

2011

"Baby, dream your dream": Pearl Bailey, Hello, Dolly!, and the negotiation of race in commerical American musical theatre

Charles Eliot Mehler

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“BABY, DREAM YOUR DREAM:”
PEARL BAILEY,
HELLO, DOLLY!,
AND THE NEGOTIATION OF RACE
IN COMMERCIAL AMERICAN
MUSICAL THEATRE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Theatre
School of Music and Dramatic Arts

by

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December, 2011

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the small number of people who devote their lives to seeking a middle ground without compromising essential principle. This is substantially more difficult than existing at an extreme, and much more difficult than it appears.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend the most heartfelt thanks to all the people and associated institutions with whom it has been a pleasure to be acquainted:

ACADEMIC/PROFESSIONAL: Les Wade (Ph.D. advisor), Femi Euba, Bill Grimes, Kristin Sosnowsky, Michael Tick, Jennifer Jones Cavanaugh, Leigh Clemons, John Fletcher, Mark Gasiorowski, Andreas Gieger, Allison McFarland, Sally Bailey, Dan Davy, Kate Anderson, Charlotte MacFarland, Lou Shelton, John Uthoff, Janice Stein, Barbara Napoli, Emily Kosh, Michael Dreznick, Elfi Sanderson, Cindy Cho, Roxanne Greenburger, Randee Blair, Bernie Beck, Sam Todes (dec.), Edris Cooper-Anifowoshe, Patrick Murphree, Miles Kreuger, Marty Jacobs and the staff at the Museum of the City of New York, the Lincoln Center Library, Tougaloo College (Jackson, Mississippi), State of Mississippi Archives, Alex Benjamin, Ben Medina, Hampton Williams (dec.?), Harold Sachs (dec.), Ellen Zuckerman Brandt, Marty Bass, Ervin Hart, and Francine Trombino.

PERSONAL: Scott Wiersema, Elaine and David (dec.) Mehler, Evelyn and Bernie Seckler, Joseph Yichel (dec.) and Myrna Mehler, Steve London (dec.), Jeffrey and Blossom Mehler (and all of Blossom's "sisters, cousins, and aunts" – and a special greeting to my brother and sister-in-law – I'm handing in the draft of my dissertation on June 20, 2011, their 40th wedding anniversary), Max and Ruth Schlam (both dec.), Andrew and Ali Mehler, Lauren (Mehler) and Mark Strien (and little Kaitlyn Isabella, my newly arrived (7/31/10) great-niece), Eva Leskovac, Seymour and Jill Hirsh, Roseline Insdorf Horowitz, Patty Bugland, Jessica Kalish (dec.), Barry Elfant, Ronnie Gravino, Paul Siegel, Barrett Brick (and Antonio), Dean Spielvogel (dec.), Stuart

Henlis, Michael Carr and Henry Siegel, Ken and Becky Klein, Brad Hennenfent, Alan Sachs, Paul Durfee (dec.), Joel Rose, Anne Larson, Warren and Stacey Silver (and “Robbie,” “Chip,” “Ernie” and “Dodie”), Kenneth Hilton (and mama Erma) and Kenton Owens, Greg Nigosian, Barbara Georgans, Georgann Joseph, Steve and Lisa Young, Sean Dunham and Bill “Woplock” Karnes, Sheila Schultz, Linda Kutner, Larry Toothman and Frank Bolick, Harley LeClere, Richard Cleaver, Jeanette and Vern Wiersema, Todd Wiersema, Andrew Wiersema, Ryan Wiersema, Jeff and Tina Wiersema, Bradd (“Bruno”) Wiersema (dec.), Ed Parks, Tom Kinyon, Wolf Anglemeyer, Robert Krenek and Johnny Smith, Marilyn and Morty (dec.) Etra [Morty, you were right – I suppose based on the material in this dissertation, it was reasonable to describe me as “some sort of nigger lover”], Fran and Dave Marcus, Marcia and Murray (dec.) Wiener, Mary Margaret Rollins and Pam Bolton, Robert Olinde, Larry and Sylvia London (both dec.), and Tillie and Leo Mehler (both dec.).

