Making America Home: Racial Masquerade and Ethnic Assimilation in the Transition to Talking Pictures

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In 1890, when Philip Krantz and Abraham Cahan were starting a Yiddish-language socialist newspaper (the *Arbeiter Zeitung*), Cahan proposed initiating the venture with an article on cannibalism in Africa. Krantz, wholly focused on promoting socialist doctrine on New York's Lower East Side, objected. Cahan was also a socialist and went on to edit the *Jewish Daily Forward* for half a century. But just as he had moved from Russian to Yiddish to reach Jewish immigrants in their own language, so he believed that African cannibalism would attract an audience for Krantz's "Our Program."[1]

Cahan had read the article he proposed to translate and publish, "Life Among the Congo Savages," in *Scribner's Magazine*. This journal offered its readers fiction by such writers as Henry James, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Robert Louis Stevenson; political articles (Theodore Roosevelt's account of leading his white and black troops up San Juan Hill appeared within the decade); and displays of exotic peoples. The newspaperman turned explorer, Henry M. Stanley, was often featured. Closer to home, Jacob A. Riis's "How the Other Half Lives," his tour through the urban jungle, appeared four months before the article on Congo savages. The documentary, classificatory invasion Frederick E. Hoxie locates as part of imperial expansion was discovering not only exotic non-Europeans but urban immigrants as well. Cahan himself, "discovered by [the] . . . renowned . . . literary Columbus," William Dean Howells, as Theodore Dreiser put it, soon published stories in English about the Lower East Side. *Scribner's* genteel readers could make the connection between Riis's "street Arabs," children sleeping on the city streets, and the "benighted savages in the heart of Africa"; between the "dark hallways and filthy cellars, crowded, as is every foot of the street, with half-naked children" at home, and the "cannibal orgies" in the Dark Continent; between the savage "craving for . . . human flesh,"

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[1] Ronald Sanders, *The Downtown Jews: Portraits of an Immigrant Generation* (New York, 1987), 104–9.

the cries of "Nyana! Nyana! (Meat, meat)," and the "pigmarket" in the Jewish quarter where "crowds . . . pushing, struggling, screaming, and shouting in foreign tongues, a veritable Babel of confusion," buy everything except the forbidden flesh that gives the market its name. Just as the nineteenth-century cartoons and racial doctrines turned Irish into Africans, so the multiethnic New York slums brought savagery to the heart of civilization.[2]

Jews, to be sure, were more the objects of sympathy in *Scribner's*, cannibals the objects of horror, but reform impulse jostled exotic display both in the article about Cahan's prospective readers and in the article he translated for them. After all, Stanley told readers of *Scribner's* that pygmies, who ate everything in sight, human flesh included, "were the intellectual equals of about fifty per cent of the modern inhabitants of any great American city of today." Although Stanley was reducing immigrants to pygmies, he was conversely elevating African savages, for he insisted, "I see no difference between the civilized and the pygmy!" "Let light shine upon the trackless region," Stanley concluded. "Some will survive the great change and . . . prove themselves to be very much like the rest of humanity."[3]

The progress Stanley imagined from savagery to civilization would catch up Riis's other half as well. The *Arbeiter Zeitung*'s "Cannibalism in Africa"—for Cahan won his dispute with Krantz—was a step neither toward Cahan's Jewish socialism nor toward Stanley's universal civilization but toward Americanization. Just as the *Forward*'s famous *Bintel Briefs*, letters from readers sharing their concerns, introduced Jewish immigrant workers to daily life in America, so "Life Among the Congo Savages" introduced them to American culture. Discovering savages, they were discovering America. Thanks to Cahan, they began to move from being the objects, to being the reading subjects, of exotic interest, from what they shared with cannibals to what they shared with readers of *Scribner's*.

Far from discovering something new in the period of mass immigration, Cahan—as Ronald Takaki shows—had come upon the oldest American story. He was creating a line of descent from the first self-styled children of Israel in the New World to the Jewish immigrants who followed them. Like those first settlers, the Jews would be discoverers. The discovery and appropriation of native peoples, peoples defined by and ripped from their relationship to their land, stands at the origins of the United States. Genocide and slavery notwithstanding, these native peoples

[2] Herbert Ward, "Life Among the Congo Savages," *Scribner's Magazine*, 7 (Feb. 1890), 135, 152–54, 186; Frederick E. Hoxie, "Exploring a Cultural Borderland: Native American Journeys of Discovery in the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of American History*, 79 (Dec. 1992), 969–95; Jacob A. Riis, "How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements," *Scribner's Magazine* 6 (Dec. 1889), 655, 657, 659; Sanders, *Downtown Jews*, 197–204; Amy Kaplan, *The Social Construction of American Realism* (Chicago, 1988), 109; L. Perry Curtis, *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (Washington, 1971). Sanders identifies Henry M. Stanley as the author of the article Cahan translated, but Stanley's *Scribner's* article (see note 3) was published the year after the first issue of the *Arbeiter Zeitung*. Ward's travel account, which centers on cannibalism as Stanley does not, must be the essay in question. It appeared one month before Cahan's translation.

[3] Henry M. Stanley, "The Pygmies of the Great African Forest," *Scribner's Magazine*, 9 (Jan. 1891), 3, 8, 17. On Henry M. Stanley, see Maria Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* (Chicago, 1990), 26–33.

were neither forgotten nor simply kept at a distance. Their discovery generated, in Hoxie's terms, not so much dialogue as invention, the invention of America.[4]

Discovery establishes priority, less of one colonizing power over another than of the colonizer over the peoples already living on the land. Discovery bestows rights over the heretofore undiscovered people. Discovery makes the discovered into passive objects, the discoverers into autonomous subjects. But, as "Life Among the Congo Savages" illustrates, the discovered are objects not only of concrete utility but also of symbolic fascination.

Their society built on the land of Indians and with the labor of slaves, early Americans created a national culture on that material foundation. The two originary forms of that culture were the captivity narrative, the first and most popular secular American writing and the source of both classic American literature and the frontier myth, and blackface minstrelsy, the first and most popular form of American mass entertainment. Indian literature and blackface, moreover, expressed both racial aversion and racial desire. Both promoted identification with native peoples as a step in differentiation from them.[5]

In both forms, reversion to primitivism fashioned American identity. Racial cross-dressing turned Europeans into Americans not only on Frederick Jackson Turner's mythological frontier but also in the cities, where blackface made white Americans out of Irish immigrants on the "cultural borderland" (to adapt a phrase Hoxie has used) between the Anglo-Saxon and colored races. My concern here is with the extension of that pattern to the period of mass immigration at the turn of the twentieth century, and to the central, mass-cultural, Americanizing instrument, motion pictures.[6]

Like Irish immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century, Jewish movie producers, vaudeville performers, and songwriters occupied an insecure position between whites and peoples of color. Hollywood movies imagined the ideal America that the moguls and their immigrant audience aspired to enter; racial cross-dressing acknowledged the ambiguous racial status they occupied. It at once provided access to the depth of feeling and infantile behavior attributed to African Americans and, since blackface was only skin deep, demonstrated the Europeans' difference from them. Making visible the significance of race in the continuing creation of American

[4] Ronald Takaki, "*The Tempest* in the Wilderness: The Racialization of Savagery," *Journal of American History*, 79 (Dec. 1992), 892–912; Frederick E. Hoxie, "Discovering America: An Introduction," *ibid.*, 837.

[5] From the enormous body of work on which this paragraph draws, I cite here only Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860* (Middletown, 1973); Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800–1890* (New York, 1985); Robert Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, 1974); Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth Century America* (London, 1990); Eric Lott, *Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York, forthcoming); and David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, 1991).

[6] "The wilderness . . . strips off the garments of civilization and arrays [the colonist] in the hunting shirt and moccasin. . . . The outcome is . . . a new product that is American," wrote Frederick Jackson Turner in "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," the 1893 paper reprinted in Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York, 1920), 4. Hoxie, "Exploring a Cultural Borderland."

identity, racial masquerade pointed to white privilege. Since the sources of white advantage in the slaughter of Indians, the enslavement of African Americans, and the exploitation and exclusion of Asians were too terrible to acknowledge directly, racial masquerade also released the tension. Narratives about jazz age music emancipated it from its African-American roots. Sentimentality confused the question of whose grievances merited redress. Humor exploited racial stereotypes, but it also played with the hypocrisy of racial divisions, sometimes stopping short of full disclosure, sometimes going all the way.

The immigrant urban entertainers operated within a continuing tradition when they invented Americanizing forms. Werner Sollors's *Beyond Ethnicity* shows that tradition as pervasive, breaking down the distinction between early settlers in what became the United States and immigrants. The colonists were ethnics like their successors, argues Sollors, caught between inherited, ancestral, Old World, Old Testament, blood-based, Hebrew particularism and New World, New Testament, melting pot, spiritual universalism. Reincarnating the Turner thesis in postmodern, urban form, Sollors stands with "consent," as he labels it, against "descent." But though he sides with the children, preferring their universalism to their parents' particularism, he calls attention to generational conflict, the loss of the old home in making the new, as the pathos of Americanization.[7]

Replacing the Puritan/immigrant opposition with the one between consent and descent, however, gives freedom too large a field. Sollors does not sufficiently stress that the discovery of racial difference is part of Catholic and Jewish immigrants' inheritance from the colonists. Facing nativist pressure that would assign them to the dark side of the racial divide, immigrants Americanized themselves by crossing and recrossing the racial line. Their discovery of racial inequality propelled the United States beyond ethnicity, I will argue, by transforming ethnic descent into an American national identity.

