. In the end, Brown was able to clear his old shipyards to make way for substantial improvements, while forcing government officials to provide the additional protection requested. All this with expenses offset by insurance.

At this time in 1824, Brown, Bergh, Eckford, Webb, and others were in the process of forming the New York Dry Dock Company. Rather than sink their own money into a business venture that was risky from the start, the men formed a corporation to further develop the waterfront north of Lower Manhattan. While their initial papers sought to purchase and develop tracts of land for the purpose of outfitted docks and slips in a manner like the waterfront already established, they soon turned their efforts to establishing a dry dock on Manhattan's East River. There was no dry dock on the American East Coast. Ships, once they had been put to sea, were required to travel to London for any mass repair or improvement required on the ship's hull. Docks in Manhattan were not able to pull ships completely out of the water, making all necessary

repairs to the hull a costly venture. Indeed, it was often the case that shipbuilders destroyed ships that needed major repairs, choosing to build a new operation rather than suffer the cost and potential damages of shipping the vessels across the Atlantic. Furnishing Manhattan with a dry dock meant that shipbuilders could tend to repair locally, saving the trans-Atlantic cost of repair. For the owners of this dry dock, the potential revenue was massive. Being the first and only dry dock on the Eastern seaboard meant a steady run of merchants up and down the coast seeking their service. Brown and company were aware of this lucrative development and would have done all they could to secure this corner of the market. The fire in March of 1824 aided this project by clearing the land necessary to build such an operation, forcing the city council to provide additional machines and manpower to the cause of fire safety, and demonstrating a degree of power and force unrivaled by competing merchants looking to gain access to this corner of the market.

The New York Dry Dock Company was successful. The waterfront underwent a great transformation in 1825, when the company officially incorporated and began business. The number of ships seeking repair and use of the dry dock nearly tripled the work force in this sector of town. In addition to the new shipyards created to house all the many ships coming in for repair, local services blossomed in the area. Machinists specializing in parts and services, artisans crafting wares for transport on newly refurbished ships, marketplaces with vendors catering to the expanded workforce and visiting merchants and sailors, temporary residences, food locales, and houses of pleasure, all were attracted to the area. So profitable was the Dry Dock Company that they were soon granted banker's rights as part of their incorporation papers. Dry Dock Company became a substantial lender on the maritime waterfront.

The new fire engine company erected on Manhattan Island was to be No. 44 in the city's arsenal of machines. Engine No. 19, which was in the process of being sold by the City, was to be relocated to Manhattan Island. Henry Eckford, a shipbuilder who worked closely with Adam Brown, and was a frequent builder of government contracted ships during the War of 1812 and after, was to house the engine on his property. The engine was to be stored in an Engine House that was to be used by the new fire company. The city council took great care to note the exceptional nature of this new fire engine company, making sure that it was noted that it was custom to erecting a new fire company under such circumstances. Minutes from June 21, 1824, report:

> The Committee on the Fire Department to whom was referred the Petition of Noah Brown and others praying that an Engine may be placed at Manhattan Island. Report. That they have had the above petition before them for some time, and after mature deliberation and a personal inspection of the exposed situation of the Inhabitants residing in that vicinity. The opinion of your Committee is decidedly against increasing the Fire Department except in very special cases. In consideration. how ever, of this location being so remote from the more dense population of the City, Your Committee feel themselves bound to report in favour of the petitioners. they therefore beg leave to recommend that Engine N° 19 (which by a resolution of the Board was ordered to be sold) be placed in such Situation as shall be agreed on by your Committee, and Henry Eckford Esqr who has offered to appropriate a piece of ground for the purpose of erecting the

necessary building for containing the Machine.[106]

The shipyard fire of March, 1824 was indeed effective. Not only was the fire engine of Company 33 replaced and upgraded, the area merchants benefitted as well with the introduction an additional fire company bound to the interests of Brown, Eckford, and company. This securing of an additional fire engine company meant that the men working on its behalf were able to ensure the safety of the proprietors for whom they worked - as shipbuilders and as firemen. While firemen were charged with the protection of all residents under their jurisdiction, it was common practice that engine companies responded to fires as best befitted their own communal interest. Tales have been related in histories of the Fire Department were competing engines thwarted each other's efforts to fight fires. The capping of water plugs, the sounding of bells in areas far away from where fires were burning, and instigation of fights between companies surround the events of fire throughout the city. Fire was a political and financial weapon and engine company fire fighters were the armed militias battling the threat.

The next significant development for Engine Company 33 occurs in 1830. By this time Engine Company 33 and Engine Company 44 (the previous Engine 19 now situated on Manhattan Island) controlled the Corlear's Hook region. Both companies held ties to the businessmen of waterfront, Engine Company 33 was housed on the shipyard of James Allaire, Engine Company 44 was housed on the shipyard of Henry Eckford. Both companies were known for their brute force; it was many an instance when a fire was attended by both fractions, often erupting into street brawls lasting throughout the night. The corner of the market that had been secured by Brown and company was complete, their business ventures and property holdings

[106] Peterson and Matteson. 1917. Vol. 52, 760.

making these men influential power-players in Manhattan in the 1830s. The power of the fire engine company was legend by this time in Manhattan's history. An insurance scandal and bank run in 1828 further cemented the power fire protection meant to business interest in the City. Eckford was implicated in the insurance scandal of 1828, and though he evaded serious prosecution, his involvement reveals the ends to which fire was manipulated for the purpose of extracting insurance rewards. The Dry Dock Company also evaded significant losses in the bank run of the 1820s, proving that their hold on the waterfront was significant enough to outlast the momentary market inflation. The strategic development of Corlear's Hook throughout the 1810s and 1820s, coupled with a masterful manipulation of government contacts and municipal resources, shielded these men from the precarious nature of new and shifting markets. The growth and collapse in speculation that resulted from the opening of the Erie Canal and the City's expansion northward largely evaded these proprietors, in part because of the firm control these men held on the threat of fire as the city developed.

When the members of Fire Engine Company No. 33 petitioned the City in 1830 for new firehouse, they signaled a move on behalf of the men to establish themselves separate from the machinations of the shipbuilders on Corlear's Hook. It is significant that the men of the Fire Company petitioned the council, as prior to this occasion it was a merchant or landowner who made the request. Further, it is worth noting that the men asked to be moved off land belonging to James Allaire and to be stationed within the area but on a municipal lot. This breaks a tradition previously held by fire engine companies, where a private business owner housed an engine and its company even though the engine was meant for public use. The request, which was ultimately approved, asked for the engine house to be placed a clear lot, the fire engine newly

erected. These expenses were to be paid for by the City, again marking a significant change in business operations. Whereas prior to this instance engine houses were built and paid for by private business owners, now the City was to bear the expense of housing a Fire Engine company. It may be that such a move was concocted by city officials in attempt to move the seat of power of the Fire Department from private interest. Unfortunately, the records do not affirm intentionality behind such a move. Still, the effect is that the men of Engine Company 33 were now to be located on Gouverneur Street proper, in a building erected solely for their benefit. No longer was the Engine Company under the direct influence of a particular landowner, but rather serving and belonging to a more generic sense of the greater public use.

The specifics of their new engine house are detailed in the council minutes. The means by which the property is secured is revealing of how the Fire Department begins to assert its authority independent from the desires of independent property-owners. It is also worth noting, as an aside, that the fire house approved below, the new home for Fire Engine Company Thirty-three, would eventually become the fire engine and meeting house for Boss Tweed during his tenure with Tammany Hall. The minutes of June 28, 1830, read as follows:

> That your Committee have endeavoured to procure a more favorable scite and after no little delay, Report that a Lot can be procured on the West side of Gouverneur Street 25 feet South of Henry street of the following dimensions 24 feet 7 Inches front and rear & 54 feet deep for the sum of One thousand dollars, this Lot in their opinion is a very desirable Location, and that part of the Lot that will not be wanted at this time for the above purpose can be rented at a price nearly

to pay the interest of the purchase money.[107]

The pricing of the new firehouse is significant, in that the Fire Department Committee has secured the land and determined that only a parcel would be necessary for the Engine House. The remaining parts of the land may be rented out at a price for other use. This represents an instance where the City would benefit from a purchase, having acquired more than was needed and exploited the remainder for profit. The city as landlord is exemplified here. It is also worth noting that the recommendation for purchasing the lot, and its division and further exploitation, are all directed by the Committee of the Fire Department. It is via their recommendation that the council is directed to act. The measure is approved, the land is purchased, and the house is built; by September 30, 1830, the house was ready for the men to occupy.

[107] Peterson and Matteson. 1917. Vol. 72, 135.

Fig. 1. *The School Boy* (Plate No. 1) from "The Fireman in Four Plates" (c. 1850)

While documentation of black participants in the City's fire safety organization of the early nineteenth century remains thin, there is one place where we may turn to investigate how blacks were thought to belong to the City in relation to civic duty. This is an important question to consider concerning labor and the constitution and continuation of an embedded racial structure of and for civic belonging. To what end is the legacy of slavery, the black quasi-citizen, publicly greeted upon the civic social stage of public engagement? What were the structures established to re-introduce fellow publics albeit draped in new altogether possibly different public appearance. The slave no longer, the freeman

with rights, the so-called former slave-cum-Negro soon Black is given scripted labor on behalf of an anti-racist visual logic seeking to take root.

The first image in a series of four collectively known as "The Fireman in Four Plates" features four men locked a tale, captivated forever by a story never heard (Figure 1). Plate One of The Life of a Fireman series depicts the scene of the Engine House and the attraction it provided by young boys. Plate One features three men working inside an Engine House, the doors of the house flung open onto the street. At left, a man leans forward with one foot on a stool. He is in the midst of story, his left hand pointing downward as if to accent the point he is making at this moment in his story. To his immediate right, kneeling on the floor, a man polishes a fireman's trumpet - the tool used by captains and chiefs to direct men at the chaotic scene of the fire. As he kneels and polishes the trumpet, his attention is turned to the man on the right. He is engrossed in the story, his face alert, suggesting that some degree of interest in the information being shared. Still further right is a young boy, satchel at his side, leaning on the outside door. He too is wrapped up in the activities and storytelling being shared in the fire house. He leans forward, his left toe pointing and his left hand on hip - all seeming to suggest that his too is being drawn into the scene of the fire house. His head, however, is tilted toward the rear of the fire house. Inside, in the background, a young male of color is tending to a fire lantern. The fire engine is behind him, seemingly making it, as well as the lantern, as part of his domain. He faces off into the darkness of the engine house, his glare focused right behind the door and the building that we do not see. The caption for the scene reads, "The germ of chivalry in the heart of a boy is aroused by the Active Fireman's recital of his exploits."

Running with a Fire Engine was a rite of passage for many young boys on Lower Manhattan. Many an elected official in Manhattan gives testimony to the fire engine house to

which they were affiliated as a youth. The alliances forged by young men to their fire engine was a lifelong devotion, as best exemplified by Boss Tweed and his love for Fire Engine No. 6 (housed in the previous home of Engine No. 33). The location of the fire house and the wards that they serve dictated the direction that men of power threw their influence in their years as titans of Manhattan's political and economic sectors. The machine that was Tammany Hall had its roots in the city's Fire Department, again the threat of fire being a powerful weapon in the development of the island's wealth. As immigrant communities moved into Lower Manhattan throughout the 1820s and 1830s, that power was solidified through the camaraderie of the fire house. As the image above demonstrates, youth were enticed into the dangerous world of battling fires through the space of the fire house. The engine house was a site where an ethos of male camaraderie and belonging was stoked. For immigrant men seeking to find entry into the social and political sphere of newly adopted home, the fire house was a place to establish and perform their sense of belonging to their new home state. The structure of the volunteer fire system was such that immigrant men were able to serve as part of their pathway toward full citizenship.

The fire house was inclusive, it was a means of bringing new arrivals into the folds of democracy. With its attraction for youth, it was also a means of growing new citizens out from within the immigrant populations. Engine Houses had political affiliations, to the proprietors, landowners, and merchants residing the wards protected by designated fire houses. As was seen with Adam Brown and the fire of 1824, the men of the fire company were beholden to the financial needs of industries ruling economies developing in Manhattan. The myth-making power of male dominance was performed in the storytelling of bravery in the face of fire. This spirit of strength was fortified in riots, acts of theft, and heroics demonstrated by fire men in countless

fires that plagued the city in the first half of the nineteenth century. With the rise of Boss Tweed, the democratic machine power of the lower wards was further monetized as political influence was buttressed with enemy destruction by fire. A man's worth was tied to the fire engine he ran with, the engine company being a status marker for specific immigrant populations and their influence, in turn, on the social and political power structure of New York City.