P.S.: If I left anyone out, let’s attribute this to a “middle aged moment” on my part. I love you all.

PREFACE

There are some atrocities for which even the most heartfelt of apologies will not suffice. The enslavement of Africans in the Western Hemisphere. Violence, subjugation, and “therapy” directed at homosexuals. The slaughter of six million Jews in Hitler’s ovens. Rape and brutality directed cross-culturally against women as they are treated as sexual chattel. The list goes on.

David Merrick’s attempt to rectify previous exclusionary practices against African-Americans attempting to partake in commercial American musical theatre, the Pearl Bailey-led production of *Hello, Dolly!*, probably does not even qualify as a “most heartfelt apology.” There is no denial that Merrick’s first motivation was making a buck. It’s not that Merrick wasn’t aware or concerned with the underlying issues of social justice involved in the production. The simple, perhaps inconvenient truth is that Merrick was motivated primarily by capitalist greed.

David Merrick produced Broadway plays with the intent to make a profit for his investors. That was his *job*. Anything beyond that is gravy.

Having said this, one must realize that it is *equally* true that the Bailey *Dolly!* represented a paradigm change in the way that African-American interests were treated in the venue of commercial American musical theatre. Before this production and for the overwhelming most part, the best a black performer could hope for was to land a part as some sort of exotic hot-house plant or to be relegated to servants’ roles. Never mind the possibility of anything vaguely resembling the real interests of African-Americans being portrayed by black writing talent in commercial American musical theatre. It didn’t happen. The era that followed the Bailey *Dolly!* displayed broader horizons for African-American talent in both these arenas.

We can look at the Bailey *Dolly!* as a feeble attempt to assuage the guilt that will not go away. Or we can look at the Bailey *Dolly!* as a point of light that showed the way to an era of greater cooperation.

Or we can do both. Let us proceed.

-- Charles Eliot Mehler
Denham Springs, Louisiana
July 5, 2011

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ABSTRACT

In October of 1967, producer David Merrick closed his successful production of *Hello, Dolly!* Merrick reopened the show one month later with an all-black cast that featured the talents of performers Pearl Bailey and Cab Calloway. While this Bailey *Dolly!* was a mammoth commercial success, this production brought attention to various problems concerning the interaction of black and white creative and performing talent in the venue of commercial American musical theatre.

One such problem involved the risk of possible loss of genuine black culture and ignorance of recalcitrant intra-black-community difficulties and the extent to which African Americans should have desired entrée into bourgeois society, as the play *Hello, Dolly!* itself portrayed onstage. Another such problem involved the possibility of the production avoiding dealing with racism head-on in order to avoid alienating white audiences. A corollary of such problems begged the question of what vision of American integration and civil rights the show represented.

On a more practical level, the Bailey *Dolly!* raised questions of the extent to which the Broadway stage needed reform with respect to its treatment of non-white participants. In this regard, questions arose as to whether there was any middle ground between calls for black separatist theatre and African-American participation in white commercial theatre, as well as to what extent white-dominated commercial American musical theatre would allow for black control of the creative and economic process.

In exploring these broad areas of concern, the study finds a fundamental conundrum. The production, to a great extent, glossed over everyday problems that the African American faced in 1960s America. At the same time, the Bailey *Dolly!* celebrated the victories of the civil rights

era, providing a blueprint for African-American bourgeois entrée. Thus, despite acknowledged detriments with respect to portraying a genuine African-American experience, the Bailey *Dolly!* served as a flashpoint of change in the treatment of African Americans in commercial American musical theatre, and as a harbinger for improvement in such treatment.

INTRODUCTION

Hello, Dolly!, the Broadway musical version of Thornton Wilder's play *The Matchmaker*, with book by Michael Stewart and music and lyrics by Jerry Herman, opened to critical and commercial success in January 1964. Until the musical version of Mel Brooks's 1968 film *The Producers* in 2001, *Hello, Dolly!* held the record for the most Tony Awards won by a single musical, garnering ten awards. Carol Channing won a Tony for originating the lead role of Dolly Levi, the middle-aged matchmaker. Channing in turn was followed in the role by a series of Hollywood film stars from the 1930s and 1940s, who by the mid-1960s had reached middle age – Ginger Rogers, Martha Raye, and Betty Grable.