Sollors observes the role of musical metaphors—symphony, harmony, orchestra—in symbolizing the melting pot. In the songs of Irving Berlin, Al Jolson, George Gershwin, Sophie Tucker, and many others, music was not simply a metaphor for the melting pot, but an instrument of it. Melting pot music has much in common with nineteenth-century theories about American English. Nineteenth-century language theorists believed that American English combined an organic discovery of the past with the construction of a nationalist identity (Sollors's descent and consent) by celebrating the expansionist power of national culture, what Kenneth Cmiel calls "the imperial cosmopolitanism of a chosen people."[8] My subject is the use of race in that process.

In a 1914 afterword to *The Melting Pot,* the 1908 intermarriage play that fixed its title on the United States, Israel Zangwill wrote, "However scrupulously and

[7] Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York, 1986), 4–5.

[8] Kenneth Cmiel, "'A Broad Fluid Language of Democracy': Discovering the American Idiom," *Journal of American History,* 79 (Dec. 1992), 930.

justifiably America avoids intermarriage with the negro, the comic spirit cannot fail to note spiritual miscegenation which, while clothing, commercializing, and Christianizing the ex-African, has given 'rag-time' and the sex-dances that go with it, first to white America and then to the whole white world." "Spiritual miscegenation" created an authentic American national music, wrote the jazz critic Henry O. Osgood in 1926; his examples were Stephen Foster's blackface "My Old Kentucky Home" and "Old Folks at Home," and "Dixie," which he described as "written by a minstrel, Dan Emmett, for a minstrel show." "The property today of all the English-speaking peoples of the world," Osgood continued, minstrel songs like these "were on the song sheets supplied to the crowds that assembled in Pretoria and Johannesburg, South Africa, to welcome the Prince of Wales."[9]

Minstrelsy was the world-wide sign of American identity because it made Americans. The 1939 musical, *Babes in Arms,* shows the process at work.[10] The babes in arms are children of retired vaudevillians. Putting on *Babes in Arms* to revive the family fortunes, which had been killed by talking pictures, they get their chance on Broadway through a minstrel number. "My daddy was a minstrel man," Judy Garland begins her song. "I'd like to black my face," she sings in blackface, "and go again down memory lane with an old-fashioned minstrel show." This, the central spectacle in *Babes in Arms,* offers all the pleasures of the traditional minstrel show, with Tambo and Bones routines, Mickey Rooney's dialect imitations, and a mass, blackface production number. Talking pictures, descended from vaudeville and entertaining genteel America, here pay homage to the blackface origins of American mass entertainment.

Spectacle has a higher purpose than mere pleasure, however. "Hi there, Yankee, Give me a thankee, You're in God's Country, now," sings Rooney in the movie's finale. "We've got no Duce, Got no Fuehrer, We've got Garbo and Norma Shearer" celebrates Hollywood as the patriotic alternative to authoritarian, European politics. Mentioning the acquisition of Greta Garbo, the song alludes to the melting pot that transformed Germans and Italians from supporters of dictatorship to democratic moviegoers. The myth is enacted by national couples (one man wears a yarmulke) as Rooney welcomes them as Yankees and invites them to dance. In this production number, called "God's Country," racially based nationalisms of descent confronted a spiritually based, inclusive, American nationalism. But there were no African Americans among Dan Emmett's or Mickey Rooney's minstrels, and none appear among the dancing couples in the movie's melting pot conclusion. American nationalism may be spiritual, not racial, from a European perspective, but race is the instrument of spirit from an American one.

Babes in Arms speaks for a motion picture industry that replaced, or rather incorporated, the frontier myth and the minstrel show as it became the agent of American-

[9] Israel Zangwill, *The Melting Pot* (New York, 1914), 207; also quoted in Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity,* 71; Henry O. Osgood, *So This Is Jazz* (1926; reprint, New York, 1978), 55n.

[10] *Babes in Arms,* dir. Busby Berkeley (MGM, 1939).

Figure 1. Al Jolson as the "Mammy singer" in *The Jazz Singer*. *Courtesy Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.*

ization. Like the Yiddish press and antebellum, urban blackface, early one-reelers were often sites of immigrant, working-class self-presentation. But the Jewish moguls who came to dominate Hollywood in the 1920s repudiated "the slum tradition in the movies" (in Adolph Zukor's phrase). As Neal Gabler has shown, they constructed an imaginary America for themselves and their mass audience. Dissolving divergent class, regional, and ethnic histories into a unifying American dream, the moguls propelled themselves from Hebraic particularism to American universalism.[11]

Although Americanization was not the subject of most of the moguls' movies, when the immigrant Warner brothers, Harry, Al, Jack, and Sam, made the first talking picture, *The Jazz Singer*, they told their own story. Choosing melting pot music against the wishes of his father, Cantor Rabinowitz, the jazz singer exchanges his inherited Jewish identity for an American one. Speaking and singing in the new

[11] Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York, 1988); Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (New York, 1980); Michael Rogin, Ronald Reagan, *The Movie and Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (Berkeley, 1987), 190–235; Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Chicago, 1991). For Adolph Zukor's phrase, see *ibid.*, 64.

sound medium, Jakie Rabinowitz acquires a new name, Jack Robin, and a gentile dancer, Mary Dale. Jack's refusal of his inherited cantorial identity kills his father; in the film's climax, Jack first sings Kol Nidre, the chant for Yom Kippur, the day of atonement, over his father's dead body, then "My Mammy" to his mother, his girl friend, and the audience at the Winter Garden theater. (See figure 1.) Although *Beyond Ethnicity* would not lead one to expect it, the Jewish jazz singer Americanizes himself by appearing in blackface. His racial cross-dressing enacts the pleasures and dangers surrounding not only race and ethnicity but also domestic and technological change. The first talking picture at once celebrated its technological breakthrough and allied the medium with patricide. In *Beyond Ethnicity,* domestic loss is the price of becoming American. But racial cross-dressing supplies "the Mammy singer" not only with a gentile wife but also with an American past, as plantation nurture replaces the east European home and mother left behind. In his relation to technology and domesticity, the immigrant turns into a representative American. He has to make technology serve the home because its promise of freedom—in car, radio, and motion picture—invaded traditional American family life. And the jazz singer's lost and found domestic haven defuses the threat from the career-oriented, sexually available New Woman by transforming her from threat to support for domesticity.[12]

The problematic of the first talking picture shaped other movies made during the transition to sound, when the technological revolution that ended silent pictures coalesced with the end of mass immigration, when nativist prejudice against ethnic urbanity confronted the new morals and forms of entertainment of the jazz age. I look at four movies made between 1927 and 1930 and united by racial cross-dressing—an urban melodrama, a musical review, a musical family melodrama, and a musical comedy set in the West. *Old San Francisco* (1927) was one of the five movies issued before *The Jazz Singer* that had occasional sound effects and a synchronized musical score. In these films, Warner Brothers introduced its new film sound system, Vitaphone. Directed by Alan Crosland, who later shot *The Jazz Singer,* its racial cross-dressing extends the European immigrant / white / black triangle of eastern cities (and of *The Jazz Singer*) to the Chinese, Irish, and Old California Spanish of the West. *The King of Jazz* (1930), an expensive, part-color musical and vaudeville review, starred Paul Whiteman, the most popular band leader of the jazz age. In this movie, jazz is a white man's music with black roots that turns immigrants into Americans. *The Singing Fool* (1928), Warner Brothers' part-silent, part-talking, part-singing blackface sequel to *The Jazz Singer,* shifts the focus of Al Jolson's first movie from crossing ethnic boundaries to crossing gender boundaries. Starring the first mass entertainment idol of the twentieth century, *The Singing Fool* was the top box office hit of the 1920s. Finally, *Whoopee!* (1930) returns Indians to the ethnic intermarriage story by way of blackface, redface, and

[12] *The Jazz Singer,* dir. Alan Crosland (Warner Brothers, 1927). This paragraph summarizes Michael Rogin, "Blackface, White Noise: The Jewish Jazz Singer Finds His Voice," *Critical Inquiry,* 18 (Spring 1992), 417–53. For Werner Sollors's amusement at urban Irish blackface spoofs of the tragic Indian, see Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity,* 132–38.

gender destabilization. Starring Eddie Cantor, it was among the most successful movies of 1931.[13]

Romantic triangles in these movies do not establish fixed points of rivalry in the traditional Freudian pattern, but rather resemble the complex triangularity among liminal American identities that Carroll Smith-Rosenberg describes. She analyzes popular writings of the late 1780s to reveal the process of negative identification that fixes and unfixes the identity of the white middle-class male. But whereas her anxious texts fear destabilized identities, the circuits of desire in Americanization films deliberately mobilize identity exchange—between colored and white, man and woman, ethnic and American.[14]

Like Irish blackface minstrelsy a century earlier, films such as these were one way in which, to quote James Barrett, "immigrant workers discovered the significance of race in American life." There were, Barrett shows, alternative modes of acculturation, some racially inflected and others not, in which workers themselves were more than spectators.[15] But no full account of the immigrant discovery of America can avoid the creative role first of Irish and then of Jewish Americans at the blackface point of production. Leaving aside the question of how mass audiences responded, one can see, for example, the difference between racial cross-dressing as a vehicle for ethnic self-assertion and as a vehicle for ethnic self-denial in the contrast between Cantor's *Whoopee!* and Jolson's *Jazz Singer.*

The entertainment business anywhere might be expected to celebrate acting as the vehicle for changing identities, but the ethos of American self-making suggests that to watch these American films, as audiences before us did, is also to discover America. Five movies (including *The Jazz Singer*), however significant and widely seen, do not establish the dominance of a pattern. They rather provide evidence for the pattern's existence and—the primary purpose of the analysis that follows—begin to elucidate its character.