The two men graphically positioned center in the above image present a particular triangulation of spatial relations concerning immigrant-black belonging. Focal point aligning at the center of the canvas. The foreground of the image, the spread of three men across the closest plane. In the background is the man holding objects. What are those objects? There is a lantern. There is a gold rod. Is the lantern attached to the rod? How does the rod and lantern work together, and why is he holding them? What does the image reveal concerning ethnic belonging of these two, possibly three, men locked inside of this static drama? How are they connected, in the space of the theatrical space - the space of the bunkhouse and fire engine storehouse? What brings together this diverse workforce, what purpose unites these figures in a space of close intimacy, and what then might we say of the work required bringing these men together? What does civic responsibility have to do with the congregation on display in this graphic static image?

Volunteer Fire Companies in the Americas from the colonial era through to the middle of the nineteenth century offer a unique instance of performing citizen participation in civil service labor as a constitutive part of establishing criterion for belonging to the nation-state. As enslaved residents fought for freedom in the post-revolutionary United States, fire companies became a visible evental site for enacting performances of belonging. As we shall see, immigrant inclusion into the

citizenry of the United States was afforded to groups of men by association with municipal fire companies, as well as through extra-circular activities sanctioned by individual fire companies.

This brings to question the role of the colored man in the image of The Life of the Fireman series. As we have seen earlier, the formerly enslaved, the negro or the colored man, was exempt from service in the City's Fire Department. Their inclusion in the initial volunteer fire service was never in question, the concerns of the negro being separate and distinct from the concerns of fire safety. When slavery was all but eradicated in the City in 1827, a question was never raised as whether or not black men would serve in an official capacity as a fireman. Even as citizenship was in question for the newly freed black individual, a question that would impact voting rights and militia service, fire safety was never thought to be a priority or a requirement for the black, formerly enslaved, negro. Still, evidence remains to suggest that black men were a part of the fire house culture. The image above bears proof, as does an entry in the Our Firemen, A History of the New York Fire Departments Paid and Volunteer. In a paragraph describing the engine of company 33, "painted a 'nigger' black on the body and had a gold stripe running all the way around," we are told that "among the runners were two gigantic negroes, one named John Arno alias "Black Jack," and the other was called "Black Joe." Further, "Those darkeys made themselves very serviceable around the engine house, and felt themselves highly honored in being asked to do anything. They were not, however, allowed to bunk in the engine house."[108] Again the negro is both separate from full inclusion in the activities of fire safety in Manhattan and yet belongs to the scene of firefighting as a municipal service in Manhattan. Negro bodies were called into service as part of a fire safety institution and yet is remains unclear to what extent those bodies were in service.

[108] Costello 1886, 706.

III. Bearing the Burden of Bad Taste

Transmission of The Black Joke from London, England to Manhattan, New York was effectively complete by the late 1820s when Volunteer Fire Engine Company Number Thirty-Three christened their organization The Black Joke Engine Company. The Original Black Joke, sent from Dublin to London in the year 1720, was a multi-verse ballad song describing male pleasure when in

company with the female commodity. The Black Joke names a variety of objects and things, all deriving from a description of the female sexual and reproductive anatomy: a class of North Sea shipping vessels, an Irish country song and dance, a trope for English theatre and dance. According to printed documents, earliest documented textual reference to The Black Joke arrives in an early-eighteenth century shipping manifest from English and Irish shores on the North Sea. Shipping manifests, dating from mid-eighteenth century trans-Atlantic trade evidence the chronological advance of The Black Joke.[109] With each further iteration of The Black Joke, manifest in new types or forms, the linguistic force of the joke's meaning is further compounded, becoming all that it meant or signified prior along with what it now stands to represent. With each shift there is a significant or substantial change to the textual surface of The Black Joke that might be felt in the most exorbitant of minor effects.

In this chapter I trace three developments in the performance history of The Black Joke. First, through the pen of Hogarth, we find an implicit visual citation of the joke. Connecting Hogarth's engraving to a theatrical trope known as The Bedtrick, I draw together the colored implications of the slang vernacular. Next, I turn to glossaries and dictionaries of slang and cant to trace literary definitions of The Black Joke. Across several editions of Grose's Slang dictionaries of the late-eighteenth century, we find meanings for The Black Joke that assign it an exceptional value and worth. Third, I turn to Lord Byron's brief mention of The Black Joke in his 1812 satire, "The Waltz: An Apostrophic Hymn," to explore how the slang term finds literary currency as a briefly

[109] Histories of The Black Joke on the Atlantic have recently begun to receive scholarly attention, with A. E. Rooks book-length manuscript being the first to treat the subject thoroughly. Rooks' dense history of Black Joke slavers on the Atlantic specifically concern the exploits of His Majesty's Brig *The Black Joke* as it sailed from 1827 to 1832. However, Rooks has contextualized this one ship's voyages with critical information necessary for comprehending the vast circulation of The Black Joke on both sides of the Atlantic. See Rooks 2022.

mentioned aside. In consideration of those ships launched from ports across the Atlantic during the time of Byron's waltz bearing the name of The Black Joke, suggestion is made that the phrase had acquired additional meaning as a transport for human cargo. Tracing The Black Joke through Bryon's English description of the imported German waltz as an Italian affection, connection is made to global trades in human flesh.

There is a danger in The Black Joke. It is multifunctional: part of a list of biological and mercantile terms that are meant to be understood in a variety of ways. Further, the joke recurs across nearly two centuries, from England to New York, continually referring to new things - while indexing prior iterations - over the course of its linguistic history. The Black Joke works in a mysterious way; it both conceals and reveals in a manner that is both befitting and contrary to popular social convention. This multifaceted quality of the joke, registering on several levels at once, is a necessary component for understanding and unpacking how it is that The Black Joke finds its way into meaning. That a large historical swath of time encompasses the history of The Black Joke further qualifies that we start with an understanding for how The Black Joke locates it humor so that we may be able to link it with the material objects accounting for it in the historical record.

The joke of The Black Joke refers to sexual and reproductive anatomies of the female sex. The joke of The Black Joke refers to the joke of the joke being Black. The ships carrying the name of The Black Joke play on the human merchandise being carried in the hulls of the ships, that is: Black jokes with reproductive capabilities. The Black bodies signal to the Black of the black joke. That the bodies are Black is not an indicator of race as a formed structure but rather a visual description of the cargo contained. The blackness is visual, the smell and other sensorial perceptions of the bodies described as Black are a pre-emergent form of racial thinking. It is important to

distinguish how this moment of labeling and naming, of christening, impacts the development of race as an ideology. Race, as a coherent structure, is not yet in play as The Black Joke is taking to sea throughout the eighteenth and early-nineteenth century.[110] The Black Joke as a ship is contributing to the idea of race by using a descriptor for the cargo in a larger meaning for the ship as a whole. The Black Joke is chattel slavery on the move. The black of The Black Joke is both the joke of enforced labor and the joke of the profit off this enforced labor, as well as the act of theft and human thievery that allows the financial structure and economic system to exist. The joke is the joke of an enslaved humanity.

This doubled nature of The Black Joke, as sex and as race, allows for multiple intersectional sites of reception for the force of the joke's intended humor. The combinatory possibilities for what The Black Joke might mean allows for multiple ways of understanding reception for The Black Joke. That this dynamic persists over time, across various material objects, further expands the boundaries of what is possible in the thinking about how The Black Joke makes sense in time.

This chapter seeks to address what the Black Joke is, precisely. It is a multitude of binary oppositions: black vs. white, female vs. male, ship vs. cargo. It is a joke that finds its humor in both the objectification of the female body and the racialization of the human body. It is both symmetrically composed and diametrically opposed. Devised as an early eighteenth-century vulgarity for the female sex as it was traded on North Sea shores, the language of The Black Joke articulates a name for and a description of phenomenological, relational, and transactional events occurring across two bodies of difference. On its face, The Black Joke details the mixing of females with various male sorts. On the one hand, it is the name for the event, the overarching signifier through which

[110] Rooks 2022, 4.

we might collectively know, and make known, that which is this event: The Black Joke. On the other hand, it is a description for that which makes for, or comprises, The Black Joke. This is to say, the various sorts and characterizations to which we apply toward those characters, those circumstances, those things that will deliver The Black Joke, are themselves the very things of The Black Joke. A name and a description.

The Black Joke is comparable to the contemporary list song. List songs are itemized catalogs in a song relaying a variety of things that relate, in one way or another, to a central theme or subject. List songs extend back to Viennese opera, where in Mozart's Don Giovanni a servant accounts for the numerous countries Giovanni has bedded a lover.[111] List songs delight in further addition, as each new entry offers some bit of new information to heighten the delight of even longer list. Often comic, the visual imagery produced through the successive adding on of more and more entries to the list make the type of song a reliable form for musical theatre writers. The Original Black Joke is a traditional list song, each verse describing a type of man who has been done in by the joke. The earliest known single-sheet printing of the song details at least fourteen different types of men who feel victim to the joke's charm. An English boy, the good Irish man, the Bishop, the Lawyer, his Client, a brave Granadeer, the Prince, the Priest, the Peasant; all caught by her "black joke and belly so white." The listing of such a wide variety of men, cut across several lines of English society, adds to the pleasure in relating how infectious her black joke may be. How each particular man comes to be specifically undone by the joke justifies the length of the catalogue.

Early-eighteenth century musicology names the chorus, or refrain, of songs such as 'The Original Black Joke' as burdens. The burden, "as a musical term means simply chorus, or refrain—

[111] Citron 2010, 195.

the burden of a song—which is repeated sometimes after every line, but always after every verse."[112] The burden outlasts and outperforms the various entries comprising the entirety of the various lists, particularly when songs such as The Black Joke grew in popularity and acquired more and more stanzas with each passing year. The burden was standard, so familiar and recognizable that participants at social gatherings could join up in the chorus as ballad singers offered new variations on a list. Like the hook of contemporary popular song, the burden makes bearable the drudgery of each solitary verse, bringing a listener or choral responder back to the groove in the record that anchors the song.[113] *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* first published in 1904 defined the burden, or burthen, of a song as the "chorus or motto to each verse." The weekly Boston publication *The Musical Record and Review* further delineates the term: "The chorus or motto, following each verse of the song, has been called in the language of the time, burden, bob, burthen and sometimes bourdon." Sung in unison, as a chorus or as assembled mass, the burden is the bearable weight of pleasure derived when such acts as Black Jokes are sung through the song.

Under an editorial title "Song Burden" published in 1886, a letter to the editor in *The Musical Record and Review* makes plain the financial rewards of a quality burden: "The chorus or burden of many a song has been the cause of popularity, making the song sell which otherwise would have had no charm to redeem it."[114] There is a certain use-value to burdens, they make the banal act of categorizing lists and catalogues pleasurable, to a point of profitable circulation even, ensuring a

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[112] Anonymous 1886.

[113] The hook of the song shares certain qualities with the use of samples in hip-hop. The sample is also a repeated snatch of the song lifted beyond the song's context. In hip-hop, the sample is then grafted into new songs, either buried or highlighted in new music to produce a new song.
See Rose 1994.

[114] Anonymous 1886.

certain persistence in the long memory of singers and listeners alike. Elevating songs into something worth remembering, burdens provide the listener with a stable sense of comfort while reiterating the purpose for drawing forth the list in the first place.

Adding texture to the use-value of having a burden in a song, the author of the letter to editor connects the formal musical convention to the language of the sea. Noting the then contemporary trend of choosing the word chorus over and above the word burden, the author writes: "We use the term chorus, because burden and burthen too distinctly remind us of something to be borne, as a load or weight, or of a ship of so many tons burden."[115] The placement of the burden, in the song, and the various other definitions it was carrying at the time call into question the weight such a part of the song carries.

The burden was repeated, again and again, in numerous permutations and variations of the same song. One reason The Black Joke has persisted throughout histories of English music scholarship is the recognizable burden each various version equally maintains.[116] It was a recognizable melodic line with words that an audience immediately knew. The burden of the song lends something of noticeable weight to the entirety of the catalogue sung, not only for its musical effect but also for the relevance the words to various entries of the list.