In the socially and politically turbulent fall of 1967, producer David Merrick made the bold and enterprising decision to close the production, only to reopen in November of that year with an “all-Negro” (sic) cast headed by veteran African-American entertainers Pearl Bailey as Dolly Levi and Cab Calloway as Horace Vandergelder, the object of Dolly's marital intent. This all-African-American production of *Hello, Dolly!* became an instant sensation in the middle of the civil rights tumult of the 1960s and brought new interest, both economically and critically, to the Broadway run of the show. Pearl Bailey would earn a special Tony Award for her performance. Ultimately, *Hello, Dolly!* would run for more than 2800 performances, surpassing the record previously set by *My Fair Lady* for longest running Broadway musical. (At the time, *My Fair Lady* was the longest running musical in Broadway history with more than 2700 performances. Since the 1960s, these records have been surpassed many times.)

This study will consider the Bailey *Dolly!* from a number of angles. First, this study will deal with the sociology and politics that inform this production. In terms of sociology, this study will contrast the economic nature of racial oppression with social and cultural barriers that

maintained American racism from slavery through Jim Crow and the era immediately preceding the civil rights efforts of the post-World-War-II era. Of particular concern is how the Bailey *Dolly!* attempted to eradicate these social and cultural barriers standing in the way of full participation by African Americans in mainstream American life. In the arena of politics, this study will explore the Bailey *Dolly!* as a phenomenon that both reflected and contributed to the “Great Society” ethic on race relations of the 1960s. The study will compare and contrast this centrist “Great Society” ethic to more confrontational and separatist takes on American race relations.

Next, this study will explore race in performance and entertainments contexts in an effort to determine the import of the Bailey *Dolly!* regarding race in these contexts. To understand how important the Bailey *Dolly!* was as a flashpoint in changes on racial attitudes in popular performance, this study explores the history of American entertainment and race from the Jim Crow era following Reconstruction to the era immediately preceding the civil rights movement of the 1960s. This study pays particular attention to the legacy of minstrelsy and how this legacy informed race relations in commercial American musical theatre. The Bailey *Dolly!* will be shown as a marked contrast to past efforts to include African Americans on the Broadway stage.

The study continues by investigating the actual phenomenon of the production itself. This production, of course, was an unqualified success, both commercially and among the popular press. Yet issues we already will have discussed – sociology, politics, and entertainment industry history – will be factored into this success equation. In addition, this study will attempt to redress the near absence of quality scholarship available on this production.

A discussion of the aftermath of the Bailey *Dolly!* follows. This discussion considers changes in the American political and social landscape that have transpired since the Bailey

Dolly! in 1967, as well as changes in the entertainment industry and, specifically, commercial American musical theatre.

In short, this study will find significance in the Bailey *Dolly!* with respect to its social, political, aesthetic, and performance underpinnings. The Bailey *Dolly!*, furthermore, served as a flashpoint or harbinger for changes in the treatment of African Americans in each of these aspects. At the end, an analysis of each of these aspects will be presented, showing how both society and performance venues have changed since the Bailey *Dolly!* appeared on Broadway.

Problems Presented

Taking a musical play previously reserved for white performers only and casting it with an all-black cast raises numerous analytical problems. This set of problems can be divided into two major categories.

A first set of problems posed by the Bailey *Dolly!* deals with the social and political ramifications of the production. These problems include:

1. The Bailey *Dolly!* displayed African American performers in an environment awash in bourgeois nicety, an environment typically denied African Americans in the centuries that preceded the civil rights movement of the 1960s. At the risk of possible loss of genuine black culture and ignorance of recalcitrant intra-community difficulties, to what extent should the black community have desired entrée into bourgeois society? In this quest for bourgeois entrée, was the Bailey *Dolly!*, at least to some extent guilty of possibly airbrushing or disregarding recalcitrant social, political, and economic problems of the black community?