Repudiating 1920s nativism, these films celebrate the melting pot. Unlike other racially stigmatized groups, white immigrants can put on and take off their mark of difference. But the freedom promised immigrants to make themselves over points to the vacancy, the violence, the deception, and the melancholy at the core of American self-fashioning. The films make us wonder: Do cross-dressing immigrants buy freedom at the expense of the imprisonment of peoples of color? Or does that freedom itself look less like consent and more like the evasion of crimes, less like making a new self and more like endless disguise?

[13] *Old San Francisco*, dir. Alan Crosland (Warner Brothers, 1927); *The King of Jazz*, dir. John Murray Anderson (Universal Pictures, 1930); *The Singing Fool*, dir. Alan Crosland (Warner Brothers, 1928); *Whoopee!*, dir. Thornton Freeland (Samuel Goldwyn, 1930). Thanks to William Nestrick for his copy of *The King of Jazz*.

[14] Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Dis-Covering the Subject of the 'Great Constitutional Discussion,' 1786–1789," *Journal of American History*, 79 (Dec. 1992), 841–73.

[15] James R. Barrett, "Americanization from the Bottom Up: Immigration and the Remaking of the Working Class in the United States, 1880–1930," *Journal of American History*, 79 (Dec. 1992), 1006.

Old San Francisco brings together two staples of early twentieth-century popular fiction and film, the ethnic intermarriage plot and the yellow peril melodrama. Dolores Vasquez, granddaughter of an Old California rancher, and Terrence O'Shaughnessy, son of a San Francisco Irish American, fall in love. The villain, Chris Buckwell, who endangers Dolores's property and her virtue, is exposed during the film as a Eurasian passing as white. *Old San Francisco* may seem like straightforward propaganda for Oriental exclusion, for the Supreme Court decision of the 1920s making "Orientals" ineligible for American citizenship. But that view, adopted in occasional recent attention to the movie, fails to account both for the sympathy shown the Chinese at the beginning of the film and for the orientalist ambience that permeated 1920s Hollywood: movie palaces (like Grauman's Chinese Theatre in Hollywood itself), narrative themes, set decor, costumes, and other objects of eroticized consumption and exotic display. Hollywood orientalism could bring once-forbidden pleasures to the mass movie audience as long as actual Asian Americans were kept out. Instead of illustrating a "social contradiction" between Oriental exclusion and Hollywood's orientalist turn, *Old San Francisco* shows how the one was the enabling condition for the other. Redistributing its initial sympathy for the exploited Asians and Spanish, *Old San Francisco* condemns the Asian racial passer and blesses mobility across ethnic lines. It thereby appropriates orientalism, not for miscegenation, prostitution, and dangerous drugs, but for the libidinized American home.[16]

As *Old San Francisco* begins, the urban Chinese and rural Spanish are equally victims of Anglo enterprise, greed, real estate speculation, and political corruption. Masquerade and sexual desire across group lines turn that opening upside down. As an Anglo, Buckwell confined the Chinese to Chinatown and threatened Old California Spanish property, the latter threat a stand-in for the American taking of Mexican and Indian land. Masquerading as a pious Christian to enter the Vasquez ranch, Buckwell seizes, not the ranch, but Dolores. That sexual violation allows the girl to "penetrate his secret," for when he raises and lowers the cloak over his face, an intertitle announces, "the heathen soul of a Mongol stood revealed."

In turning the Chinese from victims to agents of greed, *Old San Francisco* joins the Oriental exclusionist politics of the California labor and progressive movements.[17] As the attack on Chinese labor slid from the capitalists who employed the Chinese to the Chinese themselves, so the movie reveals the apparent Anglo capi-

[16] *Takao Ozawa v. U.S.*, 260 U.S. 178 (1922); cited in Ronald T. Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (Boston, 1989), 208. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978); William K. Everson, undated program notes, *Old San Francisco* file, Clippings Collection (Pacific Film Archive Library, University Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley); Norman K. Dorn, "San Francisco from Gold Rush to '06 – Warner Bros. Film Revival," *San Francisco Chronicle*, Sept. 9, 1973, pink section, p. 15, *ibid.*; Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the "Yellow Peril": Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (Berkeley, forthcoming), ch. 1, 2; Nick Browne, "American Film Theory in the Silent Period: Orientalism as Ideological Form," *Wide Angle*, 11 (Oct. 1989), 26–30, esp. 30; Matthew Bernstein, *Walter Wanger: "Independent" in Hollywood* (Berkeley, forthcoming), ch. 4; Michael Rogin, "The Great Mother Domesticated: Sexual Difference and Sexual Indifference in D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance*," *Critical Inquiry*, 15 (Spring 1989), 522–28; Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*.

[17] Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley, 1971).

talist as an Oriental. The surveyors who invade the Vasquez ranch are Buckwell's agents, revenging his failed invasion of the Vasquez woman. As the source of the threat shifts from white to Asian, the target shifts from property in land to property in women. Putting yellow faces on what it had earlier depicted as an Anglo menace, *Old San Francisco* endorses what it had first bemoaned, the passing (in both senses) of the California Spanish. Grandfather Vasquez's prophecy that "the city will bury us beneath an alien civilization" is at once fulfilled and reversed: the movie transfers alienness from Anglos who endanger Spanish to Orientals who menace whites. Instead of threatening the independent freehold and traditional culture, the "alien civilization" threatens white female virtue. Instead of burying Old California, the alien civilization will itself be buried in the film's climax, the San Francisco earthquake.

Hollywood movies of the 1920s and 1930s typically portrayed Latins as "lazy peasants and wily señoritas." *Old San Francisco* and *The Jazz Singer,* by contrast, repudiated nativist prejudice against Latins and Jews. Setting Terrence's love for Dolores against Buckwell's lust, *Old San Francisco* blesses attraction across ethnic lines. As in other ethnic intermarriage movies of Hollywood's early years, sympathy is distributed between the older generation's resistance and the younger generation's desire. Whichever side they ultimately choose, generational conflict movies acknowledge the pull of Old World ties.[18]

Old San Francisco scores its victory for love when the force keeping the lovers apart is no longer the parental victim (who dies failing to protect his granddaughter) but the racial villain. The Oriental passing as white takes the place of the Spanish grandfather in the triangle with the granddaughter and Irish lover. Once illegitimate desire moves from property to sex and is exposed as racial passing, the Spanish girl can marry the Irish boy and embrace American enterprise. Grandfather Vasquez's insistence that "blood will tell" and that his granddaughter should marry her Spanish suitor, Terrence's rival, falls to the younger Spaniard's cowardly inability to defend granddaughter and ranch. But far from repudiating blood for love, Sollors's descent for consent, *Old San Francisco* illustrates the process Michel Foucault has described that substitutes one exclusion for another, as feudally based blood exclusiveness is replaced with democratically based exclusion of Chinese blood. *Yellow* may be a term of character in the West, distinguishing some Spaniards, like some Anglos, from others. But the term also denotes an Oriental racial trait that cross-dressing cannot hide.[19]

[18] Patricia Erens, *The Jew in American Cinema* (Bloomington, 1984), 64–164; Rogin, "Blackface, White Noise," 422–28; Ana M. Lopez, "Are All Latins from Manhattan? Hollywood, Ethnography, and Cultural Colonialism," in *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema,* ed. Lester D. Friedman (Urbana, 1991), 406–13. For the reference to "wily señoritas," see *ibid.*, 406–7.

[19] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* vol. I: *An Introduction,* trans. Robert Hurley (New York, 1978), 124. Sollors acknowledges the shift from aristocratic blue, to racialized black, blood but fails to see how that transfer of taboos calls into question his subsumption of race by ethnicity. Thus his enthusiasm not simply for the intermarriage praised in Zangwill's *Melting Pot* but also for the playwright's "spiritual miscegenation" collapses racial expropriation into ethnic romance. See Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity,* 38, 71.

Figure 2. Warner Oland as Chris Buckwell in *Old San Francisco* (center right) and as Cantor Rabinowitz in *The Jazz Singer* (center left), from a 1927 souvenir program.

Warner Oland, cast as the cantor father in *The Jazz Singer,* plays the Oriental villain in *Old San Francisco. The Jazz Singer's* souvenir program featured two pictures of Oland (the only actor besides Jolson so honored), one as evil Oriental and the other as patriarchal Jew. (See figure 2.) The double casting points to traits united in the Jewish patriarch that are split between Buckwell and Grandfather Vasquez. Oland's two roles suggest the orientalist connections between the stereotyped races—between Oland as Mongol and the Jewish moguls, for example. But *The Jazz*

Singer's blackface links Jews and blacks in order to separate them; *Old San Francisco* rejoins the Chinese passing as white to his own people.[20]

As in *The Jazz Singer,* racial masquerade transfers value from traditional, patriarchal family to melting pot America. *The Jazz Singer* blesses Jewish blackface, whereas *Old San Francisco* condemns racial passing. But the cross-dressing Chinese villain hides the movie's own racial transfer: Asian masquerades as white in the story, but the actor playing the Asian passing as white is himself white passing as Asian. Buckwell's "unknown origins" are the shadow underside of the humble beginnings of the Jacksonian self-made man and of the typical movie mogul.