Musicologist further define the burden in terms of its instrumentality in the shaping of song. Furthering the standard definitions of burden described above, as a refrain, there is the standard modern English word usage of burden for any repeated sections in hymns and songs of the 15th and 16th centuries. In particular, the presence of a burden as structurally independent of the verse is the

[115] Anonymous 1886.
[116] Dennant 2013, 303.

prime distinguishing characteristic of the carol.[117] The burden also describes the drone or pedal note underscoring a song, particularly when played on a bagpipe. This usage is found in both English and French music from the 13th century onwards.[118] In 1338 Robert Manning of Brunne used the word to describe the bottom line of a three-voice texture in his Rimed Story of England: 'Of tho clerkes that best couthe synge, Wyth treble, mene, & burdoun'. Many later English references define burden as a deep bass.[119]

To describe the burden in terms of what various types of men must bear as targets of The Black Joke, we find a sort of pleasure to be found in the various ways a black joke may undo its victim. Each verse vividly describes the undoing, the specific manner through which the best of men fall victim to the joke and the belly. For each verse mentioning another man seeking "to dip his pen in ye bottomless pit" there is the communal articulation of what human nature must obey. As a country song popularly sung at festivals and gatherings throughout the English countryside in the first half of the eighteenth century, the doing of the song lends to an effect of the burden bearing an actual weight for the song. When singing and dancing, the music and the body both align to bring an embodied weight to the doing and the singing of the burden of the song. The economical sense placed upon The Black Joke is itself a type of burden. It is the weight of what the term "The Black Joke" may bear as a matter of exchange in discourse and trade. The Black Joke is slang for the female monosyllable, the dipping of the pen an allusion to a profitable trade in engaging the sex worker.[120] The burden of The Black Joke is the female commodity, itself.

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[117] Bukofzer 1952, 153ff.
[118] Harrison 1958, 206.
[119] Besseler 1957, 186.
[120] Anonymous 1732.

In his article listing various iterations of The Black Joke throughout eighteenth and nineteenth century, Paul Dennant offers several theorizations as to the origins of the phrase. Quoting Edgar V. Roberts writing in 1962, Dennant locates an anti-Catholic sentiment in the song on account of a recurring anti-clerical theme in a 1730 variation.[121] From Vic Gatrell, Dennant surmises reference to a Platonist "nature" points "to the libertine movement of the eighteenth century."[122] The overt sexual pleasure described in the song, particularly as ascribed to both men and women, coupled with an affirmation for the generative seed of male-to-female copulation, makes possible this origin. Citing The Harlot Unmasked (1720?) and A New Flash Song-Book (c. 1725), Dennant also sees a link between The Black Joke and the prostitute. Scant evidence suggests that The Black Joke may have been the christened name of a lugger on the North Sea at the turn of the eighteenth century, yet creditable evidence has not yet emerged to proclaim this as fact. Nevertheless, it is apparent that by 1720, when The Original Black Joke was sent from Dublin, the song had firm connections to sexual pleasure and desire, most likely derived from the bodies of sex workers.

In addition to the musical origins and multiple variations for The Black Joke song, Dennant provides catalogue detail of the joke's representation across the eighteenth-century visual field. As a reference to both the vaginal and the bawdy, The Black Joke may be seen as an indexical marker in popular prints and engravings dating from mid-century. Most prominent in referring to The Black Joke was Hogarth, who features some element of the joke in both of his 'Progress' narratives.[123] Notably, Plate Three of Hogarth's series *The Rake's Progress, The Tavern Scene* (1735), features a pregnant ballad singer entering a room littered with revelers in various states of dress. A single-sheet

[121] Dennant 2013, 301.
[122] Ibid, 301.
[123] Vaughan 2005.

entitled 'The Black Joke' rests in her hand as she prepares to serenade the crowd. Directly across the facing image, at left, a madam and her Negro stare into the room's center. While the madam pours a beverage for a reclining prospect lounging just below her, the Negro mischievously smiles with her face barely visible from behind the figure of the madam.

As the song gained in popularity throughout the first two decades of the eighteenth century, The Black Joke began to be played steadily in theatrical performance and dance interludes (as scripted breaks in plays).[124] The Black Joke is scripted in play-texts as either discrete airs, sung by a character engaged in some play of sexual pleasure (as prostitute or eager lover)[125], or as an entr'acte or between act entertainment. A benefit performance in 1732 mounted at Covet Garden gives mention of a dance sequence featuring 'a Grand Dance of Momus, concluding with the Black Joke."[126] Writing in The Dublin Stage, 1720-1745, authors Greene and Clarke characterize 'Black Joke' dances as "comical peasant dances." Dennant writes "between the years 1730 and 1736, the 'Black Joke' is named in advertisements for at least forty-three different shows, and for a further ten show in the period 1738 to 1750." Of the standard types of dances mentioned in advertisements - country dance, hornpipe, wooden shoe dance - The Black Joke is repeatedly mentioned by name.

Further research on the formal placement of The Black Joke in theatre performance is necessary in order to truly appreciate how familiar the song may have been for contemporary audiences. Similar to the effect of the burden popularizing the tune of The Black Joke as an oral song tradition, the playing of the tune in a theatre setting produced another type of familiar knowledge. The song was often mutated, the remaining play-texts giving evidence of many different

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[124] Dennant 2013, 309.
[125] Concerning *The Archers,* see Dunlap 1796; concerning *The Disappointment*, see Forrest 1767.
[126] Dennant 2013, 310.

takes on the specific meaning and effects of the joke. Still, dance and theatre versions of the song retain their initial link to sexual pleasure and the female commodity. Whether explicitly placing the song in the mouths of prostitutes or innocently contrasting the tune with virginal pretensions, the force of sex radiates throughout each manifestation.

Lacking in our archive of The Black Joke in theatre and dance is manner through which the song was taken up in dance. Play-texts note where in the script the song was inserted, however little to no information exists on how the dance was done. As a function of the script, where would The Black Joke have been performed as either part of, or a break from, the play's proceeding? Though few exceptions draw an explicit link between character and song, the dance is seemingly ornamental to a majority of the evidence. This is a scripted dance moment, that would have been highly dependent on specific musical variation and interpretation, and yet we lack scripted dance notation to suggest how the song was embodied.

There is an ahistorical nature to the application of taxonomies that I wish to place on the study of The Black Joke previously stated. Taxonomies emerged in the nineteenth-century expansion of the natural sciences, forming a structure for the recognition of human difference. The Black Joke predates this explosion of taxonomies by nearly a century and a half. Still, there is something useful in the idea of a taxonomy as it may pertain to The Black Joke. The categorization that is requisite for a taxonomical investigation is well-suited to the vast territory owing to the name, The Black Joke. In other words, writers of the eighteenth century needed to mark the female body as different prior to engaging in studies of the female difference. The marker of difference needs already be in place in order for an understanding of how those differences manifest may be written or described. The taxonomy brought into language via The Black Joke as a song (with burden) requires a structured

understanding of how the female is not only marked as different but also classified by the color black.

From Dennant's research we may glean how the popular song undergirded the prolonged existence of the phrase, The Black Joke, throughout the eighteenth century. Though variations shifted specific details of the lists included within The Black Joke repertoire, the sense of sexual deviance and pleasure sustains as a baseline for comprehension and trade in the joke. Variations nevertheless maintain the origins of the joke, and account for meanings attributed to further iterations of the joke. The joke is in reference to the vagina, and the public secret of disclosing trade in such proliferated well into the nineteenth century.

Grose's *Vulgar Tongue* (1788)

It has been recommended that an author err toward the side of simplicity when naming new editions of previously published texts. The Chicago Manual of Style defines edition as not only an original publication but also "each subsequent reissue in which the work is significantly revised."[127] In another sense, however, "reissues of a work, without significant revision, in paperback, special format, with new illustrations, or through licensing with another publisher" may be categorized by edition…. "A concise statement of the number of the edition: second edition, third edition, fourth edition, and so on"[128] shall suffice, particularly when descriptive words such as "corrected," "revised," "expanded," or "abridged" may confuse readers as to which version of a text is presently

[127] Chicago Manual of Style 2017, 10.
[128] Ibid, 10.

at hand (for example, a “second edition, revised and expanded” may also, in fact, describe a “third edition”). However, they concede, what constitutes a new edition remains at the discretion of an author’s subjective taste. Naming an edition is a matter of judgement and taste, not simply a cause for additive mathematics. It not a quantifiable decision, it is a subjective choice. We are left then to consider what makes a new edition a "new edition.” To this, they add, keep it clear how the new edition is described. Adding words such as “expanded” or “corrected” may confuse the reader, thinking them to think that the edition in hand is an even later edition than the one being offered.

The question to be asked here is about the classification of a different, or other, language. First there is the making of the glossary, of the dictionary, of the thesaurus, of the thing that catalogs that which is different. Once this has been done, and put into effect, there is a secondary move, where what has been classified as the language of the other is then incorporated into the whole, or the main, as a type of rarified other, a type of boutique, or unique, part of the overall segment for whom only a certain few may know of its existence. To traffic in this version of the language of other is to be an outsider within, a specialist in what is rare.

To further unpack how The Black Joke was circulated in England at the close of the eighteenth century, we may turn to a variety of glossaries and encyclopedias published. The Black Joke has a history in these types of texts. *The Female Glossary of 1732* contains an entry about the joke, a rather lengthy description of not only the joke in its various colors but also the status play the joke maintains in the language of the female sex. The full title for *The Female Glossary of 1732* is as follows: “The Female Glossary. Being a particular description of the principal commodities of this island where in the various Names, Qualities, and Properties of each are very handsomely handled.” The type-print for the title page has various fonts, the largest belonging to the word ISLAND is block

capital print. Principal Commodities is offset by italics, in a similar font to the words "Female Glossary" and "DESCRIPTION." The portion beginning with "The various Names…" and ending with "handsomely handled" is of the smallest font, blocked in paragraph style.[129]

As language, The Black Joke is a thing: it is a descriptive term for the female anatomy that possesses an affective weight. That weight has economical worth. That worth is valued as a commodity, an exchange brought forth in trade. Manuals for trade traffic in the vulgar and the sexed, the textbooks for a learned class having to trade in the societal low for the purposes of naturalized pleasure. The meaning for The Black Joke that persists in publications offers not only a descriptive reading of the term but also a performative dimension to how the term is verbally traded. The implications on the physical body emerge following the verbal use of the term. Once The Black Joke is stated and performed, then it is embodied.

The commodities, and more important the exchange of commodities, characterized in the language of The Black Joke definitions effects true material gains and pleasures. In the opening of the glossary, the author laments the financial hits men suffer at the mishandling of the female sex. As such, sex itself maintains an economic hierarchy. The status of the female sex derives in the commodity exchange of the so-named female sexes. The Black Joke was not in the first classical dictionary of the vulgar tongue.[130] It was included in the second, but for what "expanded," "corrected," or "abridged" reason? The Black Joke, already in circulation, possesses something of the secreted, vital knowledge that man knows and must be left to posterity for future growth. The Black

[129] Anonymous [Old Trader] 1732.
[130] See Grose 1785. The second edition of *Grose's Dictionary for Vulgar Terms* published in 1788 defines The Black Joke as the monosyllable, a woman's commodity.

Joke entry in the second edition is a correction, it is an omission that must be reinserted. What is the economy in knowing from The Black Joke?

The first edition of Grose's dictionary reveled in the low, finding its foundation in cant and earlier writings on low vernaculars. The 1788 version, the second edition, aimed for a different audience, seeking to position itself in the arena of scholarship of university and gentlemen. There is something in this version that seeks to play up the situation of all men being versed in the vulgar. If the first was an outsider's guide to the world of the vulgar, the second is more a textbook in learning the ways of knowing about and trafficking with the low. Throughout both prefaces in these first two editions of Grose's dictionary are references to the double-play of language. Often there are warnings about the ways languages may be used in public toward duplicitous means. The ability to double-code language is what Grose seeks to uncover. The fourth edition sets it goals a little loftier, hoping that it will inform a class of readers who can come to know the art of using equivocal speech.[131]

The Black Joke references a great many things, all with a similar thrust in meaning, but in possession of several different objects to make itself known. This chapter explores how The Black Joke is employed to reference several different types of objects throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Considering The Black Joke in relationship to beds and ships, this chapter challenges how meaning is made in relation to The Black Joke's humor.

How was the vulgar made fashionable, how was slang brought into the popular vernacular? Eighteenth-century upper-class engagement with 'the low' invites a discussion on use of slang in the

[131] "We need not descant on the dangerous impressions that are made on the female mind, by the remarks that fall incidentally from the lips of the brothers or servants of a family; and we have before observed, that improper topics can with our assistance be discussed, even before the ladies, without raising a blush on the cheek of modesty." See Grose 1788, ix.

performance of social culture. The point is to extract the use-value of trafficking with the low as it pertains to folks of a particular social standing within English culture. The point here is that while the low is the low, there is a certain gain from knowing how it is to engage the low. This is not simply about top talking down, this is about acquiring a language to be able to talk on the terms of those below the level of acceptable society.