In this study, we explore the continuing and historically-based African-American tradition of attempting entrée into the mainstream of the American bourgeoisie. Such entrée would come with attendant plusses, such as the improvement of the economic and social lot of black people in America, and minuses, such as the loss of a strong sense of African-American culture that resulted from assimilation. Specific focus will be placed on the extent to which this breakdown of vertical/social barriers was acquired perhaps at the expense of African-American community actualization. This tradition of bourgeois aspiration is considered from a point of view that compares structures of racial oppression composed of vertical (social) and horizontal (economic) hierarchies. Much of the difficulty in this breakdown can be seen in the challenge of white privilege/bias while working within Euro-centric framework. With specific regard to the Bailey *Dolly!*, this all-African-American cast was at its most effective in breaking down the vertical/social barriers to African-American involvement in mainstream American enterprise.

Much like the issue of taking Stewart and Herman's *Hello, Dolly!* seriously as a piece of literature – a tenet we argue is not necessary to the appreciation of the role of the Bailey cast in re-imagining the piece – a purist interpretation of the politics of the Bailey *Dolly!* might lead to a dismissal of the importance of the piece in considering the social and political circumstances of the mid-1960s. We argue that this would be a mistake – that despite any lack of attempt to present a “true” African-American experience, the Bailey *Dolly!* played a significant role in the re-imagination of the Broadway musical stage with respect to race.

2. Did the production avoid dealing with racism head-on in order to avoid alienating white audiences?

Producer David Merrick chose a light romantic comedy like Stewart and Herman's *Hello, Dolly!* as a way to expand African-American presence in the Broadway theatrical milieu. Such a choice begs the question, why did Merrick choose a Euro-centric piece like *Hello, Dolly!* and not attempt to produce more Afro-centric material such as the plays of Amiri Baraka and Adrienne Kennedy? One answer to this question concerns perhaps a desire on Merrick's part *not* to alienate the "commuter from Scarsdale," i.e., the member of the white bourgeoisie whom Merrick was trying to both attract to this production and who served as the backbone of the Broadway theatre audience in the mid-1960s. In this dichotomy, Merrick can be seen perhaps as advocate of positive reform in his intent to expand the presence of African-Americans on Broadway. On the other hand, one must consider that in 1967, there was only so far Merrick could go to expand the "commuter from Scarsdale"'s race consciousness.

3. What vision of American integration and civil rights did the show represent?

This study will explore issues surrounding the racial integration of American society in the 1960s from several points of view: race as a social class structure, the political upheaval concurrent with the production concerning race in America, bourgeois romantic comedy as a means of negotiating class divides, the lingering effects of minstrelsy on the Broadway musical, and what happened on Broadway in the era that followed the Bailey *Dolly!*

A second set of problems posed by the Bailey *Dolly!* deals with what were, in the 1960s, issues surrounding African-American participation in white-dominated American theatre. These problems include:

4. Why was there the need to integrate American theatre at this time? What were possible ways to effect such integration, in terms of material and performers? What were the problems of various choices?

Until the Bailey *Dolly!*, commercial American musical theatre stood at “arm’s length” from any true sense of African-American involvement. As discussed earlier, Broadway, in the person of producer David Merrick, could have chosen to give more credence to more Afro-centric artists rather than offer an Africanized version of a Euro-centric piece like Stewart and Herman’s *Hello, Dolly!* This choice boils down to balancing the need to include African Americans in the full commercial success of the Broadway theatrical enterprise versus maintaining genuine standards of African-American culture.

This study will examine the reconsideration of class barriers between black and white America that in the 1960s was in its most significantly active state since the end of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Of interest here is how the Bailey *Dolly!* served as a repositioning on the part of Broadway with respect to race – at once a radical departure from previous practice while at the same time providing a sufficient safety zone such that bourgeois audiences could maintain a level of comfort.

5. Was there any middle ground between calls for black separatist theatre and African-American participation in white commercial theatre?

This conundrum further begs the question of what is the most appropriate and effective role of commercial American musical theatre, especially in the Broadway venue, with respect to issues of social justice. Need Broadway be ahead of the curve in order to have a valuable effect

on such debates? Or is it possible that Broadway solidifies positive change on social justice issues? As with the race-neutral/race-conscious conundrum from the first problem, this is a multi-faceted problem that must be faced from all sides of the ideological spectrum.