The specter of miscegenation, defused when the racially ambiguous Jew dons blackface and thereby moves from the "Oriental" to the white category, takes over *Old San Francisco.* The California law prohibiting miscegenation defined it as intermarriage between the white race and the "negro, mulatto, or Mongolian."[21] Racial cross-dressing facilitates intermarriage, not between whites and people of color, but between whites divided by ethnic lines. Put more exactly, racial masquerade moves white ethnics from a racially liminal to a white identity. Racial cross-dressing in both films collapses the division separating Anglos from some other Americans, but it allows Spanish and Jew in by keeping Asian and black out. Buckwell's crime is not passing; it is the threat to white womanhood from his Oriental blood.

Buckwell's Chinese concubine, revealed with the exposure of his identity, marks the shift from Asian victims to Asian villains. She inherits the sexual menace of the Eurasian femme fatale. The dark, sultry Dolores is whitened by contrast with Buckwell's concubine, who helps kidnap her, and sympathy for Dolores as Spanish granddaughter is replaced by sympathy for her as victim of Asian desire. As sexual melodrama covers over the dispossession of Mexican land, so the expression of materialism as menace shifts from Anglo commercial speculation to Chinese opium, jewelry, and depravity.

When he is exposed as Oriental, Buckwell carries Dolores to a Chinatown opium den and house of prostitution. Dolores is stripped of the mourning black she had put on for her grandfather, dressed in bridal white, and displayed for sale. Rotated before Oriental eyes, touched by Oriental hands, Dolores four times tries to escape from the closed room. The camera follows her in four different directions, each time to find an Asian blocking the door.

New York's Chinatown, wrote Jacob Riis, was "honey-combed with scores of the conventional households of the Chinese quarter: the men worshippers of Joss, the women all white, girls nearly always of tender age, worshipping nothing save the pipe that has enslaved them body and soul." That is to be Dolores's fate. In actuality Chinese girls were the victims of the Chinatown traffic in women, a product of the grossly unbalanced sex ratio perpetuated by the Chinese exclusion laws. *Old San*

[20] "*Jazz Singer* Souvenir Program," in *Souvenir Programs of Twelve Classic Movies, 1927–1941,* ed. Miles Kreuger (New York, 1971), 13. On Jewish orientalism, see Rogin, "Blackface, White Noise," 440.

[21] Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore,* 102.

Francisco, like the yellow peril pulp novels from which it derived, turned the victimized woman white.[22]

Victimization Americanizes and thus whitens Dolores, and the movie discovers whites as the true victims. Ancestors are either impotent, if Spanish, or monstrous, if Chinese. But just as her grandfather could not preserve her Spanish blood, so her lover cannot protect her white blood. Terrence's Irish brogue, intrusive in the early titles, disappears as he "becomes acclimated," in the words of *Variety.*[23] Nonetheless, even as American, he is powerless against the mass of Asians. Dolores prays to God, and He sends the San Francisco earthquake. A mad, Old Testament–quoting derelict had earlier called God's curses down on Buckwell and mammon; as Buckwell is being crushed, he sees the prophet again. The jeremiad directed against Buckwell as agent of modern materialism is fulfilled against the Asian as white slaver.

Prayer and divine intervention also save Cecil B. De Mille's heroines, infected by leprosy passed from a Eurasian seductress in *The Ten Commandments* (1923) and by atheism in *The Godless Girl* (1928).[24] Sign that the individual male subject is helpless on his own, these *di ex machina* invoke the power, not of God, but of Hollywood. Orchestrated crowd scenes of panic and the sight and sound of crashing, burning buildings testify to the authority of Hollywood special effects. Profane technological progress threatened the Vasquez ranch; the miracles of modern technology rescue the Vasquez woman.

Earthquake and fire destroy Chinatown, the modern Sodom and Gomorrah. Chinatown is a melting pot, the crucible in whose burning interior a new American identity forms. Though this Christian meaning is not intended by the film, the redemptive sacrifice of Chinatown gives birth to the American family. Having filmed Chinatown's destruction from inside and within, the camera pulls back for an aerial view of "the cleansed streets of the modern quarter" built on Chinese-American ruins. The aerial perspective turns into a shot from the point of view of Dolores and Terrence, as they look out over the city. Removed from the urban carnage, they constitute the American family, for the camera cuts from their distant perspective to the baby in their arms.

Spanish and Chinese no longer share pariah status as the victims of American progress. Civilization has confiscated the productive property of Chinese and Old California Spanish, but the Spanish daughter has gained a compensatory domestic space. There, like other Americans, she enjoys orientalist property—jazz records, for example—in consumption and display. As the teeming crowds of immigrants are destroyed, the individualist, rural Spanish move into the American home. Observers

[22] Riis, "How the Other Half Lives," 155; William F. Wu, *The Yellow Peril: Chinese Americans in American Fiction, 1850–1940* (Hamden, 1982); Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore,* 14, 41, 121–23. For the identification of the 1927 pulp novel by Allie Lowe Miles from which Darryl Zanuck wrote the screenplay for *Old San Francisco,* see Dorn, "San Francisco from Gold Rush to '06," 15.

[23] Review of *Old San Francisco,* June 29, 1927, in *Variety Film Reviews, 1907–1980* (16 vols., New York, 1983), III, n.p.

[24] *The Ten Commandments,* dir. Cecil B. De Mille (Famous Players–Lasky, 1923); *The Godless Girl,* dir. Cecil B. De Mille (C.B. De Mille Productions, 1928).

of the reformed, urban scene, the melting pot couple are no longer interactive members of it.[25] They stand for the movie's spectators, whose position they have achieved. The medium is the message, for just as the special effects of Hollywood prove more powerful than Buckwell's makeup, and his masquerade hides Hollywood's own, so the sign of achieved Americanization is passively to observe the spectacle of making Americans. The Warner brothers were preparing to move that story closer to their home, in *The Jazz Singer.* The proceeds of *Old San Francisco*'s first night in New York went to benefit the Hebrew Orphan's Asylum.[26]

Old San Francisco expels one alien to incorporate another; *The King of Jazz* appropriates African-American music to Americanize immigrants and exclude blacks. The link between the Dark Continent and the melting pot, to which Abraham Cahan's translation of *Scribner's* article about cannibalism pointed, becomes explicit in *The King of Jazz.* Part of the tradition that runs from blackface minstrelsy through *The Jazz Singer* and *Babes in Arms, The King of Jazz* makes Americans out of American entertainment. Since that entertainment is American thanks to its African-American origins, "the melting pot of music" in *The King of Jazz* digests and expels its own beginnings. Asian Americans are a visible presence in *Old San Francisco;* their elimination comprises the plot. African Americans are an absent presence in *The King of Jazz* because their exclusion sets the movie in motion. But closeness is the precondition for separation in both movies, the method by which the properties of one group are expropriated for another. The property in *Old San Francisco* is Old California / Spanish / Indian land and orientalist eroticism; in *The King of Jazz* it is African-American labor and emotional expression.

Antebellum blackface minstrelsy grounded American popular culture in expropriated black production. Since myths of minstrelsy's origins insisted on the authenticity of blackface imitations, they revealed what Eric Lott has recently labeled the reciprocal problems of love and theft. Black and white closeness (the precondition for the authenticity of blackface) raised the specter of interracial love, whose material basis was the sexual exploitation of slave women, but whose transgressive feature in minstrelsy, an originally all-male, transvestite entertainment form, was homoeroticism. But to create distance by excluding actual blacks from performance raised the specter of theft; its material basis was slave labor.[27]

The popular music of the jazz age, deriving from ragtime, New Orleans bands, and other black performance styles, inherited minstrelsy's obsession with origins. An obligatory black man who made rudimentary noises, in the jazz myth of origins,

[25] Cf. Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), 171–84, 197–200.

[26] Mordaunt Hall, review of *Old San Francisco,* June 22, 1927, in *New York Times Film Reviews* (6 vols., New York, 1970), I, 372.

[27] Eric Lott, "Love and Theft: The Racial Unconscious of Blackface Minstrelsy," *Representations* (no. 39, Summer 1992), 23–50. On the origins of minstrelsy in Jacksonian mass politics and culture, see Saxton, *Rise and Fall of the White Republic,* 165–82.

gave the music its name; for Paul Whiteman, he was "that jazzy darky player, named James Brown and called Jas." Minstrelsy had begun as a ribald, vulgar popular cultural form, and that is how the opponents of jazz saw it. Defending itself against that accusation, the melting pot music of the jazz age (not to be confused with the jazz of King Oliver, Jelly Roll Morton, or, though they played alongside blackface acts for white audiences in segregated clubs, Fletcher Henderson and Duke Ellington), stressed the distance jazz had traveled from its primitive, African, slave roots.[28]

Advocates of jazz age music argue that whites transformed black raw material into art. "Our whole present music is derived from the negro," Gilbert Seldes insisted in 1924. Negroes simply were their primitive music, writers in the mass-circulation magazines and newspapers explained. Whites did the skilled labor of musical arrangement and intelligent performance. "The negro side" of jazz, as Seldes put it,

> expresses something which underlies a great deal of America—our independence, our carelessness, our frankness, and gaiety. In each of these the negro is more intense than we are, and we surpass him when we combine a more varied and more intelligent life with his instinctive qualities. . . . The greatest art is likely to be that in which an uncorrupted sensibility is *worked* by a creative intelligence.