The fourth edition of Vulgar Tongue published in 1811 speaks to this effect of trafficking in the low. The boys who have added terms to the fourth edition of the glossary do so to be able to trade with other people. The usefulness of the text is made apparent to the person looking to interact below their station. The book is there as a guide to help the unwitting from being fooled. Secondary sources point to the linguistic concerns with naming the vulgar, as it relates to an establishment of English society, gendered and classed. My focus on the fourth edition of Grose's slang, having been supplemented by a member of the Whip Club (and his informants), is to center this conversation on exchange, trade, and use-value in language.

The written discourse on the vulgar shifts in nature and tone with the 1811 publication. Now, use of the vulgar by a certain class of men distinguishes that individual as someone of high quality. The ability for a particular class of men to use vulgarities, particularly if they are well-versed in the use of vulgar phrases, in non-vulgar settings is an attribute. The Black Joke is an exchange; it conceptualizes a type of economic trade while also being the trade itself. The Black Joke is exemplary, it is the type of joke one wishes to acquire if they are to traffic in this trade. The Black Joke is also a name for the commodity to be traded. It starts in possession of another, it is the lady's commodity. The trader wishes to engage in this commodity, he wishes to acquire - or at least know from - The Black Joke of female possession. A bad deal is one where the trader receives something less than The

Black Joke. When the trader gets a Black Joke that is not really Black, he loses out. He is the victim of the joke. If the trader knows what he is after, he will be able to recognize or know the Black Joke prior to purchase. The skilled trader is versed in the language of the Black Joke such that they will also be satisfied by the goods received in the lady's Black Joke.

For the modern ear, The Black Joke is about race. The way Black is used to qualify the joke is a standard operation for how Black is used in today's vernacular. Black sets off the thing, the thing universally accepted as whole unto itself, and sets it as a type of exception. The Black thing is more or less than that which is the accepted universal whole. The Black thing is noted, not for its inherent qualities but for the relational degree it holds with the non-qualified thing. Black works the same way with the joke.

The lexicon is not so much about knowing the language of the vulgar, understanding a foreign language. The lexicon is about locating and identifying useful terms of trade. It is about crafting a shared language that alerts the buyer as to the quality of the wares the seller is selling. The qualities of the Black Joke that are useful to those persons residing outside the borders of the vulgar are of such a value that comprehension of The Black Joke, in all its vulgar trappings, is essential for anyone wishing to partake in the joke. This wholesale education in the appreciation of The Black Joke re-centers the importance of the joke, making it a useful commodity for all persons, not just the low.

Hogarth's Late *Discovery* (1788)

And what a discovery *The Discovery* was. The illicit image had been kept from public since its initial appearance circa 1743. Brought into public attention by Jane Thornhill, daughter to historical

painter James Thornhill and wife to pictorial satirist William Hogarth, *The Discovery* had been assumed to be lost to time. Its plate thought to have been destroyed after less than twenty reproductions, the illicit image and the personages depicted were safe from public disclosure until its appearance in 1788. Published on the eve of her death in 1788, one year before her passing, the print had remained out of public circulation for nearly half a century. The circumstances that brought *The Discovery* to light are lost to time. Whether the impending death of Thornhill or some other circumstance necessitated the printing of the supposedly lost engraving is not known. It's hard to say exactly how *The Discovery* was discovered again. There had been a small few who were entitled to an actual print of the initial engraving in the years surrounding Highmore's stake in the patent at Drury Lane.

The known facts are thus: Highmore was caught out in an attempt to seduce another man's wife (a purported friend, the other man, not yet the wife) and captured, or seen, by a coterie of camaraderie in his act of illicit seduction.[132] Highmore, seen by the crew, was deeply affected, ashamed and embarrassed, perhaps enough so to request Hogarth keep the engraved rendering of the scene out of circulation for so many years after. The scene of seduction was set to posterity via the pen of Hogarth. Whether or not Hogarth was present at the scene is lost to history, but he was entrusted with capturing the scene to print. Akin to the courtroom artist whose sole responsibility is to capture something of the scene to be to report back to those who were not present in the room

[132]"Hogarth and some friends fixed up the boastful womanizer John Highmore (of Drury Lane mutiny fame; fl. 1730s), with a pretty woman whose place in bed was taken by a black prostitute – when Highmore drew back the bed curtains they pounced, and Hogarth circulated a crowning point, The Discovery, among their friends." See Uglow 1997, 457f.

a sense of the drama, of the interplay, between relations present and attending. So this is Hogarth's job. He is meant to record the scene.

For this reading of Hogarth's work, however, attention is paid to the woman at the center of the image. Her look is beguiling. She is looking to the man on her right, tapping him on his shoulder. Her eyes cut to him, darting a look in his direction. The upward smirk in her gaze tells us something, something about both the man who is tapping her shoulder and the man to whom she extends her palm. Is she slapping him? Is she about to reach over and give him a slap in the face? Is she petting him? From her reclined position she holds all the power. In her hand rests a quill pen.

In as much as this woman is in the background, she is the focal point of the image and yet the narrative that has been culled since the image's production concerns the four men surrounding her. The names of the individuals in the image have been identified, their histories and their bearing on the image described. And yet, the woman at the center remains, at best, an example of Hogarth's depiction of African bodies in his works of English society. Commentators since have detailed how Hogarth interpolated the black body into his works, while the persons embodied within the black body have yet to be given full consideration. I am curious about the woman at the center of this image, in as much as she is both a representative body and a flesh-and-blood human being. How do we reconcile her humanity with her figurative trope within the image? How do we bring to light her existence as a player in the drama, a player that though assigned to the background figures heavily in the dramatic arch of the image? How do we make a backgrounded body foregrounded in the imagery of the image, as an actual lead player in the story?

To understand one aspect of *The Discovery* we may turn to Lafont's discussion of color and the visual arts in the constitution of skin pigmentation as a constituting factor or race.[133] Lafont brings attention to a 17th century lecture where shadow and light are emphasized in the framing of the image. The shadow helps to focus the viewers' attention on the primary focus of the work, the body in light. We see this in play in Hogarth's print, where the black body at the center of the image is nevertheless part of the background, the behind, to the lighted images of the man holding the candle and Highmore. These figures are sketched in the light, the light of the candle brings them to our attention. The woman in the bed and the man at her immediate right are in the shadow; indeed, his jacket is the only one amongst the four painted in darkness. This light-dark effect helps to foreground the other players in the image. In as much as the black woman at the center is indeed in the center, the play on shadow and light renders her background.

Concerning the woman central to the image of *The Discovery* I want us to see the pose of the model residing inside of the image. This is to complicate our understanding of the power relation happening in the image. What if the woman posing retained the power of the artist's perspective with the inscription of a quill pen? What if she is continually reaching for the power, even through to today, while keeping the powerlessness of her imposed subject position at bay? What if this is how we think of Hogarth having etched her, and consider him attempting to give her the fullness of her reaching for the power? We see this in the quill pen.

In *Gender and Materiality on the Eigthteenth-Century Page*, Christina Lupton argues that the quill pen, when considered as an object, speaks back to the male dominated discourse of the pen as

[133] Lafont 2017, 89.

synecdoche for male authorship, male dominance, male penis writing.[134] Her reading of the pen brings the art of prostitution into the use-value of the pen, the animal-feminine object being perverted - used and abused - for the purpose of advancing the supremacy of rational discourse. I take this a step forward, seeing not only the interruption the pen might posit in terms of gender and male-authored histories, but also as an indicator of the way in which the pen is subverted in the rational discourse by women who take up the pen-as-male to write from a decidedly non-male perspective.[135] The pen still writes, the pen is still shaped and molded in the manner to which its genealogy suggests. But it is in the hand of a woman. The body of the woman is still present, and she writes from what she sees. The pen is still powerful, and powerful in the way it has been designed - historicized and immortalized. This power is not taken away from the pen; rather, it has been directed toward another end. That end, I would argue, has not yet been disclosed to use, but rather remains a hidden secret shared between the artist capturing the pen on the page, and the woman who is seen holding onto the pen.

The quill pen allows for the writing of a rational discourse.[136] The pen is the instrument that ensures the recording of this ideology, the spreading of its power. The pen is the instrument. That it has been so closely aligned with the gendered male thought, one cannot help but make the crude association between the pen and the penis. Interesting, though, that the pen comes from the feather.[137]

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[134] Lupton 2014, 606-607.
[135] Maginnis 1905, 1130-1134.
[136] Daniels 1980.
[137] Blake 1956, 22-31.

Michael Cohen, in *A Fountain Pen of Good Repute*, suggests that the pen mediates the body and the mind, the instrument that can capture what is following from our thoughts out into the world. "Beyond aesthetics and convenience comes an identification of writer with pen: the feeling that the pen itself is somehow doing some of the creative work of the person who wields it, or that the pen is an extension of the self and actually gleans thoughts from the teeming brain faster than the brain can provide them."[138] I want to base our appreciation for the pen and the role/function it holds in our cultural, creative acts. The pen is a mighty mediator. It is an extension not only of the body, wholly, but also that part of the bodily function that makes meaning. The pen is instrumental in making meaning from what is thought by the author and how it is articulated in the world. All of this is inscribed in the meaning of the pen that the woman at the center of the image holds.

In her 2005 study, *Performing Blackness on English Stages, 1500 - 1800*, Virginia Mason Vaughan describes the bed trick as follows: "Simply stated, a man or woman unknowingly has sexual relations (or comes close to it) with someone other than the person he or she had intended to bed. The device requires a trickster who sets up the assignation and a victimized dupe."[139]In her chapter "Bedtricksters," Vaughan details how the bedtrick was deployed across several early-seventeenth century plays of the English stage. Vaughan describes the bedtrick as a theatrical convention stemming from mythology and folkloric traditions. Vaughan introduces studies on race, slavery, and the English stage to interrogate reception for the bedtrick along lines of race and gender. Her reading of the bedtrick complicates how the convention has been historicized for its theatrical use, adding complexity to how race can be seen circulating across bodies on the early modern English stage. "Its

[138] Cohen 2010, 176.
[139] Vaughan 2005, 74.

Figure 2. Hogarth, *The Discovery* (c. 1843).

most common pattern - substituting a black servant in the bed for a chaste white mistress - connects issues of gender and sexuality with clearly defined racial constructions and class consciousness."[140]

The bait-and-switch functioning of the bedtrick is key. As Vaughan explains, readers of the bedtrick take the victimized dupe as the so-called 'butt of the joke.' The trickster, usually the chaste

[140] Vaughan 2005, 75.

mistress, finds success when the dupe is found to have copulated with the substituted servant. The servant serves merely as prop for the successful deployment of the joke. That the dupe finds enjoyment in the act of copulation only points further to the effectiveness of the joke. Having found pleasure in lust, albeit at the site of the black body, the dupe is further disgraced.

By the early-seventeenth century, the bedtrick was deeply embroiled in the logic of race. The Black Joke is first published in early-eighteenth century, having been sung on docks and ships for nearly a century prior. The Black Joke, as a song, is reliant upon the conceit of the bedtrick. "In the bedtricks described below, the Black servant, usually but not always female - like the shadowy figure in Titian's painting - diffuses male lust away from the white female onto her own black body, which is read as a site of forbidden erotic pleasure. Substituted for her white mistress in the bed, she serves as an iconic double, a negative version of the white positive that embodies hidden desires and fantasies…Lust is a crucial element in plays featuring the bedtrick, and when the substituted bedmate is discovered to be Black, the dupe's horror is magnified by the grotesque image of intercourse with the devil."[141] The purported Black Joke that ensnarls most men is the bait-and-switch trick of the bed. The natural act that all men fall victim to, as described in The Black Joke, is the forbidden act of the bedtrick: a joke that lands precisely due to the body of blackness that remains in the background.

Byron's Apostrophic *Waltz* (1813)

[141] Vaughan 2005, 75.

The Black Joke briefly appears in Byron's *The Waltz; An Apostrophic Hymn*. The hymn is a satire of the waltz, a dance craze that had made its way to England from Germany with the arrival of Hanover royalty. Along with the waltz, Byron sends up the crown of King George IV, lampooning his style of dress and political associations. In a very minor stroke, The Black Joke is referenced to provide an aural context for the performance of the waltz. Describing the scene of the waltz to his reader, Bryon, under the pseudonym Horace Hornem, writes of seeing his wife in the arms of a German soldier, "turning round, and round, and round, to a d—d see-saw up and down sort of tune, that reminded me of the "Black Joke," only more "affettuoso," till it made me quite giddy with wondering they were not so."[142] This description precedes the actual hymn, serving as a letter to the publisher to situate the writing of the hymn. Buried in the introduction to the hymn, The Black Joke is merely a quick aside meant to situate the reader in the world of Byron's Hornem prior to engaging the actual text.