6. To what extent would white-dominated commercial American musical theatre allow for black control of the creative and economic process? Despite an all-black cast, did the *Bailey Dolly!* present a problem of control, of whites using black performers for commercial profit?

This study will investigate the aftermath of the *Bailey Dolly!* – how the production related to the following explosion of casting opportunities for African-American performers, and how the show may have paved the way for greater production and entrepreneurial efforts by African Americans in generating Broadway works by and for African Americans. In dealing with the various sub-issues raised by the *Bailey Dolly!* – race as a social class structure, the political upheaval concurrent with the production concerning race in America, bourgeois romantic comedy as a means of negotiating class divides, the lingering effects of minstrelsy on the Broadway musical, and what happened on Broadway in the era that followed the *Bailey Dolly!* – this study will show that the *Bailey Dolly!* was an important if incremental milestone in the effort to expand opportunities for African-American expression in commercial American musical theatre.

7. How could commercial American musical theatre deal with its past legacy of minstrelsy? How could black performers appear onstage in a previously “whites only” theatrical environment without invoking a past based on minstrelsy? Was it possible to redress this grievance?

In commercial American musical theatre, the legacy of minstrelsy would continue to haunt any effort at African-American inclusion until the civil rights era. This era, especially in the incarnation of the Bailey *Dolly!*, would usher in the engagement of middle-brow white audiences in the cause of fair treatment of black performers. Ultimately, the era that followed the Bailey *Dolly!* would see increased opportunity for African-American performers as well as input on the part of African Americans in the process of creating commercial American musical theatre. The success of the all-black cast of the Bailey *Dolly!* served as a harbinger of the era that followed in which African Americans gained greater access to Broadway, opening door to greater involvement of black performers and producers in commercial American musical theatre.

8. To what extent were the strategies and choices by *Dolly!* producer David Merrick finally effective in a broader sense? How did these strategies and choices affect both commercial American musical theatre and the larger American society with respect to race?

This study deals with the conundrum inherent in the social-science experiment/gamble engineered by Broadway producer David Merrick in 1967: the presentation and promotion of an all-African-American production of Stewart and Herman's hit musical play *Hello, Dolly!* On the one hand, Merrick engaged in what can be seen as an effort to reform existing unfair casting practices in commercial American musical theatre with regard to race. On the other, Merrick operated in an environment that perhaps limited the extent to which a Broadway producer could address previous exclusionary practices against African-Americans.

Merrick's efforts here at once paved the way to provide manifold opportunity for the African-American performer in the venue of commercial American musical theatre. At the same time, Merrick's efforts implicitly defined the limits to which an entrepreneur in commercial

American musical theatre could go in the 1960s to raise the race consciousness of bourgeois theatre-goers. This apparent dialectic, among other conundrums, makes the Bailey *Dolly!* an event of particular scholarly interest.

Furthermore, this study will evaluate the claim made with pride by Merrick with respect to the transfer of *Hello, Dolly!* from a presumably all-white environment to an all-black fantasy; at the level of performance, argued Merrick, not a word of the original creation had to be changed to affect the transfer. In evaluating this apparently seamless transfer of source material, this study will delve into the nature of bourgeois romantic comedy, the genre to which both Wilder's *The Matchmaker* and the adaptation that was *Hello, Dolly!* each belongs. At issue is why this material, and the subsequent ostensibly Euro-centric musical adaptation, was so well-suited for an all-black cast, at least in terms of popular success. In addition, the role of African-Americans in the formation of the "Tin Pan Alley" style of popular music composition that permeates the score of *Hello, Dolly!*, will be investigated in terms of possible cooptation by white composers for commercial American musical theatre.