Having resolved the problem of theft by assigning labor to whites, Seldes gave an illustration: "Nowhere is the failure of the negro to exploit his gifts more obvious than in the use he has made of the jazz orchestra . . . no negro band has yet come up to the level of the best white ones, and the leader of the best of all, by a little joke, is called Whiteman."[29]

Paul Whiteman was the acknowledged king of jazz, and, like "King Jazz," all the "Jazz Kings" celebrated in the 1926 *Literary Digest* article of that title were white. Like Seldes, Whiteman insisted on the African origins of jazz. But in his autobiography and in music critic Henry Osgood's book on jazz, mostly anonymous African Americans (none are named by Osgood) supply the prehistory of the music, replaced by named, white performers when the author reaches what he calls jazz.[30]

"Jazz is the spirit of a new country, . . . the essence of America," the music "of the common people," Whiteman proclaimed. Standing against an imitative, "highbrow," Europe-oriented culture, it inherited the American nationalism of Walt Whitman, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Edgar Allan Poe. "Americans—and the term included Slavs, Teutons, Latins, Orientals, [were] welded into one great mass as if

[28] Paul Whiteman and Mary Margaret McBride, *Jazz* (New York, 1926), 122; Samuel B. Charters and Leonard Kunstadt, *Jazz: A History of the New York Scene* (New York, 1981), 246. On the relationship of the jazz age to jazz, see Rogin, "Blackface, White Noise," 447–49, and the sources there cited.

[29] Gilbert Seldes, *The Seven Lively Arts* (New York, 1957), 98–100. The first version of this book was published in 1924.

[30] "King Jazz and the Jazz Kings," *Literary Digest*, Jan. 30, 1926, pp. 37–42; Whiteman and McBride, *Jazz*, 3–4, 17, 176, 265; Osgood, *So This Is Jazz*; William Weaver, "Jazz in Jackets: Cultural Commodification in the Jazz Age," seminar paper, Johns Hopkins University, 1988 (in Michael Rogin's possession).

by the giant machines they tended," wrote Whiteman. Jazz, removed from its origins in African-American labor and community, gave these machine age workers their leisure-time release. Since only Americans could express the national music, "the most important item in the jazz equipment is that each player shall be American"; while Whiteman included "the nationalized citizens" of foreign ancestry in his band, he, like all other white band leaders of the 1920s, excluded African Americans.[31]

Whiteman performed that exclusion in his 1924 concert at Aeolian Hall in New York City (according to one historian, second only to talking pictures in importance for 1920s popular music) and in *The King of Jazz*. The concert, announced Isaac Goldberg, the biographer of George Gershwin, was an "Emancipation Proclamation, in which slavery to European formalism was signed away." Whiteman was emancipating jazz from enslavement not just to Europeans but also to black Americans. He took his orchestra, as the movie reviewer Creighton Peet put it, "into the sacred precincts of Aeolian Hall in an attempt to make an honest woman of Jazz, at that time a cheap and notorious wench." The orchestra played "The Livery Stable Blues," complete with imitation barnyard noises, to show how far the music had traveled, in Whiteman's account, "from the day of discordant early jazz to the melodious form of the present." This "crude jazz of the past" was counterposed to George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue."[32]

Exclusion reinforced expropriation. "The Livery Stable Blues" came from "an old Negro melody," Whiteman acknowledged. But he endorsed a judge's dismissal of a copyright infringement suit brought against the Original Dixieland Jazz Band (ODJB), the mendaciously named white group whose hit record of that song launched the jazz age. "As to the moral aspects of the theft, there aren't any," Whiteman concluded. The ODJB served not only to deflect the accusation of theft away from Whiteman but also to move his band one safe step further from the African-American original.[33]

Advanced technique plays a similar distancing function in *The King of Jazz*. Just as the prologue to *Old San Francisco* announces the Anglo displacement of the Spanish, Whiteman's prologue introduces the white appropriation of Africa. It does so in a cartoon that, Whiteman explains, will show how he became king of jazz. The scene opens on the rotund, immaculately dressed band leader "big game hunting in darkest Africa." When a lion chases Whiteman and is about to devour him, the white hunter takes out a violin and plays. The lion begins to dance; instead of swallowing Whiteman, his wide open mouth speaks the word Al Jolson had made famous, "Mammy." Africans and snakes dance as Whiteman continues to play. Far from being their own product, music calms the primitives. It turns them into plan-

[31] Whiteman and McBride, *Jazz*, 15, 19, 27–28, 122–27, 178, 237.

[32] Arnold Shaw, *The Jazz Age: Popular Music in the 1920s* (New York, 1987), 47–53; Isaac Goldberg, *George Gershwin* (New York, 1931), 136; Creighton Peet, "The Movies," *Outlook and Independent*, May 14, 1930, p. 72; Whiteman and McBride, *Jazz*, 94–99.

[33] Whiteman and McBride, *Jazz*, 178–79.

tation, blackface mammies. A soothing, nurturing mouth naming the black nurse of white boys and men replaces the lion's devouring orifice. Jazz, which here domesticates Africans into creatures on which white men feed, is the trophy the white hunter brings back from Africa.

Having served their originary function, African Americans are, with two exceptions, excluded from the musical numbers and vaudeville sketches that constitute *The King of Jazz*. One appearance repeats a genteel version of the opening cartoon. Jazz combines the most primitive and the most modern elements, intones a voice-over, "for jazz was born from the African jungle to the beating of voodoo drums." The camera shows first a blacked-up, nearly nude, male dancer, then white female ballroom performers, finally Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue." The primitive male dancer is segregated from the women whose pleasure he inspires. For the libidinal character of jazz flirted with sexual transgression along not just gender (pleasure for respectable women) but also racial lines.

Jazz, the product of "musical miscegenation" (in Isaac Goldberg's phrase), could not afford to be seen as promoting interracial sex. The "Mammy" aspect of jazz spilled over into sexual excitement, and the only moment in *King of Jazz* where an actual black person appears flirts with the sexual risk, only to neutralize it. Whiteman, filmed from behind and apparently alone, conducts from a park bench as white couples dance; the number is called "Public Park." Each band member sings and dances with a girl on his arm. Whiteman turns around in the middle of the scene to reveal a little black girl on his lap. Repeating the paternalist racial relation established in the opening cartoon, the interracial couple is safely set off, as white father and black child, from the adult, dancing partners. Peet had wondered to what sort of child Whiteman's "honest woman" jazz would give birth. Paternalist miscegenation produces a musical baby that is not the offspring of interracial, sexual exploitation but the catalyst of romance between whites.[34]

The place of African Americans in *The King of Jazz*, culturally routine, provoked no critical comment. Attending instead to the film's trick photography, reviewers divided on whether the photographic effects (Whiteman's band emerges, for example, from his briefcase) enhanced or detracted from the music. But all praised the opening cartoon and the "Melting Pot" finale, for the new technology and the new music joined together in the film's climax to make Americans.[35]

In a scene perhaps borrowed from the graduation ceremony at the Ford Motor Company's Highland Park Model T assembly plant that James Barrett describes, Whiteman stirs a giant steaming pot. A voice-over declaims, "America is a melting pot of music, where the melodies of all nations are fused into one great new rhythm." Suitably costumed singers and dancers perform their national music, one

[34] Isaac Goldberg, "Aaron Copland and His Jazz," *American Mercury*, 12 (Sept. 1927), 63–64; Peet, "Movies," 72.

[35] Richard Dana Skinner, review of *The King of Jazz*, *Commonweal*, May 21, 1930, p. 80; Peet, "Movies," 72; review of *The King of Jazz*, *Variety*, May 3, 1930, *Variety Film Reviews*, III, n.p; review of *The King of Jazz*, *Nation*, May 28, 1930, p. 633; review of *The King of Jazz*, *Time*, May 12, 1930, p. 64.

Figure 3. The Paul Whiteman band in redface. *Courtesy Whiteman Collection, Williamsiana Collections, Williams College Archives.*

group after another. Ethnic insignias identify English, Italians, Spanish, Scots, Germans, Irish, Mexicans, Russians, and Poles (or Jews). "The incredible pressure was bound to blow off the lid" of machine-tending, ethnically diverse, industrial America, Whiteman wrote in his autobiography, "and it might conceivably plunge a whole nation into nervous prostration or insanity." Instead of the lid blowing off the melting pot of music after the nine different ethnic performances, out from the enormous base of the pot dances a chorus line of American cowgirls. (Figure 3, another version of Americanization, shows Whiteman and his band dressed as Indians.) "For sheer spectacle, the Melting Pot finale can't be beat," enthused *Photoplay*. The movie ends with couples from the different nations (one man wears a yarmulke) dancing to American music.[36]

Israel Zangwill's cauldron melted down Old World metals to produce a stronger alloy. But Whiteman's "restorative," "brewing in New Orleans . . . to the national

[36] Barrett, "Americanization from the Bottom Up," 996. Mordaunt Hall, review of *The King of Jazz*, May 30, 1930, in *New York Times Film Reviews* (6 vols., New York, 1970), I, 623; Whiteman and McBride, *Jazz*, 15; "King of Jazz," *Photoplay*, 38 (June 1930), 56, in *Selected Film Criticism, 1921–1930*, ed. Anthony Slide (Metuchen, 1982), 157.

nerve complaint," invokes a cooking pot as well as a crucible. The cooking pot, instead of being a cauldron in which cannibalism devours civilization, harks back to the maternal origins of melting pot imagery. The breasts and lap of New World nature, in eighteenth-century visual and linguistic depictions, gave birth to a new American man. From that vantage point, the finale of *The King of Jazz* inverts the prologue, for jazz turns the devouring lion's mouth into the vehicle for cooking up a new, American stew, making Americans out of the separate ingredients of the old.[37]

But African Americans, like the Asian Americans of *Old San Francisco,* are the melting pot medium; like them, they are not included in the final message. No African or Caribbean nation enters the melting pot of music; no dark skins (as in *Old San Francisco,* all the Mexicans are white) dance as members of their own nations or in the American melting pot. By the compensatory cultural logic of the jazz age, Whiteman's music has nothing to do with jazz.