Byron and "The Waltz" make plain economic trading, exporting and importing, implicit in the performance genealogies of The Black Joke. The satire concerns exchanges between German and England cultural and material effects circulating in the early nineteenth-century.[143] Implicitly, the satire points to imported goods to America and the transference of cultural effects from one land to another. That Byron references the music of The Black Joke to sensorily trade in the commerce of cultural exchange reveals how The Black Joke was explicitly trafficking in the circulation of human

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[142] Byron 1821, 6-7.

[143] "In the narration of Waltz's voyage from Germany to England, Byron lists as part of the ship's cargo 'Ten plays, and forty tales of Kotzebue's,' 'sim composer's airs,' 'Meiner's four volumes upon womankind,' and the 'massive multi-volumed works of Brunck and Heyne' (lines 72-78). Because of their German origin, Byron links together the waltz and writings imported from Germany that were gaining wide popularity in England. As he traces the career of Waltz in England, Byron employs allusions that suggest a parallel between the English rage for waltzing and its obsession with German culture." See Childers 1969, 89.

bodies. The Black Joke is a type of exchange, it has a trade value. The quality of the joke shifts in terms of how it is used.

Reference to The Black Joke in Byron's "Waltz," captured in this story as a type of song played for the dancing of the waltz, is written as an effect the body is meant to mentally reproduce. [144] Byron, through writing, through language, opens the mind to the idea that something is not lost in transfer of a movement to the page. In this section on Byron's theatre of The Black Joke I consider how Byron scripted affect into his citation of the joke. By understanding how the reference and citation of The Black Joke resounds within Byron's satire and further, how that satire fits within Byron's biography, we can come to understand the affectual sway of Byron's reference to the joke.

Byron's use of The Black Joke affects a type of swagger, a particular kind of sway. For Byron, the satire points to a type of illicit behavior being enacted by conspiring partners out in the open, the swagger becomes one of paraded secrets and withheld knowledge. The joke invites a type of understanding: for those who know the bawdy references of the joke, the use of it implies licentious behavior. For those who are not familiar with the song, it is merely a type of sonic notation, a waltz-like tune that gives background atmosphere to the scene of the dance. When a secret (such as a bawdy affair) is out in the open, is being paraded in the open, a type of swagger emerges. There is a swagger to this act of parading a secret in the open. What are historical secrets? What are the secrets that are left as historical records of events?

[144] In Byron we have the imperative to "hear" The Black Joke. It is no longer a visual and/or textual reference, it now is something that 'makes sense' only when encountered sensorily, if only via the imagination. For the addition of the Italian undercurrent of affettuoso to make sense, we need to know what bodily exchanges are being described in relation to the black joke, not just as a textual reference but as a something known and felt sensorially.

How does history remember to see/sense bodies in space. I close this section with an understanding for how the body circulates itself in everyday life, and with a keen understanding for how it is that we are trying to think, to see, to feel, to sense the bodies in the room dancing/parading as a part of the history, as the story, as the written document, as well as the sensorial sense being transferred. Once we are see reconstruction of performance histories of the past as part of the written archive - as part of history - then we may begin to ask questions revealing history as an embodied experience, if only through fabulation.

The burden of ship and the burden of song are united in the body of the men who worked the docks. Their laboring melodies spurred into action those parts of the body that hoisted and hurled cargo meant to travel across seas to lands beyond the line of the horizon. Oft-repeated, burdens of song unite in one voice a laboring class meant to get a job done. The song impressed upon each individual a collective rhythm by which the labor was not only performed but executed to completion. The burden of the song was the release, the putting out of what was an internal struggle to get the cargo onboard, to load the ship with the burden that had been sung.

Though suggestive, I hesitate to speculate as to why or for what purpose The Black Joke morphed in form across the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Though its referent maintains primarily throughout, shadings of meaning acquire as the joke is told in song, on paper, in dictionaries and literary texts. The final turn to the Atlantic connects the burden of the song to the burden of ship, the cargo below of the latter burden constituted by the labors of the female commodity. Recent scholarship addressing ontologies of blackness are relevant here, for thinking through the space of the Atlantic and the transmission of European sensibilities toward sex, pleasure, and racial difference. What I am after here is an understanding for how the concept of a slang

terminology manifested itself into a visual language, a song and dance, a literary device coming to represent or stand-in for that act which otherwise cannot be named. This bit of unknowingness, or oversight, is what I describe and think of as the joke to which The Black Joke refers.

To close, The Black Joke is a text, as a rhetorical phrase, a euphemism, a bit of coded language. Although the history begins to bring us to an understanding of the joke as an embodied referent, we are still, as a historical investigation, at the level of text. I will argue that Byron's reference to The Black Joke, in his satirical piece, The Waltz, begins to give us the background to see the connections between the literary reference of the joke to a performed instance of the joke. Byron's description not only allows us to understand the joke as a musical, danced thing, but also as a figurative trope standing in for a body of knowledge that circulates in common thought. Play-texts of the time period need only reference the song, the black joke, without having recourse to musical notes or a sung song. Similarly, references to the black joke as a ship, or further, the naming of a fire engine company, register through history as a textual reference yet fail to bring about the embodied context through which the joke circulated. With Byron, I hope to highlight how the joke moves from page to body as a bit of historical reference.

The various Black Jokes circulating on the high seas belong, or are invested with, to, and in multiple trade economies.[145] The cause of The Black Joke on the open sea is variant, depending on for whom The Black Joke serves. At the approach of the mid-nineteenth century, we see The Black Joke being taken up as a name for former slavers - or interceptors of slavers - seeking to control the markets of human cargo. Those accounts brought forth during the investigation primarily concerned naval efforts meant to curb the trade in human flesh. However, at moments accounts were drawn

[145] See Rooks 2022.

forth that spoke of The Black Joke as relating to vessels complicit in the trade. Accounts from these ships, their being called "The Black Joke," brought the listener into dank spaces of human waste, into cargo holds where bodies were left to decay along the long transport across the ocean. While history has attempted to bring forward an account of The Black Joke that accords with our present-day assumptions pertaining to slave trade, the truth remains that The Black Joke stood both for the proponent and the opposer of human cargo.

In this way The Black Joke is reminiscent of the floating signifier. The placelessness of the body of The Black Joke, either as a human being of value or a commodity of trade, the name sticks. The history of The Black Joke circulating in the Atlantic connects with storied tales about privateers during the war of 1812 and the role The Black Joke played on the high seas. The business of pilfering goods was prevalent. As slave trade is being abolished, the work of intercepting and profiteering from the business of the trade became even more intense. If we imagine the high seas in the aftermath of the war of 1812 as a wild west of sorts, where rising nations and floating empires were able to manipulate all sides of new and establishing laws, the black market for trade becomes an all-in proposition. Many nations found wealth as well as disaster skirting various sides of the law viz. the trafficking of human flesh.

Government contracts, in and out of war times, were big business for Americans as well. The ties between shipbuilders and the war efforts show how specific men benefited from the nation's war. The connections between the lower east side and the shipbuilding factories of the north exhibit the close connections instigating the birth of the industrial revolution on the lower half of New York. The confluence of events: the war of 1812, the northward expansion of the city border, the Erie Canal - all these events led to the modernization of Manhattan.

In the Atlantic, The Black Joke begins to register as a metaphor. A metaphor for not only the trans-Atlantic slave trade, but also a metaphor for the figurative use of language. The Black Joke as a ship becomes a metaphor for how meaning is made and shipped between two different bodies. The ship is the body of transport. The ship is what makes one thing communicable to another. The ship is how words, native to some and foreign to others, circulate.

If The Black Joke possesses so much ambiguity as to its meaning, while also functioning as a word meant to be deciphered in multiple ways, how are we able to ever describe accurately what is The Black Joke? I believe this to be a predominant feature of the joke, its ability to have meaning while also not having any meaning at all. This is not a byproduct of the joke, a remnant of its variegated histories; rather this is the joke itself. Its own duplicity with the social context allowing for it to register in contemporary society is what makes the joke so dynamic.

Returning to the burden of The Black Joke, no longer as chorus but within the hull of a ship. The weighted bowels of slavers, privateers, and the rescuers of slavers add material circumstance to the copulation suggested by the song of previous century. In effect, we are now confronting the legacy of such Black Joke dances engaged a century prior. Now, the burthern of mistresses switched into bedchambers of unexpected paramours find their young the cargo for a New World still in creation. The profitable trade in sex is once again exploited as the children of Black Jokes become a different type of Joke on the other side of the Atlantic. Scholars such as Sharpe and Wright have begun to shift the disciplinary grounds upon which we orient our study of slavery's descendants, demanding we critically encounter the ship in passage, its wake and its bow. Treating The Black Joke as an ontological thing draws us closer to the circumstantial evidence supporting trades in flesh.

The Black Joke was shipped across the trans-Atlantic middle passage waters and delivered to the shores of New York City as a recognizable, transferable, and translatable term during the War of 1812. Moving from Grose's fourth edition definition of The Black Joke published in 1811 'for young men of fashion' to Byron's use of the term in *The Waltz* (1813), mention is made of the Italian musical term applied performatively. When Byron takes the definition and adds an Italian musical term – affettuoso – he adds not only to sense of musicality but also unites the sexual pleasure of trafficking whores with the physical activity of doing the waltz.

IV. When Morgan Benson Slayed the Bit

You're showing them black wit, if you want to call it that.

- Geoffrey Holder

As if being summoned from below, the pit lured Geoffrey Holder out from his seat and on down to the stage blaring "Ease on Down The Road" all the way home. Holder, clad head-to-toe in dazzling whites (save only a knotted swath of black fabric clutching at his throat) is about to dance his way into musical theatre history as he shuffles forward to collect his Antionette Perry "Tony"

Award for Best Direction of a Broadway Musical. The Wiz (1975), a surprise hit of the 1975-1976 theatrical season, had marked Holder's first directing assignment on Broadway. He had also designed the production's costumes, for which he won an additional Tony, after first supplying producer Ken Harper with conceptual sketches of various characters to help investors envision a technicolor stage version of The Wonderful Wizard of Oz (1900). After arduous out-of-town engagements, an almost-stalled opening night, coordinated critical backlash, and an ensuing wave of popular interest that kept the show running for nearly four years, Holder was now bounding onstage to collect the prize he had believed was rightfully his.

Emerging his seat at the Winter Garden Theatre, Holder hurriedly shimmied toward the end of aisle before pivoting back to acknowledge his greatest treasure, wife Carmen de Lavallade. Gently he slipped forward, leaning ever so casually into an arabesque that almost, but not quite, reached out to its full extension. Tilting forward slightly, his neck arched forward to bestow a kiss upon his muse, he quickly gathered his nearly six foot six inches broad-shouldered frame and jolted down the aisle. The ensuing jaunt to the stage belied a particular brand of bitter-sweet relief for Holder. Composed yet exuberant, flabbergasted but assured, the trip down the aisle seemed to quell years of anticipated/realized defeats; expected hurdles one comes to accept part and parcel while attempting to do something different. Holder was different: a visual artist, dancer-choreographer, director, performer and fashion designer, born in Trinidad and living in Manhattan. This win, a first for man of Holder's stature on Broadway, was optimistically signaling an interest in what Holder had described to Harper as a thing called Black Wit. Cultural production on Broadway in the mid-1970s was rewarding Black Wit, not just with monetary compensation but also a peer-reviewed accolade of great achievement. Considering this, Holder paused to regain his composure. He

approached the steps looking straight to the stage, adjusted his glasses, and bounded up: One step. Two. Then breath…

Onstage: he stepped one, two. Then he elongated step third four to accentuate the vocally-absent back-phrasing lyric accompanying his march. Indulgently, next, he slow-dragged himself into the two-syllable one-word phrasing on 'carry',[146] hitting home what a laborious journey this road to the stage had been. Thoroughly composed now, he greeted a familiar face. Familiar to the audience, no doubt, for it was Ray Bolger, Scarecrow in the 1939 MGM film version of Oz. Together, they danced an improvised quick-step of old moves and new, looking for a common ground in the far-out funky sounds of contemporary Broadway soul. And when finally the Antionette Perry "Tony" Award for Best Direction of a Musical in 1975 was placed in the hands of Geoffrey Holder, he simply said this: "Try pulling that out of a cola nut."[147] And with that that, off flew the knotted black fabric clutching at the throat of a man dressed head-to-toe in dazzling whites.

Holder's joke trades on the financial success of his image, widely circulated owing to his role as brand ambassador for a national advertisement campaign for 7-Up. Taking a creative leap from performer, dancer, and actor to Broadway musical director and costume designer, Holder was attempting to break a glass ceiling. Industry speculation that Holder's *Wizard of Oz* soulful translation was doomed to fail nearly closed the show in Baltimore before arriving to New York City. However, an imaginative restructuring of the show by Holder and an aggressive marketing and advertising

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[146] Smalls (1979). As in: "Don't you *car-ry* nothing that may be a load."