Review of Scholarship

Given the range of political, social, and artistic issues invoked by the *Dolly* production, this study draws upon a number of different areas of scholarship. The following list indicates the range of scholarly topics the study explores and draws attention to the key authors and works that informed the outlook and approach of this study.

i. Race/class Structure

This study will rely heavily on Benjamin Bowser's *The Black Middle Class*. Bowser argues that racism relies upon a vertical class structure, one that accords with the views of nineteenth/twentieth century Max Weber. This vertical model at once challenges, yet works in tandem with, the horizontal economic class structures described earlier in the nineteenth century by Karl Marx. Because of the status afforded the white person in racist American society, the white person will ignore economic-class-based interests in favor of an ideology based on the shared cultural attribute of being white as being superior to being black. Though economics plays a role in this oppression, Bowser focuses on the level of prestige (and thus power) afforded white people in contrast to non-whites.

Bowser's contention of a strong class structure based on the shared cultural attribute of race is supported by any number of other studies. In *Race and Social Analysis*, Caroline Knowles, a white citizen of the United Kingdom, describes her personal voyage along post-colonial landscapes. In this process, Knowles discovers a process of racial subjugation based as much in social processes as it is in politics or economics. In *Places of Their Own*, Andrew Wiese would seem to take Bowser's theoretical sociological interpretation of race and places a geographical description of Bowser's take on the state of a black bourgeoisie in the civil-rights era and beyond. Wiese discusses the mass migration (approximately one third of the black population in America) to the suburbs. In this discussion, Wiese finds surface similarities between black and white suburban culture. Yet like Bowser, Wiese finds disturbing differences in terms of wealth equity between black and white suburbanites. All these difficulties inform the difficulty in accepting a black cast for *Hello, Dolly!* drenched in bourgeois opulence.

The issue of Euro-centrism, as raised by Edris Cooper-Anifowoshe, serves as an interesting complement to the discussion of race as a class structure, begging the question of white privilege. This question of white privilege will inform the Bailey *Dolly!* with respect to control of the means of production and the comfort levels of while agents involved in the production. In considering this issue of white privilege, this study investigates Gail S. Murray's text, *Throwing Off the Cloak of Privilege: White southern women activists in the civil rights era*. Murray's text presents a series of essays organized around the role of white southern women in the struggle for black equality. At once, these women can be seen as heroic in their efforts to challenge racism. At the same time, these women come with the baggage of a certain level of *noblesse oblige* and control of an issue that perhaps rightly belongs in the hands of black people themselves. Such condescension serves as a backdrop for black/white interaction in the representation of black interests in popular entertainment, especially the Bailey *Dolly!*

ii. Political Ideology

A wide range of political ideologies will be presented in this study. At the left end of the spectrum, the works of Malcolm X (the autobiography) and Eldridge Cleaver (*Soul on Ice*), so popular during the period under investigation and rife with discussion of a more separatist, confrontational ethic, will be used as a contrast to the centrist, cooperative political underpinnings of the Bailey *Dolly*. In contrast, Glazer and Moynihan's *Beyond the Melting Pot* creates a contrast to the color-blind ideal in describing a reality in which the "melting pot" mythos is debunked.

Also written from a centrist perspective like Moynihan and Glazer (and written well after the period under investigation), Schlesinger's *The Disuniting of America* targets the diversity

paradigm of the post-civil rights era from his unique point of view as an architect of race policy during the New Frontier/Great Society. In its longing for a sense of commonality among Americans of all backgrounds, *Disuniting* would seem to wax nostalgic for the race-neutrality offered by the Bailey *Dolly!*, thus affirming the production's point of view concerning race.

Perhaps most informative to the Bailey *Dolly!* in terms of race polemics is an obscure volume of essays on race from the late 1940s. In Bucklin Moon's *A Primer for White Folks*, various writers explore answers to Jim Crow-racism from a slightly pre-civil-rights-era perspective. The result would seem to envision the kind of cooperative ethic presented in the *Bailey Dolly!* Moon's vision of racial harmony from the 1940s cannot take into account the changes in the political and social landscapes that would happen in the civil-rights era and beyond. Nevertheless, this vision presented in the stories in the Moon volume provides a fine comparison at the attempt by the Bailey *Dolly!* to neutralize race as a divisive issue.

iii. Black Theatre and Literary Concerns

A central tenet of this study is that light romantic comedy is a universal in all world cultures. Dealing with this universality in an African context, we find two outstanding volumes: David Kerr's *African Popular Theatre* and Karin Barber, John Collins, and Alain Ricard's *West African Popular Theatre*. Both volumes provide extensive detail with respect to comedy as a story telling device in ancient tribal societies.