All the movies discussed here played variations on themes in *The Jazz Singer;* the central subject of *The Singing Fool* was gender. *The Jazz Singer,* I have elsewhere argued, feminized its protagonist. Singing in blackface the price of success, the loss of home that joined immigrant to native-born, mobile American, the jazz singer crossed the border not only between white and black but also between desire for and identification with the woman. If *Old San Francisco* foreshadowed the first talking picture's ethnic example, *The Singing Fool* followed its gender example. Perhaps because blackface domestic tragedy drained of its ethnic particularism had a wider appeal, *The Singing Fool* was the top box office success of its time. Jolson's Jewishness, *The Jazz Singer*'s subject, is barely acknowledged, but it is the condition of the gender cross-dressing.[38]

In minstrel ideology, blackface wildness invoked Africa, and blackface nostalgia invoked the lost plantation. Minstrel consciousness not only repressed the savagery experienced by slaves on plantations; it also appropriated for voluntary immigrants and migrants to the New World the longing for home of the single group of Americans stolen from their Old World homes. Jolson sings loss in his first movie, moreover, to facilitate gain. Blackface spectacle looking backward, to Jewish mother and Russian/plantation home, projects narrative progress forward for the immigrant son. The balance shifts from gain to loss in *The Singing Fool.* The entertainer who had used blackface to move from Jew to American and to sing "My Mammy" now uses it to become mammy and to mourn the loss of his child.

The Singing Fool's opening shots invite us into Blackie Joe's, the cabaret where Al Stone, the singing waiter, performs. The peephole through which prospective

[37] Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity,* 75–99; Whiteman and McBride, *Jazz,* 17.

[38] On feminization in *The Jazz Singer,* see Rogin, "Blackface, White Noise," 441–44. Box office figures are from William K. Everson, *American Silent Film* (New York, 1978), 373–74.

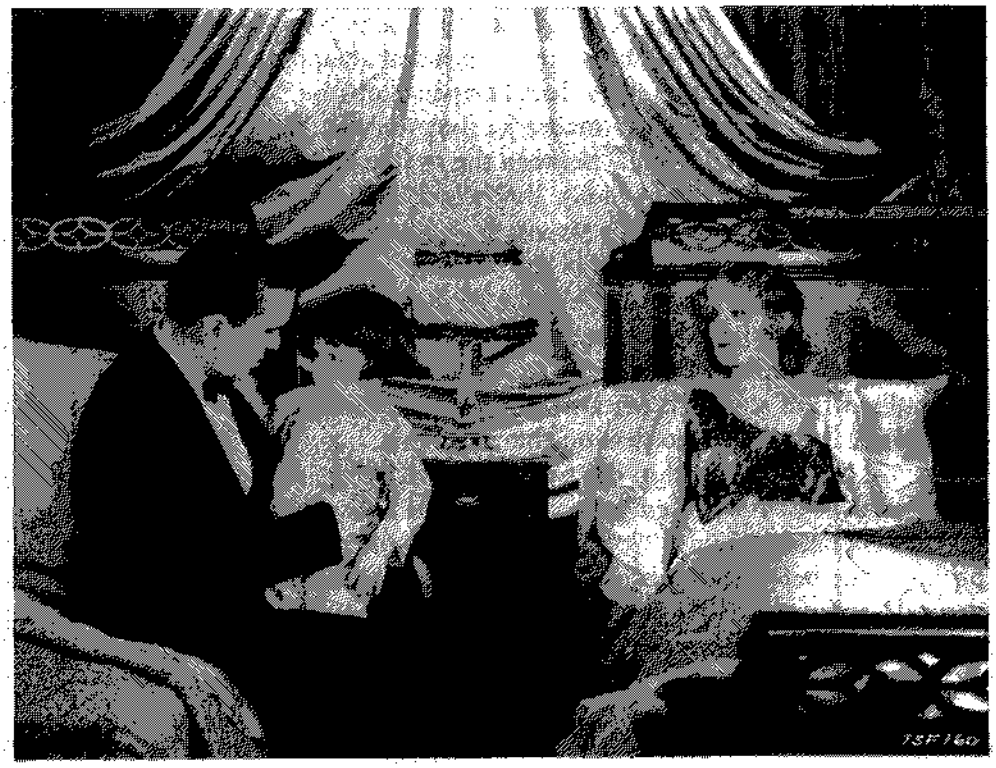

Figure 4. The Al Stone family in *The Singing Fool. Courtesy Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.*

guests are inspected marks the speakeasy as illicit; the mobile camera is the film audience's peephole, moving up to, in, and around the hidden room. The first image of Molly, shot from below, shows her lying on a dressing room bed with one long, thin, bare leg crossed over the other. The intrusive, voyeuristic camera fetishizes the showgirl leg as the sign of female sexuality. Sexual aggression is assigned to the woman, however, not simply employed to display her. Molly's foot will crush the sheet on which Al has written her a song.

Silent for its opening, *The Singing Fool* switches to sound for Al to sing that song. As in *The Jazz Singer,* Jolson introduces his first song in *The Singing Fool*'s initial lip-synched talking sequence. Both scenes display the famous voice and patter to celebrate talking pictures and to make Jolson's sound the instrument of his success. Song raises the Jolson character to stardom in both movies and wins him his girl. Louis Marcus, a producer in Blackie Joe's audience, gives Al his chance. The naming of the fatherly producer as Jewish moves ethnicity from the jazz singer and his family to a show business impresario.

But in *The Singing Fool,* paternal permission, removing the barrier between the son and his object of desire, proves a deeper obstacle to romance than paternal pro-

hibition in *The Jazz Singer.* The exchange of looks between Molly and Al that registers their desire follows Molly's interception of an approving look from Marcus to Al. She kisses Al after he sings "It All Depends on You," the song she had originally rejected; the kiss is a performance for the producer. Molly brings Al to Marcus; the three form a triangle, Molly between the two men. Audience and producer approval have created desire in Molly, but it is triangulated desire.

Molly marries Al only because Marcus has come between them. Her lover replaces the producer in the next section of the film. Montage reviews real-life Jolson hits as a voice-over announces, "In the following four years, Al wore out eight pianos, rhymed 'Mammy' with 'Alabammy' 981 times—and did more for Dixie than Robert E. Lee." But the arm that reaches out to a close-up of Molly's face, pinches her cheek and pulls her off screen, is revealed to belong to another man. As eager son and cuckolded husband, Al borders on the ridiculous.

The triangle introduced in the next scene, Al, Molly, and their child, makes Al the vehicle for pathos. Al embraces and caresses Sonny Boy; cut to Molly alone in bed. (See figure 4.) Al sings "Sonny Boy" to the toddler and puts him to sleep; Molly primps alone before her mirror. Molly refuses Al's kisses and terms of endearment; the child enters the bedroom to interrupt their fight. Sonny Boy goes to his father; Al, carrying the child back to his bedroom, sings "Sonny Boy" again. Cut to Molly alone in bed, back to Al rocking Sonny Boy. In the next scene, Al calls home from the cabaret to discover that Molly has taken Sonny Boy and left him.

The most successful film of the jazz age inverts the stereotypical sex roles. Wife wants sex; husband wants affection. Wife has lover; husband has child. Wife looks nonmaternal, with exposed legs and no breasts; husband rocks baby. Wife leaves home for lover and career; husband mourns the loss of his child.

When Al returns to his empty house, *The Singing Fool* reverts to silence for the first time since his opening song. In *The Jazz Singer,* a paternal "Stop!" silenced the jazz singer, interrupting the romance between mother and son. In *The Singing Fool* too a transgressive maternal relationship is punished, but this one features Al, not as son who wants mother, but as mother who wants son. Success entails loss in the plots and in the lost sound of these films. But whereas the jazz singer wanted both Jewish mother and jazz, the singing fool (like many career women) wants both career and child.

Moving back and forth between silence and sound to show Al's penultimate farewell to his son and to register his decline and the recovery of his career, *The Singing Fool* climaxes when Al learns that Sonny Boy is dying. Al, the nursing father, holds the child to his breast; he sings "Sonny Boy" and rocks him to sleep. Carrying the dying child in his arms, Al is Uncle Tom in Edwin Porter's film version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* carrying the dead little Eva.[39] Cut to Molly, slim and alone, all in white. The jazz singer killed his father by becoming a blackface singer rather than a cantor. The singing fool, by contrast, is an innocent; an abandoning mother destroys his home and is to blame for the death of their son.

[39] *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* dir. Edwin S. Porter (Edison, 1903).

The jazz singer Americanized himself through blackface, not just by choosing New World entertainment over Old World ritual but also by providing the emotional form to mourn the loss of the old. Blackface, I have argued, was the transitional object whose emotional linkage to a world left behind facilitated movement forward and away. Conflating Jewish and plantation home, blackface linked agrarian (immigrant and American) past to urban, industrial future.[40] Blackface provides the emotional climax, the catharsis, of *The Jazz Singer; The Singing Fool,* to that same purpose, withholds blackface (after the opening shot of the blackface performer) until the film's final scene.