[147] Holder's reference to a cola nut derives from a popular advertising spot that had aired for the better part of the decade. Holder was the voice and face for the campaign, turning the cola nut line into a national treasure. The catchphrase humor turned on the visual difference between cola nuts (used to make Coke-Cola products) and un-cola nuts (used to make 7-Up products). Cola nuts were dense, dark, and hard; un-Cola nuts (lemons and limes) were supple, large, and juicy. Holder seems to suggest that there was something exceptional about him having been able to manifest such brilliance out from nothing more than a cola nut.

campaign assured the show's continued success. Holder had done the unthinkable, turning a destined failure into an artistic and economic success. Holder's comparison of the work he performed on the Broadway show to the extraction of juice from the dark, dense, and hard Cola nut visually lands a joke reminiscent of The Black Joke vernaculars of the nineteenth-century.

Like the United States of America itself, the American musical theatre is an unwieldy object of study. Cultivated, as a form, from a diverse range of performing and fine arts, the American musical we recognize today solidified, as a form, at the turn of the twentieth century. Prior to then, the various parts of the emerging genre were spread across a broad field of entertainment and recreational activities, having been developed and formed in pleasure gardens, dance halls, and circus arenas; culled from the Italian opera, the English ballad opera, and opera buffa. Additionally, contributions from individuals classified through race as Black have greatly aided in bringing into existence the American musical theatre as it is recognized today. However, owing to the complexities of structural racism in America, such contributions are popularly imagined existing outside of the main frame of American Musical Theatre history.

Scholarship on the American musical still qualifies Black performance as either exceptional, or ancillary, to the focus of study. And though several edited compilations continue to devote sections and/or chapters to identity-based subjects and performances of racial categories, wholly considered as separate and distinct, there have emerged numerous studies squarely considering Black identities as the thrust of a general musical theatre study and scholarship. And while scholarship on the musical continues to divide into discrete categories such as biography or show-related studies, these works have introduced post-structuralist concerns of reception, authorial address, and intersectional positionalities of perception and perspective. Particularly, recent studies have

introduced historiographical interventions into the formation of the object of study, decentering and realigning the American Musical as a more holistic artform representative of the United States that birthed its expression.

D.A. Miller's 1998 monograph, *Place for Us: Essay on the Broadway Musical*, squarely considers reception in its approach to the musical theatre form, basing its critique in a literary study of the Golden Age musical filtered through a psychoanalytic approach toward the viewing subject. Miller's text treats the musical with depth and nuance, using a corpus of musical theatre works to interrogate, if not deconstruct, the queer subject of literary study. Miller's approach to the form, coupled with an identity-based intervention on behalf of queer subjectivity, invites a theory of reception that manifests a poetics inseparable from the form. This embedded quality of the object of critique within a deconstruction of the sight of reception elevates introspection of the Musical Theater object of study. Similar show-specific studies of Musical Theater production, exhibiting methodologies of literary studies and reception theory, have also elevated critiques of American Musical Studies.

Todd Decker's *Show Boat: Performing Race in an American Musical* (2012), Alisa Solomon's *Wonder of Wonders: A Cultural History of Fiddler on the Roof* (2013), Carol Oja's *Bernstein Meets Broadway: Collaborative Art in a Time of War* (2014) offer detailed and deeply entrenched research on popular shows in the musical theatre archives, contextualized in a historiographic inquiry concerning the aftermath and legacies of these popular shows. Such detailed work on specific productions examined through close readings of contemporary and historical reception have added a necessary complexity for how we comprehend performance on the musical stage. This is a critical moment for the study of the American musical as scholars demand a comprehensive understanding for reception of the American musical as a historical object of study.

I am framing a problem that has to do with writing histories of Black subjects without contextualizing instances of what Black subjectivity means historically in particular places and times. This is not to detract from the work of scholars building histories of Black subjects in the theatrical performance. Rather, the effort here is to further thicken our descriptions of Black subjectivities as we continue to recover those voices from the past. What is instrumental to know about these recovered histories is the ways in which subjects respond to identification as Black subjects, from within their contemporary moment. While it may be impossible to accurately describe how a historical subject comprehended their own position as a raced subject from within their own time, this dissertation asserts that with thickened, deep hangs in the time and place of these subjects of history we may begin to feel our way through an understanding of how race emerges as an inter-relational construct.

This chapter sketches three nodes of interpretative possibility for the grotesque swagger of Morgan Benson. First, Throw-Casting is conceived of as a means of explaining how Benson effected his swagger upon his audience. Second, Blackground Theory is introduced to describe the subject-object relation of Benson and his target when presented for theatrical spectatorship. Third, Performed Deflection describes the effect of Benson's swagger, the knowing game of distraction and mis-direction Benson engaged to turn the joke of targeted stage act into a memorable performance worth noting. Having set the terms of the Blackground, Throw-Casting, and Performed Deflection, I introduce the historical circumstances of Benson's performance, the lack of evidence concerning his stage work, and popular audience reception across two decades.

I bring this history to light to illuminate what I believe is happening in the age of Morgan Benson. Benson performed in a time of significant historical development, at the birth and

aftermath of our nations' civil war. Such a war has had lasting implications for the future of democracies, as we are no doubt living through similar such circumstances in our contemporary moment. Benson's swagger arose as our nation was attempting to figure out what was to be done with a huge swath of the population. Where they to be treated as a fellow species? Were labors to be exploited? Are our economies to be threatened by the asking of such questions? Out from this chaos – human drama at its finest – we have a character such as Morgan Benson's swagger arriving. Benson is the anomaly, the working against time, that nevertheless does something to the audiences lying in wait for reception.

In this chapter I describe the swagger of Morgan Benson across three photographic images – that is, I use three photographic images (together) to locate and describe the swagger of Morgan Benson. Benson's swagger is non-verbal. Benson does not have lines to say, his stchik reduced to the language of 'stage business'. There is no script of Benson's performance, no choreographic notation as to his movements and embodied language of performance. We have no trace, as the only trace thought to be able to capture such a thing as the legacy, or the remainder, of the act is retained in the text-based archive of the play. The scripts live on as reminders that the plays existed. With them come designs, scenic and costume. There are reviews. There are diary entries by those who attended. Now and then we may have a description of the experiences of the actors, either in biography or expose. There are traces. There are traces left by those who were there in the form of text-based and written word descriptions.

What are the means for tracking what is not verbal? How do we form an understanding of what was occurring that was not a part of the text-based language of performance but reflected the spatial dimensions? What are the archives that account for movement? What trace do we have of

how things shifted in space? The movement of Benson's hat across three images suggest an authorial capability in the self-styling of an actor that belies a particular strain of agency. Trapped within a historical context that would have his subject debased as target, Benson nevertheless signals out from behind the frame with a simple turn of his cap. In an informal portrait of Harrigan's *Gallant 69th*, we find Benson in a state of repose, cap turned backwards, staring directly into the camera as he had similarly done three years in 1873.

In this chapter I track the movement of Morgan Benson's hat and hands across three photographs shot between 1873 and 1876. I trace his hands in relation to his props, his target and his water pail; his hat in relation to which direction the cap is flipped. I argue that the relationship Benson forms between his materials objects, his properties, across three years represents a particular growth of celebrity, an awareness for how one's presentation of self effects a type of reception for public performance and consumption that wrests the power of viewing from the audience and (re-)places it - the puissance of 'the performance' - in the hands of the actor performing. This calculated move is a performed deflection – a staging of props and self within the background – that centers the focus of the power on the individual performing.

This performer, then, has the power to deflect a threat or attack in the mere presentation of self in the picture such that how he is to be (re-)presented aligns with how his attacker would see him. With the performed deflection, an actor camouflages themselves within an expected reception of the one caught-out watching. Visibly hiding in this way, in plain sight as an expectation of the other, the actor performing deflection projects his deflected self forward, out, into the space of reception, making their presence known no matter what. The performed

deflection becomes the background where the attack is deflected and simultaneously paraded before the crowd. The crowd sees all and the deflector fades back into the black.

Throw-Casting: The What of Grotesque Swagger

As a child on the boat with my grandfather, I came into an understanding and appreciation for throwing a fishing line. Whether a fish was caught or not, the dexterity of a fisherman was valued by the cast of the throw. I learned a great deal of fishing was about how the throw is cast. There is an art to this. It is in the wrist, it is in the back. It has everything to do with the position of the body, the pole in the hand. From where the body is in its own positioning matters to the pole in the hand and how the line is cast, the aim and efficacy of the throw.

I remember being on the boat early morning with a group of men. We were out fishing. This was a sacred place. And the one time I felt as though I mattered to the conversation, was when I made an observation about cherry coke. Cherry coke tasted like the smell of pine trees, I said. And I was heard. For some one person in the group responded with a rather eloquent rhapsody about the connections between the mouth and the nose, the passages that link the two, and why I would come up with such an observation. Though a few men took a minute to try to understand what I had at first said (And yes, I liked this attention too, the attention of folks working hard to comprehend what I had said) it was the appreciation for what I said that captured me. Someone heard me (one first go, no less) and had something more to offer to my insight. I was being helped along the way. This, to me, was the true camaraderie of the morning fishing trips.

This is also the space where I learned how to cast a line, how to throw a perfect line – how to ensure dinner was caught. An existential take on the idea of 'being thrown' mixed with theatre and angling in search of a reading practice for Western literary studies to begin an appreciation for the efficacy of Black performance and Black performative arts. This is a theory in search of reclamation, reclamation of the power of Black performative arts as figured by the throw of a line cast into unseeable future.

We are thrown into that which we believe ourselves to be. When looking in from the out we may perceive ourselves to be that which others do see. If we take ourselves from without, we may fall into a way of seeing that is that which the other may purportedly hope to see. In this view, we are nothing more than a collection of the popular ways of seeing that would have us in the manner and style of being that is that which is to-be-seen. In this we must revise our way of thinking: rather than "we are thrown into that which we believe" we may now amend our thinking toward "I am thrown into that which I want others to see." Herein lies our choice.

Our choice for how it is we wish to believe we are to-be-seen by others. I may either choose to be that which others would have me to be, or, I may be that which I believe and/or see myself as being. In this sense, I am thrown into that which I believe myself to be as it were when I see myself from within. From within I know that I am the projection of that which I do believe myself to be.

Figure 3. Harrigan & Hart's *The Gallant 69th* - informal (1876)

I begin with the last photograph of Morgan Benson discovered during the course of this investigation. In a scrapbook devoted to the theatre of Harrigan was found an informal image of "The Gallant 69th" featuring the entire corps in posed relaxation. Tucked in center in Anthony Hart, leader of the petite crew, sitting in young authority, his faced trained on the camera. Hart is

flanked to his left and right, both standing and sitting, twelve soldiers in uniform - each of them armed. Collectively they read as stone-faced children, their solemn faces betraying their young years. At center, seated below Hart, is Morgan Benson. He sits, knees bent, leaning on a water pail turned upside down. His right arm casually rests on the pail, the height of which allows for his hand to bend naturally, falling ever so gently to the side. The pose of Benson is demure, quaint in a way as becomes a young charge seated at the foot of their leader.

I begin with this informal picture of Benson to capture him at the end of his photographic archive. Benson would have been performing with Harrigan and Hart for the better part of two years by the time this photograph was taken. His ease and comfort in front of the camera is noticeable. If his relaxed pose bespeaks an awareness for an earned space of representation before the camera, the look of unadorned self-presence assures the thought. Tellingly, the cap we see on Benson is the same cap he wears in Figure 4, however in this photograph the cap has been turned backwards. Figure 4 shows the corps in formal parade, standing at attention with Hart as Captain at their side. Benson, on the other side of the group, stands tall, holding a water pail and styled in the cap to suggest his position as group attendant. Returning to Figure 3, we see Benson has chosen (perhaps?) to relax the image of posed attendant into an image of relaxation. The chill Benson effects in Figure 3, arm draped and hand bent, cap cocked to the side, assert a type of swagger: the swagger of chill.