In contrast to any broad inclusion of romantic comedy as presented in the Bailey *Dolly!*, this study will investigate theatre that is particular and identity-based and resulted from the often confrontational and separatist Black Arts Movement. The study will use Lisa Gale Collins and Margo Natalie Crawford's *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement* and James Edward

Smethurst's *The Black Arts Movement* as resources to describe a more Afro-centric approach to drama than the Bailey *Dolly!* provides. In addition, we will investigate plays by the likes of Ed Bullins and Adrienne Kennedy to provide comparison to the style of theatre espoused by the Bailey *Dolly!* As a general reference concerning African-American drama, Harry J. Elam Jr. and David Krasner's *African-American Performance and Theater [sic] History*, a volume of essays, will provide a background in recent trends in black theatre.

Anyone performing research into the history of black involvement in commercial American theater can find much primary material on the 1997 debate on the state of black theatre between August Wilson and Robert Brustein . In a special edition of *African American Review*, editors Paul Carter Harrison and Vincent Leo Walker II discuss the implications of the Wilson-Brustein debate in "August Wilson's Call: Notes from the editors." Of particular interest here is Wilson's opposition to productions like the Bailey *Dolly!* that populate Euro-centric dramatic pieces with African-American performers. This opposition lies in comparison to Ed Bullins' review of a production of an all-black production of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* in which Bullins finds valuable parallels between the lives of Russian agrarians and the lives of African-Americans, especially through the lens of southern slavery. This study will use other volumes on black theatre of interest, including Woodie King Jr.'s *The Impact of Race: Theatre and culture*, Susan Curtis' *The First Black Actors on the Great White Way*.

iv. Light Romantic Comedy as Literature

This discussion of the literary virtues of Herman and Stewart's *Hello, Dolly!* emanates from the idea that Stewart and Herman's have written a competent piece of middle-brow entertainment. Such a piece is not the typical fare for a scholarly study, much less the single

focus of a Ph.D. dissertation. In contrast to what is perhaps a scholarly bias against such middle-brow fare, Patrick Murphree, in his unpublished manuscript “The Pleasures of Mediocrity; or, Why We Should Study Poor Plays,” argues that the study of “poor plays” like *Hello, Dolly!* allows the scholar a glimpse of the social history of the culture that produced such efforts.

A significant thread of investigation in this study lies in the discussion of light bourgeois romantic comedy (of the ilk of *Hello, Dolly!* and its predecessors) and its role in the negotiation of class barriers. Studies that touch upon this thread include Walter Kerr’s discussion of comedy as an afterthought in *Tragedy and Comedy*, Wylie Sypher’s discussion of the expansive nature of comedy in “The Meanings of Comedy,” Christopher Booker’s discussion of the “rags to riches” archetypal plotline in *The Seven Basic Plots*, and Steven Vineberg’s discussion of class structure in supposedly class-free America in *High Comedy in American Movies*.

v. Commercial Musical Theatre

This study will use several outstanding general texts describing the history of musical theatre. These include Richard Kislán’s *The Musical* and Alan J. Lerner’s *The Musical Theatre* (this is the same Alan Jay Lerner who wrote the libretto for *My Fair Lady*), each of which offers an encyclopedic discussion of the genre.

Another class of musical theatre text provides the in-depth study of seminal productions. Scott Miller’s *Deconstructing Harold Hill* offers what might be seen as a post-modern take on popular musicals such as *The Music Man* and *Camelot*. Rather than use the tenets of a particular production to make a point on either the aesthetics or social import of a particular musical, a text like Miller’s presents an analysis that is more probing and in greater depth.