"I'll feel better if I try to work," says Al, and he begins to apply burnt cork. He puts it on slowly, covering neck, nose, cheeks, top of head. As the catatonic Al, paralyzed by grief, disappears under the cork, a close-up shows his expressive, sad, blacked face, lips exaggerated, holding back tears. The hit of the first Vitaphone program was Giovanni Martinelli performing "Vesti la Giubba," and the great tenor's clown-costumed, whiteface, rendition of Pagliacci's grief may well have encouraged Warner Brothers to make *The Jazz Singer* and *The Singing Fool.* In celebrating performance as vehicle for emotional intensity, Hollywood celebrated itself, with a self-consciousness about losing self-consciousness that complicates descriptions of classic Hollywood's illusionistic, narrative realism. Blackface gives full expression to the feelings that would otherwise lock Al in frozen melancholia. Faking cheerfulness when he relinquishes Sonny Boy and nonchalance when he is rescued from starvation, catatonic when Sonny Boy dies, Al cries real tears for the first time in blackface performance. The jazz singer's acting is the vehicle for changing identities in order to Americanize; the singing fool's acting recovers the feelings of abandonment concomitant to the change. The line "I still have you, Sonny Boy" anticipates the theft of the child by the mother and later holds onto a son present only in the ability of talking pictures to make absence present and thereby memorialize loss. The singing fool's performance facilitates authenticity, but at the expense of those supposed to have closer access to feeling, African Americans and women.[41]

The Singing Fool was probably a woman's film, like the 1930s weepies that followed it. Women were a larger film audience than men. If Rudolph Valentino was the object of women moviegoers' sexualized, maternal gaze, the singing fool offered maternal mouth and breast. Just as the Valentino cult disturbed traditional defenders of male sexual privilege, so *The Singing Fool,* challenging film theorists' stereotypes of the male gaze, reproached the sexually aggressive, dominating man. But *The Singing Fool's* target was less the traditional man than the new woman. The feminized man wins sympathy at the expense of the sexual, abandoning

[40] Rogin, "Blackface, White Noise," 444–49. On transitional objects, see D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (New York, 1982), 1–25.

[41] Richard Koszarski, "On the Record: Seeing and Hearing Vitaphone," in *Dawn of Sound,* ed. Mary Lea Bandy (New York, 1989), 18. Cf. David Bordwell et al., *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (New York, 1985), 3–39.

woman. If *The Singing Fool* is an early version of male feminism, then it is a precursor of *Kramer v. Kramer.*[42]

Blackface is the method of Al's maternalization. The portrayal of the black man as mother not only (as in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) reproaches the white woman who refuses to play that role but also makes the black man nurture whites. Blackface operates as vehicle for sexual as for ethnic mobility by offering freedom for whites at the price of fixedness for blacks. The white man plays with a nurturing, emotional identity that fixes black man, like white woman, as mother and child. The forbidden liaison between black man and white woman is realized in the black man as mammy. Cross-dressing, as *Old San Francisco* also testifies, is not reversible across race and gender lines.

In *The Jazz Singer,* the Jolson figure escapes ethnic imprisonment. Cantor Rabinowitz, fixed in a traditional identity, sings Kol Nidre as ritual. His grown son, ethnic only in performing the sacred number, can take or leave his ethnicity; in *The Singing Fool,* he may seem to leave it behind. But Jewishness also placed a limit on the gentile dreams Jolson could interpret to his mass audience. A liminal figure, he was not permitted full, patriarchal authority. For the Jew to perform his transitional functions in classic Hollywood, linking immigrant to American and man to woman, he had to know his place. That is the message of the comedy that brings together ethnic and sexual cross-dressing, blackface and the myth of the West: Eddie Cantor's *Whoopee!*

Whoopee! begins where *The King of Jazz* ends, with a western production number. Instead of dancing out of a melting pot, cowgirls join with cowboys to form the spokes of a human wheel. But Busby Berkeley's wagon wheel explicitly performs the function the melting pot pretends not to do; like drawn-up covered wagons, the wheel excludes those outside its circle. The first outsider is Henry (Eddie Cantor), a hypochondriacal Jewish weakling out of place in the West. The second is Wanenis, the Indian in love with Sally, the white girl whose marriage to Sheriff Bob the wagon wheel number celebrates. Indian and Jew come together, like Asian and Spaniard in *Old San Francisco,* as those threatened by American progress.

Unlike *Old San Francisco,* however, *Whoopee!* dwells on the relationship between the excluded rather than substituting one group for the other. The comic tie between Indian and Jew places *Whoopee!* in a tradition of Jewish/Indian spoofs, from Yiddish theater and vaudeville to *Blazing Saddles* (1974), productions that typically mock the white man's tragic, noble savage, intermarriage story. The first movie in which Cantor starred, *Whoopee!* may also derive from Cantor's friendship with the part-Cherokee "cowboy," Will Rogers, who wrote the introduction to Cantor's autobiography. The jazz singer, first successful in San Francisco, exemplifies the Turner

[42] Hansen, *Babel and Babylon,* 245–94; *Kramer v. Kramer,* dir. Robert Benton (Columbia, 1979).

Figure 5. Eddie Cantor in redface advertising *Whoopee!* in the *New Yorker,* Oct. 6, 1930.

thesis, for he loses his ethnic particularism on the frontier. When the Jew goes West as vaudeville Jew, as Eddie Cantor, he at once facilitates and subverts the melting pot.[43]

Whoopee! disturbs not just ethnic and racial boundaries but, like *The Singing Fool,* sexual ones as well. Cantor's stereotypical Jew is a timid neurasthenic. If the high intermarriage plot brings together white girl and noble savage, the low one makes Henry the target of sexually aggressive ("I like weak men") Nurse Custer.

Whoopee! makes humor from the outsider status of Indians and Jews. Indian burlesque was a vaudeville feature; Cantor's first job was in a review called *Indian Maidens.* "I'm only a small part Indian," Wanenis tells Henry. "How small?" "My grandfather married a white girl." "So did mine," responds Henry. He speaks as a white man, but since Jews were Oriental, racially stigmatized, and themselves the

[43] Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity,* 131–48; Charles Musser, "Ethnicity, Role-Playing, and American Film Comedy: From *Chinese Laundry Scene* to *Whoopee* (1894–1930)," in *Unspeakable Images,* ed. Friedman, 62; Ella Shohat, "Ethnics-in-Relation: Toward a Multicultural Reading of American Cinema," *ibid.,* 230, 245; *Blazing Saddles,* dir. Mel Brooks (Warner Brothers, 1974); Eddie Cantor, as told to David Freedman, *My Life Is in Your Hands* (New York, 1928). (I am indebted to Mark Slobin for directing me to this source.) *Whoopee!* is also an early example of the male buddy film, pairing a straight, macho man with a clownish feminized cross-dresser (Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis, Bing Crosby and Bob Hope). See Rebecca Bell-Metereau, *Hollywood Androgyny* (New York, 1985), 23.

protagonists of intermarriage plots, the joke has a double edge. Is or is not this "half-breed," as Henry calls himself, a member of the group into which Wanenis wants to marry? "I've gone to your schools," Wanenis explains to Henry, who asks, "An Indian in a Hebrew school?"[44]

Whoopee! also makes fun of the opposite crossover, the Indianization of whites, by making its Dances with Wolves a Jew. After a captivity narrative spoof places Henry and Sally among the Indians, Wanenis's father ("Old Black Eagle, not old man Segal," sings Cantor to the tune of "Old Man River") invites Henry to join his tribe. Disguised as an Indian ("Me big chief Izzy Horowitz"), Henry adopts a Jewish accent to haggle over the price of an Indian blanket and doll he is selling to a rich white man. The message is that Jews would have gotten a better price for their land. Ads for *Whoopee!* show Cantor wearing Indian feathers, but, as in the movie, red-face does not disguise but rather calls attention to the Jew wearing the costume. (See figure 5.) Claiming to be an Indian fire chief, Henry holds a Pueblo wall scaler and his nose: "Here's my hook and ladder."[45]

Degrading physical humor and violations of bodily integrity spread from ethnic jokes to sexual relations. Henry takes pills and receives injections from Nurse Custer. He and the rich white man roll around on the ground examining each other's surgical scars. When the half-naked Wanenis appears in Indian feathers, Henry subjects him to a minute, intimate, physical inspection. These plays with the grotesque body, borrowed from blackface minstrelsy and Cantor's vaudeville shows, mock genteel romance. But the male body contact becomes respectable in the service of intermarriage. "Making Whoopee," the song whose ridiculous pun joins Indian war dances to sexual play, comes down on the side of marriage. Conjugal fidelity disciplines indiscriminate heterosexual pleasure in the song's lyrics, polymorphous, homoerotic perversity in the movie's subtext.[46]

In response to Black Eagle's invitation to join the tribe, Henry reinstates the intermarriage plot by bringing up Pocahontas. "Pocahontas saved John Smith," responds Black Eagle. Henry asks, "Why didn't he do something for his brother, Al?" Before viewers have time to reflect on the failure of Pocahontas (and by extension, that of the melting pot) to save Al Smith from anti-Catholicism in the 1928 presidential election, Henry goes on, "And I don't mean Al Jolson." Cantor, like Jolson, achieved stardom through blackface, so the reference to the two Als is a reference to cross-dressing and the situations that provoke it.[47]

Blackface is the fulcrum at the center of Cantor's multiple cross-dressings. "I brought my negro friend up north," Cantor wrote of his blackface persona, by

[44] Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, 132–38; Cantor as told to Freedman, *My Life Is in Your Hands*, 82; Musser, "Ethnicity, Role-Playing, and American Film Comedy," 64.

[45] Musser, "Ethnicity, Role-Playing, and American Film Comedy," 62, 43; ad for *Whoopee!*, *New Yorker*, Oct. 6, 1930, p. 87.

[46] Cantor as told to Freedman, *My Life Is in Your Hands*, 29–30; Lott, "Love and Theft."