Benson's swagger, for me, is thrown forward into my modern consideration of Benson's performance genealogy. The condition of being thrown or cast forward in a performance-based setting allows for a per-condition of there already landing a success in the throwing of the throw. The swagger of Benson in this photographic moment arrives as the swagger of Holder's verbal cola nut joke. In that the performance-based setting assumes itself to be successful by dint of having been

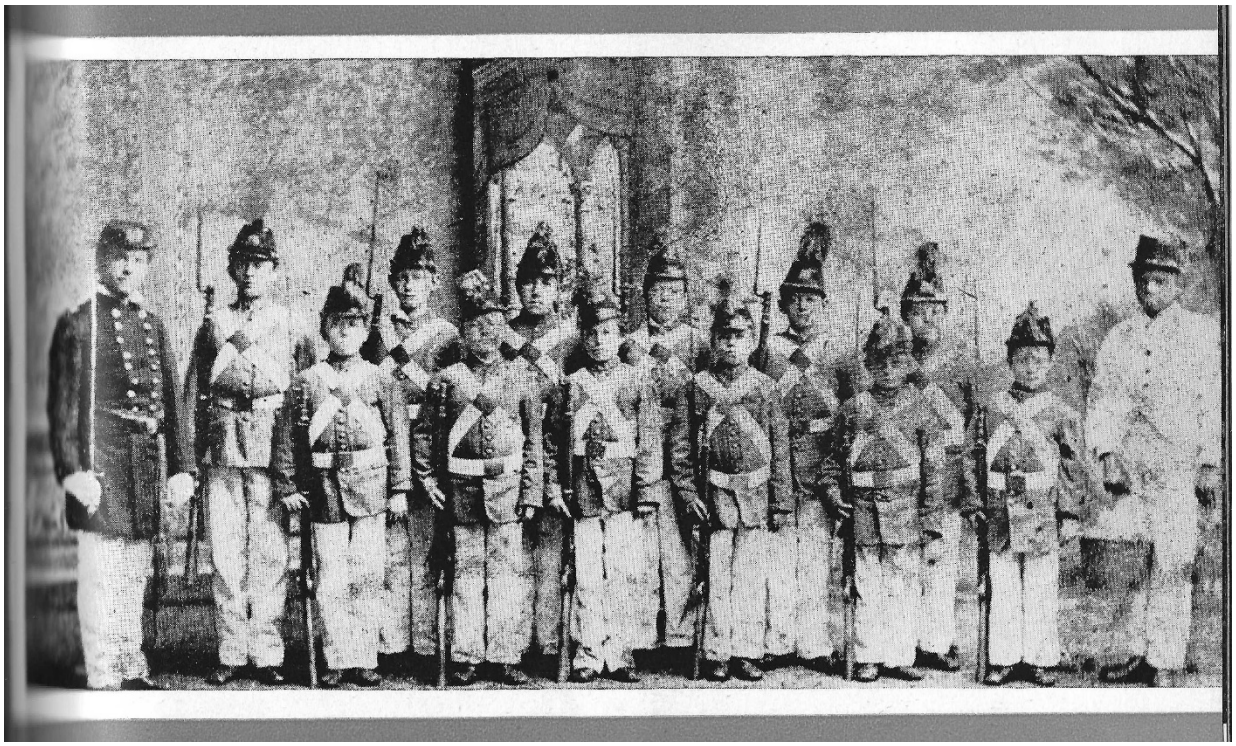

Figure 4. Harrigan & Hart's *The Gallant 69th* (1876)

done, then the throw-casting is a fait accompli as the act of casting (re)presents an act already completed in the doing. Throw-casting is directly implicated in time. To be thrown – spatially thinking – connotes movement; movement and direction. Throw-casting reverberates against notions of temporality.

What are the aesthetics of the cast of a thrown shade as enacted by that of the quare child? Observable acts of shade thrown may not *be* as they appear. Visual reception may not be the most effective means of interpreting acts of throwing shade. Neither may aural reception: the art of throwing shade begins in non-verbal acts. I propose a sensory reception of felt, or emotional touch, as a means of interpreting acts of throwing shade, a more personal subject reader-response that requires an in-depth entrenchment in the hearts and minds of others, with an understanding that a gap always exists between the seeker of knowledge and the person wielding the power to throw. Still,

we may begin to understand the other in their acts of throwing shade as they are willing to be understood, by comprehending and appreciating how it is that they are throwing the shade, how they have had intended to cast the line of their throw. What does it do to the archive to have the act of throwing shade be rewritten as an act tied up in speech, reception, and being able to read the performance of a gesture and words rather than gesture alone?

What I am purposing is a strategy for reading the non-verbal reception for throwing shade. This is a bit of a retreat, a move back from what we think of today as an act of throwing shade. What was once a subtle art has become an overt performative act and gesture. The combination of act and gesture registers loudly as a 'thing being done' such that the subtly of where throwing shade began has lost itself in the midst of such popular circulation. I propose a way of returning to the subtle nature of throwing shade by investigating how such artful acts are interpreted by those outside of the circle, as it were. This proposal is merely a means of expanding appreciation, for growing an understanding among communities who might require an education in how to receive the subtle art of others.

To the art of throwing shade I would offer a reader – one trained in the Western language of literary discourse – a means of interrogating their own response. This offering begins with a question: how was the thrown shade cast? This requires our reader to ask the addresser, someone they may not have intimate or direct relation and/or contact with, what was the intent of a shade being cast. This questioning demands active listening, listening for the intent of the speaker without recourse to any other than how they respond. This question is not asked for interrogation, but rather comprehension. So often the Western reader misrecognizes plays on the field in an effort to situate themselves in the discussion. It may be the case that a shade thrown has nothing whatsoever to do

with a witness, some reader outside of the circle, and it is from there where the question must be asked. To truly arrive an intent, in fullness of the power of the shade being thrown, the reader/person asking must acknowledge and be aware that the thrower, much like the sardine can, may not see you.

What I am after is how the shade was thrown, how it was cast. What is the cast of throw? Without this understanding and knowledge, any response or reception is woefully misunderstood. To read is to invite interpretation. To comprehend and appreciate how a shade thrown was cast, no interpretation is required. In fact, interpretation defeats the purpose. In the listening for response one must remove as much of an understanding of the self as is possible so as to allow for the fullness of another's response to be registered. If a reader asks the question of how a thrown shade was cast with a formed reception for the quality of the shade, then the response is meaningless. It is in full surprise and non-anticipation that a reader might hear an answer to a question, might be able to glean a sense of the casting of a throw. Like the fisherman on the wharf fishing for dinner, one who finds great success, it is the technique of the throw that matters, the end/determination having already been appreciated so as to demand asking the question.

Into the Blackground: The Where of Grotesque Swagger

America has constituted a blackground onto which and from which Black American subjects emerge; first and foremost as Black figures. Breaks down the monolithic concept of black figuration. The purpose of this research is to offer a theory for intervening in the constitution of Black monolithic subjectivities as a feature of historic and historiographic investigation. This theory is

meant to limit the reach of race insofar as it is used to delineate historical figures. Understanding how and when figures emerge in history through an analytic of the blackground allows the historian to take sideways glances at what otherwise would have been not relevant or tangential stories, disciplines, etc.

The Blackground, a spatial condition of the American musical theatre that presents the conditions for an emergence of a grotesque swagger such as Morgan Benson. What matters here is the space of the viewing presentation, the situation of actors and audiences. The stage is set with actors and there presents there a particular mode of seeing and being seen. On the stage, there exists those spaces from which an actor enters and exits. Such a condition of being for the actor means there must be a place where the audience is allowed 'to see' and there also remains hidden that which an audience is not to see. There is a space of presentation, a place marked for the act of seeing and being seen. Such a divided place in the space exists on one half of the actor-audience group space.

On the audience side there is the place of reception. This is the space marked for those to see. This is also a space of being seen. These two conditions exists conterminously while collectively comprising a united space of reception. Dynamics such as cross-viewings go down in this space.[148] This is to say there are intrasubjective relations occurring inside of a space marked for reception.

At the edge of both spaces we find an emergence of the blackground. There exist, on the side of the actor, a fine line between what an audience sees and what the actor allows the audience to see. More than an effect of the performance, or work, of the actor, there are the conditions of the stage (and the scene set within) that mark where an actor knows that they may be seen or unseen.

[148] Manning 2004, xvii.

An actor has an ability to conduct when and where they enter in terms of reception. The actor might chose to enter in such a way such that all, or part, of a reception body may see their actions. Similarly such for those exits. In between, across a range of the actor's performance, there are moments of disclosure, of allowing an audience to see or not see, what an actor is doing. The skilled actor can visualize themselves from various points of view of reception such that they are able to manipulate how an audience receives their performance. This is one trait of performing on the fringe that must be in place for the blackground.

A condition necessary to activate the blackground is location of a member within the audience of reception who is aware of those spaces where an actor is able to legislate how they are to be seen. This might arise, most poignantly, from the member of the space of reception is caught being seen while is a space of seeing. This collapses a power dynamic onto the act of seeing, a hierarchy of who is being seen seeing others. This is to impose the hierarchal structure of the viewing box with assumed positions of authority. In as much as all may be said to be viewing the same event, where people are positioned within the act of seeing legislates who matters most in the act of seeing. For those in recognition of their own lowered status positions in the hierarchy of being seen, there exists the possibility of slipping into the background, of disclosing one's self in the crowd. While positions of power might see monolithic bodies of lower order, those bodies come together or adhere by dint of their being in the crowd. Even when there is only one body of difference in the crowd, that body is part of a whole other in that they are the one instance of a different body. They exist as an imagined set of possible other bodies, a set of possible other difference. In this way, that body of difference might disguise themselves to be a different body of difference than how they might otherwise be. A small person in a room of giants might assume a different performance of small to

deflect recognition of their particular type of small-ness in favor of a generic, though not entirely relatable quality of small-ness.

At the fringe of reception exists bodies of difference being seen while seeing. From those who see themselves in the blackground onstage, there is a connection to the actor onstage who chooses when and where it is for them to be seen. The alignment concerns perspectives of viewing, an understanding for a perspective of viewing that is conjoined where both bodies understand the power-play of both choosing when and where to be seen along with how it is that is to be seen. An actor-person spatially orienting themselves in such a way that an body of reception only sees what the actor/person wants them to see might find camaraderie with the audience-person choosing how they wish to be seen in the crowd. Both persons: actor and audience, strategically play against their place on the stage and in the crowd to effect a particular type of appearing, all for affect. When two bodies recognize themselves in this play of difference, a coalition is formed. One side weave in and out, appearing where and when strictly for effect, while the other side responds in full awareness that how they are being seen is already is cast in hierarchy. There is apprehension and play on both sides, each ducking and weaving from ever being caught.

This phenomenon that I am describing is two bodies in the midst of flight, each off on their own trajectory, though momentarily finding alignment during this fugitive flight where the unexpected, the laugh, erupts in passing flight. Two bodies escaping from sites of public captivity while catching something that both bodies know all others have missed. There is an improv here, a riffing on the event, that both bodies can call and respond (to/with one another) as they are wholly not a part of the event. They are ornament. They are set dressing. They are mere props in a play of

other people's subjectivity. And with (both awareness of one's own position and the fact of such an awareness being 'a thing') there exists much humor – a great deal of quality jokes.

This term is introduced to set the stage for those characters who emerge from the blackground who are featured, or possibly even leading roles (or acts) in the American musical theater. This term pre-supposes a musical theatre form not based in an overwhelming ontology of blackness, but rather as that which is decidedly not-Black.

The root origin for the blackground might be found in Moten's *Case of Blackness*. Here we might find an argument for a type of black social life that is not yet apparent within the commercial structure of the American musical theatre and yet caught laboring in such a way as to be suggestive of a subjective agency. In that such a subjective agency may exist, then we might say that it persists. For even in its diminishing, it lingers in the imaginative for what might be there unseen in the barely possible seeing. The condition of the background and those objects that fade away. The details of the background and what is only really apparent when you get close to the image.

Performed Deflection: The How of Grotesque Swagger

Quite possibly, Morgan Benson was a theatrical genius. And such a truth may have been seen with the simple turn of a hat. I conclude with a child actor enacting the Target-bearer as part of a performance for the burlesque stage. The joke here is that he is making jokes off the fact that he is carrying a target as a Black man - being a Black man holding a target has a certain obviousness about it. Moving backwards, I would say that the occasion of Morgan Benson holding a target brings about a curious question concerning black men and military: are they to be perceived as friend or as

enemy? Should they be equipped to handle weapons, or, as an unspoken option to that question, should they be made to carry targets? Are black men fighting in America considered friends or enemies?

This investigation began with a picture of an unnamed Black boy. He is photographed standing between two men, easily twice his age, both of white descent. The two men are costumed in military regalia, one with shako and sword, the other with musket. They appear to be ill-dressed, their outfits do not fit, are wrinkled, and suggest that the two men are beneath the ranks of their military dress. The unnamed Black boy stands center, staring straight at the camera. His pants are cutoff at the ankle, his feet bare. His shirt and vest are rudimentary, simple in design and manufacture. He is holding a wooden bull's eye target. The concentric rings are prominently displayed, with the name of regiment Captain Mulligan sprawled across. While the two men in military dress are angled slightly toward each other, locked in a look that tilts their torsos toward each other, the young boy stares forward: blank stare, eyes fixed directly at the camera. Careful investigation of the picture reveals that all three men are leaning upon standing poses.