[47] Al Smith was Cantor's ghetto boyhood hero, "as if the lady of the statue of liberty had sent her own son to receive these poor, bewildered immigrants," the actor wrote in his autobiography. Cantor as told to Freedman, *My Life Is in Your Hands*, 44.

"add[ing] an intellectual touch to the old-fashioned darkey of the minstrel shows." Cantor's trademark character was "the cultured, pansy-like negro with spectacles"; Cantor and the "whitest black man I ever knew," the African-American blackface vaudevillian, Bert Williams, appeared as "Sonny and Papsy." As a blackface performer Cantor was ambiguously male/female and black/white; he played Salome in drag and moved from man to woman to black eunuch in a slave harem in *Roman Scandals*.[48]

As it facilitates intermarriage in *The Jazz Singer*, so blackface brings *Whoopee!*'s Indian and white lovers together. Henry, helping Sally escape her wedding to Sheriff Bob, hides in an oven. When the stove is lit, he explodes out in blackface. Like Whiteman's lion, Jolson's mammy, and the prototypical, exaggerated blackface mouth, the oven associates blackface with primitive orality. The disguise fools Sheriff Bob and encourages Sally to confess her love for Wanenis. Promoting anarchic violence against the forces of law and order, blackface also facilitates intermarriage in the low plot. Cantor sings "My Baby Just Cares for Me" in blackface and sings it again sans cork to Nurse Custer to end the film. Transforming Jew from frightened melancholic into trickster, blackface shifts the meaning of "cares for" from nursing to sex. When Sheriff Bob tries to wipe Henry clean, he leaves him with what look like Orthodox Jewish earlocks and beard.

Racial cross-dressing promotes ethnic intermarriage in *The Jazz Singer* and *Old San Francisco; Whoopee!* may seem to bless racial intermarriage as well. Indians, to be sure, were not universally the targets of intermarriage taboos. As the John Smith/Pocahontas story attests, Indian/white intermarriage was one way to provide the white presence in the New World with a native ground. But racist hostility extended to Indians. "My one drop of Indian blood makes your people hate me," Wanenis explains to Sally. *Whoopee!*'s spoof of the one-drop theories of racial contamination flourishing in the jazz age acknowledges the racial prejudice buried in *The Jazz Singer* but dominant in *Old San Francisco* and *The King of Jazz*.

As in the intermarriage melodramas, Black Eagle wants Wanenis to return to the ways of his people, and the combination of traditional loyalty and white prejudice seems to doom the romance. But faced with the love between Wanenis and Sally, Black Eagle reveals that Wanenis has not even a drop of Indian blood; a parodic descendant of James Fenimore Cooper's Oliver Effingham, he is a foundling the chief raised as his own child. Wanenis may not know it, but, like Henry, he has been masquerading as an Indian. As in Rudoloph Valentino's *Sheik*, the dark object of female desire is white beneath his mask. In *Whoopee!*, as in *The Jazz Singer*, there is racial cross-dressing, not miscegenation. The amalgamation that gives birth to a distinctively American culture substitutes for the mixing of blood.[49]

[48] *Ibid.*, 113–15, 122–23, 159–60; *Roman Scandals*, dir. Frank Tuttle (Samuel Goldwyn, 1933); William D. Routt and Richard J. Thompson, "Keep Young and Beautiful: Surplus and Subversion in *Roman Scandals*," *Journal of Film and Video*, 42 (Spring 1990), 17–35. Thanks to Vivian Sobchack for this reference.

[49] James Fenimore Cooper, *The Pioneers* (New York, 1823); Marchetti, *Romance and the "Yellow Peril,"* 22–27.

Turning Wanenis white is parodic; unlike *Old San Francisco* or *King of Jazz*, *Whoopee!* does not eliminate the racial in favor of the ethnic group. Nor does it, like the other movies discussed here, put technological innovations in the service of new identities. Even the dance numbers, Busby Berkeley's first Hollywood productions, are, like the movie as a whole, self-mocking.[50] *Whoopee!*, with its blackface and redface masquerades, remains in the technologically more primitive, anti-illusionistic, vaudeville and early silent movie tradition.

Nonetheless, *Whoopee!* also participates in the racialist tradition it ridicules. By making savages noble and confining the Jew to slapstick, *Whoopee!*'s plot privileges the racial over the ethnic minority, but its method has the opposite effect. Cantor's stereotyping may edge into anti-Semitism, but it is the vehicle for Jewish performance. Like the vaudeville routines and Vitaphone shorts of Lou Holtz, George Burns, Gregory Ratoff, and George Jessel, Cantor's performance participates in a recognizable, authentically Jewish milieu. No Indian, by contrast, will recognize himself in the cardboard straight men for Jewish humor. Wanenis has not a drop of Indian blood, and the actors playing Indians are palefaces, too.

Cantor's blackface does not even pretend to depict real blacks. *Whoopee!*'s blackface is Jewish, its redface (Cantor aside) is goyish—to borrow Lenny Bruce's distinction between mocking, physicalized signifiers and pious, disembodied ones—for the film privileges an urban minority voice over the racially based, melting pot myth of the West in *The King of Jazz* and *Old San Francisco*.[51] In the other movies, race is the vehicle for ethnic assimilation; in this one it supports ethnic self-assertion.

Cantor gains power over his ethnicity by turning it into performance.[52] Signifying on his Jewishness, playing with the stereotype rather than challenging it, is also a sign of the narrow constraints within which he could assert his ethnicity. The sexual cross-dressing implied in Jewish neurasthenia and male horseplay may point either to polyphony or (as in *The Singing Fool*) to the limits of Jewish liminality. But however one evaluates the transgressions in *Whoopee!*'s ethnic and sexual carnivalesque, the movie—it is necessary to say—provides no vehicle for nonwhite self-expression. Bad taste is its virtue, but *Whoopee!* plays with, mocks, and operates wholly inside the ethnic, sexual, and racial hierarchies of jazz age America.

Blackface carried Cantor from the slum to the stars. But it "had become an inseparable part of my stage presence," Cantor wrote in *My Life Is in Your Hands*, "and I feared that the day might come when I could never take it off. I would always be Eddie Cantor, the blackface comedian, but if I ever tore the mask off I'd be nobody at all." Resolving that "I was not going to be a slave to a piece of burnt cork for the rest of my acting days," Cantor convinced Florenz Ziegfeld to let him appear in whiteface. Unlike African Americans, inadvertently invoked by Cantor's refusal to

[50] Cf. Routt and Thompson, "Keep Young and Beautiful," 24–27.

[51] Lenny Bruce's Jewish/goyish monologue is legendary. I heard it in Chicago c. 1960.

[52] Musser, "Ethnicity, Role-Playing, and American Film Comedy," celebrates ethnic performance as a vehicle for American self-making. Although I have learned and borrowed from Musser's rich essay, which I read after completing a draft of my own, he takes a sunnier view of the material.

be a slave, the white man in blackface could change the color of his skin. "It was the first time I felt revealed to the audience and in personal contact with it," Cantor confessed. In Cantor's first, whiteface skit a doctor subjected him to an invasive physical exam. The comedian connects it to a later scene, "in essence" the same, that turns on his Jewish identity. Cantor's free association moves him from the stage doctor's to the audience's hands. *The Jazz Singer* escapes his Jewish past in blackface. Cantor, thanks to blackface, can finally reveal himself to the mass audience as a Jew.[53]

Like the jazz singer, however, the urban Jew finds a southern home. Cantor's autobiography ends with "the slum boy of the tenements" preparing to make the stage production *Whoopee!* and, "a modern pioneer," buying a house in Great Neck, Long Island. Cantor's neighbor is Nathan S. Jonas, "an imposing gentleman with a trace of southern aristocracy" who has planted a "boxwood garden reminiscent of southern estates" and developed "one of the most beautiful and exclusive country clubs in America." "Space and time are the slaves that tremble under the wand of wealth," writes Cantor, and those modern slaves allow the financier to "return to the simple and primitive" pastoral life. Cantor is incorporated into the family homecoming, for the boy who at the age of two had "floundered in the streets of New York, fatherless and motherless" writes that he is "now sitting in a flower-laden bower with my parents. Mr. and Mrs. Nathan S. Jonas have become father and mother to me."[54]

If Cantor's autobiography lacked the comic courage of *Whoopee!*'s convictions, the Marx brothers supplied it. Cantor's plantation refuge could well have been the Long Island estate the polyglot immigrants invade in *Animal Crackers* (1930), where Groucho, taking off on Henry M. Stanley, plays Geoffrey T. Spalding, "the noted explorer returning from Africa." ("Hurray for Captain Spaulding, the African explorer; did someone call me *schnorrer?*") "I wish I was back in the jungle, where men are monkeys," says Groucho. Then, in a "program . . . coming to you from the House of David," the barbershop quartet of Groucho, Chico, Harpo, and Zeppo lament and replace their lost home. They mangle—not the version of "Swanee River" that helped launch the jazz age, written by one east European Jew and performed in blackface by another, not Gershwin and Jolson's "Swanee"—but the original Stephen Foster minstrel ballad, "Old Folks at Home."[55]

[53] Cantor as told to Freedman, *My Life Is in Your Hands*, 40, 44, 186–87.

[54] *Ibid.*, 292–95.

[55] *Animal Crackers*, dir. Victor Heerman (Paramount, 1930). Charles Musser described the barbershop quartet, inspiring me to see *Animal Crackers* again and discover that the Marx brothers had already written this article. (See Musser, "Ethnicity, Role-Playing, and American Film Comedy," 66–67.) That *Animal Crackers* was in part a deliberate parody of *My Life Is in Your Hands* is indicated by Chico's Irish chiropodist tune, "My fayt is in your hands."