Through textual analysis of theories of subjectivity, thing, spatial, and affect theories, deconstructive readings of musical texts, oral histories of artists involved in the stage productions under considerations, and the use of innovations from digital humanities in media documentation, I propose an analytic to methodologically parse the color black from theories of racial performativity. I use an analytic of performed deflection to study how artists working on Broadway in the late twentieth century engage black representational space.[149] A performed deflection is a historicized

[149] "...the black representational space I am presently concerned with began to take shape around the start of the twentieth century, when black art began its life as a component of a political program of uplift.

strategy of disavowal, disruption, and dispersal performed in the immediate present tense linking theories of restored behavior with improvisatory acts of making a scene. A second(ed) nature of restored behavior underscores how performance revises originary content through ritualized acts. Restored behavior, having been hailed from a distant (recent) past, performs itself as if being with contemporary sociality. In this performance of past being made newly present, actors deploy strategic identitarian deflections of racial performativity to frustrate redress to ontological differences that have been structured in a visibility of racial legibility. How repetitive acts of performed deflection come to be documented, articulated, theorized, and ultimately archived as tropes for American Musical Theatre Studies is lane of further investigation and study.

Black men are not a self-given category. There is no such thing as a Black man beyond our construction of it as such. What I am trying to say is that the thought that we might be able to describe a group of people of such varying types as such is ridiculous. We can see this in the way gender is starting to become unmoored. Black as a racial category does not hold. I want to write a dissertation that shows how race as a category does not hold.

Across this dissertation, a performance history and genealogy for The Black Joke has been detailed. Beginning in 1720 with a single-sheet ballad sent from Dublin to London, The Black Joke has been traced across stages of England throughout the eighteenth-century, in the engravings of Hogarth and the writings of Bryon, on ships across the Atlantic trading in human flesh, to the shores of Northern New York State where The Black Joke was transmitted to an outfit of shipbuilders

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Indeed, the thought of black representational space is inseparable from the forms and goals of black cultural politics. But I use the phrase more specifically to refer to the constellation formed in the accrual to black art of audience, legitimacy, visibility, and other forms of dissemination and validation." See English 2007, 9.

during the war of 1812. From Sacket's Harbor, NY in 1812 to the docks of Lower Manhattan in the 1830s, The Black Joke was reinstated in America when those shipbuilders christened both their fire engine and their engine company in the name of The Black Joke. As a result of branding their fire engine company in the name of The Black Joke, the target excursions and target parades first instituted by these men in the 1830s were familiarly done so in the name of The Black Joke. Consequently, the practice of hiring out a visible Black man to carry the shooting target to the firing range became the provenance of The Black Joke engine company. As target excursions and parades became weekly affairs, embedded in the political and economic structures of New York City life, the joke itself was discreetly transferred from an ideology of targeting Black Men to the actual bodies of Black Man physically holding targets.

The Mulligan Guard variety sketch burlesque of 1873 further reified the Black body as a target, though removing any and all direct and explicit reference to histories for The Black Joke. By the 1870s, the target parade and its Black Man target bearer were familiar enough to contemporary society to no longer require an awareness for how The Black Joke had been aligned with the visible perception of America's so-called Black Men. Morgan Benson, playing the character and figure of The Target Boy, cemented in the imaginations of America an ideal of Black Men as targets, albeit putting forth such a sickening idea through a fierce display of grotesque swagger. In the fifty years between The Black Joke fire engine company setting off on their first target excursion with a man carrying a target and the staged presentation of a boy holding a target for comic entertainment, The Black Joke silently disappeared. No longer necessary to articulate the Black Man as The Black Joke, audiences were both required to and take great pleasure in continually reinstating a practice of believing Black Men to be firing targets for militia and municipal forces.

While the phenomenon of target parades and target excursions lasted for over half a century, the connection between the visible Black Man as target and The Black Joke itself was strategically laid aside. The thrust of The Black Joke meaning - visible Black bodies taken as firing targets, either for sex, or death, or both - continues to persist through to today. The musical theatre stage was instrumental in allowing this murderous idea of Black men as targets to persist. By turning the situation of target parades and excursions in to burlesque, audiences delighted in the folly of seeing militia men handle their weapons and march in drill formation. The bit concerning the Black boy holding a target was ancillary to the narrative thrust of the burlesque, a background bit of fun easily believed and free from close inspection or critique. Benson's performance of swagger frustrates the smooth transition of The Black Joke onto the stage, though such a frustration has yet to be explicitly drawn out for audiences of American Musical Theatre entertainment.

In addition to compiling and presenting a performance genealogy for The Black Joke, this dissertation seeks to extend the grotesque swagger displayed by Morgan Benson in 1873 into a historiographical intervention for histories for The Black Joke. To the histories of The Black Joke presented above, I wish to enact a methodology of critical fabulation as detailed by Saidiya Hartman.

To conclude the study I turn to Morgan Benson and the appearance of black men in the fire engine culture circa mid-1800s. I turn to citations of black male presence in the culture of NYC fire department during the volunteer company years. Specifically, I turn to the dress of Morgan Benson as target boy. He is both slave boy running the streets and swagger of target boy.

Harrigan and Hart's *The Mulligan Guards* sketch provided the blueprint for their popular Mulligan's Guard series, an early blending of burlesque, melodrama, olio. Harrigan's ethnographic approach to writing character bought the street scene on the stages of early variety theatre. The

personas Harrigan and Hart portrayed were culled from the streets of New York City. Harrigan would spend days roaming the streets of Manhattan, talking to people along his walks to get a sense of the scenes he wished to portray. Additionally, he was known to buy the clothes off the backs of his interviewees, to give his theatrical portrayals an imagined authenticity. One such a person, both encountered and then drafted into service on Harrigan's stage, was Morgan Benson. Barefoot, dressed in a Confederate soldier's hat, Benson portrayed the target boy and was acclaimed for his performance of swagger. What was the significance of Benson's costume, in what way did it prepare him for his performance of swagger?

What happens when part of what is required to make a costume make sense to an audience is the cloak of racial comportment? What does this say from the inside, and by inside I mean to say from the sense of the costume making sense by the one is who is required to wear it as part of the play? I am looking at these people dressing from Broadway convention type events, and I see them wearing costumes that need the racial component. I say they need the racial component because the costume was first thrown down with race in mind.

In as much as this chapter highlights Benson's performance in Poughkeepsie, it is couched within the multi-city tour that Harrigan and Hart embarked upon. I want to say something about touring, about bringing a type of performance from one place to another. There is something in the translation (movement from one place to the next) that speaks to a larger or broader idea of translation (human performance and effect). There are a few things to keep in mind as we make this move: the timing - this is soon after the Civil War, the creator/writers - Harrigan and Hart had something to say about the state of America in this historic moment and felt that their theatrical efforts were saying something about and something to the state of American in this moment. There

is something to say about difference in this time period, meaning how difference is interpreted on the stage and how that interpretation then becomes something in the way of theatrical performance. We might think of this in terms of how Harrigan portrays the conflict between north and south. We might think of it in terms of how children are presented and staged in Harrigan's world. Finally, we might think of this in terms of how the Black body is staged in the Harrigan-Hart theatre.

What is notable concerning the historical legacy that Harrigan and Hart enjoy, and the politics of difference that is wrapped up in the brand of Harrigan and Hart entertainment, is the role afforded Benson in this history. If we pull out the formal traits of musical theatre making that the two mean leave behind and remove the bits of nostalgia that come with learning about the formal traits, we are left with only a vague understanding of who these artists were and what they were in saying in their own time about the world around them. There is ideology in their art making, ideologies that are quieted in the historical process. You might think of this as a kind of refinement of thought - a refining of ideas. I think that it is important to keep those ideas alive if only to see if those ideas still register today outside of the work aesthetics does to maintain their historical clout.

Phenomenologically, what does performance at the event of death mean for the figure of the Black man? In consideration of what has written concerning death and dying and mourning and performance as an act of disappearance, how are we to consider the repeated and recurring event of the death of black men? But what I want to go for here is the idea of performances that occur at the brink of death, on the precipice. And, due to the expected arrival of Black men at death's door, what flashes of performance arise at the show of their execution. There is an inevitability to it, of course - it is death - but there is also an anticipated sense of arrival, as though the time of arrival were in some way known.

I have found a theory of deflection that has proven to be operational in the structuring of a formal history for histories of performance in the dramatic arts, specifically for the American musical theatre. Histories of performance have often deflected recognition and attention away substrata rumblings altering stable foundational structures of the form, turning instead to cogent narrative themes that strive to not further complicate stories of an already complex tale of origin and creativity. This dissertation seeks to introduce deflection as an active component of the writing and organizing of, and reception for, American musical theatre-based performance histories. It is in these acts of deflection - not only acts of deflection themselves but further obfuscation of such acts - that the history of American musical theatre is written. Over time, such accumulated histories compound to further distort paths of inquiry toward comprehending American qualities embedded in the craft of creating American musical theatre. Confronting such deflective acts brings a reader closer to toward comprehending not merely what is not known about histories of American musical theater performance but also, and perhaps even more alarmingly, what is not known, or unknowingly unknown, about such origin stories. The scope of this research only begins to address this last concern, settling merely toward an understanding for what needs to be addressed to get at what remains unknown about this most American of enterprises.

To read the American musical, to understand the American musical, one must attain an appreciation for the con, the putting over on someone, the hustle that makes kings of jokers and fools of kings. The American musical is American in that its ethos is that part of the American spirit, the American identity, that seeks to replace this for that. The American dream that would make for a better life requires a trade, a sort of giving up of the old to make way for the new. This trading up is implicit in the musical, the stage being a place for such acts of deception to take place. An audience

bears witness, validating the success of the hero that would make a better way for themselves out of what is at hand. This American of qualities, brushing off the imposition of a higher authority for the wishes of the individual to succeed, is what Miller (1998) identifies as its queer voicing. It may be queer when read against Miller's context of the Golden Age musical, but this sheer defiance of what reality might present is thematic throughout a nearly three century history of the form. Beyond the pleasure received in having succeeded oneself, there is the vicarious joy of seeing someone else succeed, particularly someone one is rooting for.

And yet, much if not all the history of American musical theatre centers on the win of the hero, the stories of adversity that were met with much reward. The triumph is one for an audience, the success of the form contributing to the creative and economic genius of its creators. Performed deflections are the calculated acts of distraction, meant to veer attention away from the center, or foundation, of a discourse. They are performed in that the coordinates deriving how and when and where a deflection is to take place is in some way pre-historical, that is, it is out of time with history. The performed deflection has already been enacted, it is merely rendered new via context.

Performed deflections account for the restorative behavior espoused by Schechner while advancing the critical fabulation work of Hartman. Performed deflections are temporally precarious, in line with Munoz's uptopias, and are as preoccupied with the temporal nature of the event of Badiou. Thinking through events and the space of the liminal. what is the threshold for ordering of historical time. when and where do we account for liminal spaces as we order history? When we remark of historical events, we place ourselves in space in the event. "Where were you when…?" We bring about critical awareness of an event taking place by ordering our sense of self from within a chronological order of the event. This or that event took place at a particular place in our collective

understanding of history, occurring at such a time in space. We locate ourselves in relation to such coordinates. Yet the threshold of such markers, the before and subsequent after that lead to, derive from, and are wholly possessed in the event are ambiguously placed. These liminal moments are marked only by way of transformation, by way of an end result where what has happened is starkly different from what came before. What occurs during the during?

There are two points I wish to stress here. First, that the event itself is marked by a beginning, a middle, and an end. Inasmuch as we are able to discretely mark an event's occurrence, so to does history attempt to mark the narrative arch of such an event. As such, the liminal may be said to reside from within the event. Second, the event itself is vaguely marked, meaning such things as beginnings and ends are themselves lost to the event in its entirety. Fluid throughout, the event knows not of discrete markers, but rather a continuous outpouring of effects, a series or sequence producing manifest change in what was once thought prior. In this way, past is made present tense in the reformulation of what once was. Surveys of the liminal in the ritual event are of primary concern to a discussion on the ordering of historical time. Historical time is laden with liminal space, a consequence of which demands an awareness of how knowledge bends when crossing thresholds. The confusion of time inherent in this process is itself liminal, a series of liminal occasions giving rise to the appearance of an overall event transformation

Figure 5. Harrigan & Hart in *The Mulligan Guards* (1874)

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