Yet another class of musical theatre text involves discussion of the construction of the musical as a piece of literature. Included in this category are Scott McMillin's *The Musical as Drama*, and Bruce Kirle's *Unfinished Show Business*. Kirle's volume is of particular interest in its discussion of the Broadway musical as a collaborative effort. Each of these volumes on musical play construction will be helpful in the when discussing the aesthetics of *Hello, Dolly!*

vi. Musical Theatre and Race

Several encyclopedic volumes examine social issues more specifically than those mentioned under the "commercial musical theatre" heading and provide research data in the area of musical theatre and race. The most specific is Alan Woll's *Black Musical Theatre: From Coontown to Dreamgirls*. Woll's study will be of particular significance in the discussion of nineteenth century musical theatre forms such as minstrelsy.

Other musical theatre texts that deal with the genre specifically from a social history point of view include John Bush Jones' *Our Musicals, Ourselves* and Raymond Knapp's twin volumes, *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity* and *The American Musical and the Performance of Personal Identity*. These three volumes provide an excellent reference with regard to the discussion of the sociology and polemics of the Bailey *Dolly!*

In conducting this study, we will attempt to compare the experience of David Merrick and cohorts to the experience of those who previously attempted to break down race barriers in commercial theatre. Here, Philip Rose's *You Can't Do That on Broadway* provides a comparable situation in the production, previous to *Hello, Dolly!*, of Lorraine Hansbury's *A Raisin in the Sun*.

vii. Bailey *Dolly!* Personnel

A number of informative volumes have been published concerning the principal agents involved in the creation of the Bailey *Dolly!* Bailey herself wrote the autobiography *Talking to Myself* in 1971 among numerous other personally written tomes. Barbara Lee Horn's, *David Merrick: A Bio-bibliography* provides a thorough exploration of the life and machinations in the career of Broadway's "abominable showman," the person most responsible for the advent of the Bailey *Dolly!* Of special interest here is Merrick's background in Depression-era St. Louis who, as a Jew, was not allowed to participate in professional theatrical production, an activity reserved for the gentile gentry. Director/choreographer Gower Champion's life is described in David Payne-Carter's *Gower Champion: Dance and American musical theatre*. In addition, there is a biography of *Dolly!* composer-lyricist Jerry Herman entitled *Jerry Herman: The poet of the showtune*, by Stephen Citron, as well as the auto-biographical *Showtune: A memoir* which Herman co-wrote with Marilyn Stasio. In addition, Cab Calloway, along with co-writer Bryant Rollins, penned an autobiography entitled *Of Minnie the Moocher and Me*.

viii. Race and Mass Media

Like the casting of the Bailey *Dolly!*, Sheldon's Leonard's casting of Bill Cosby in the espionage drama *I Spy* served to break down class-based racial barriers in American television. In *I Spy: A history and episode guide to the groundbreaking television series*, Marc Cushman and Linda J. LaRosa discuss the then-revolutionary casting of Bill Cosby as the fully-equal partner of fellow spy (and white) Robert Culp. Occurring in a similar time-frame as the Bailey

Dolly!, strong comparisons can be raised in the cooperative racial climate espoused by both the Bailey *Dolly!* and *I Spy*.

Similar parallels as with the conciliatory *I Spy*, as well as provocative contrasts with raw ugly racism, can be seen between the Bailey *Dolly!* live performance and the annals of American print cartoons in the evolution of the presentation of race in the twentieth century. Two volumes in particular illuminate these parallels. In *Cultural Diversity and the Media*, Yahya R. Kamalipour and Theresa Carilli (editors) present a series of essays that describe the aftermath of the minstrelsy era. Of particular interest is Scott McLean's essay, "Minority Representation and Portrayal in Modern Newsprint Cartoons." McLean details the stereotypes of the early twentieth century, followed by a description of more recent cartoon efforts that more fully reflect the presence of black people in American society.

ix. Recent Trends in the Politics of Race

Inasmuch as Broadway became a different place in the era that followed the Bailey *Dolly!* concerning racial casting policies, so the landscape of racial politics in America would change in the era that followed World War II. Such change would continue into the turn of the millennium. But where Broadway would become more inclusive in terms of casting policies and presenting black points of view in the content of its musical plays, the American political landscape in the era that followed the Bailey *Dolly!* would display a variety of paradigms.

One side of the debate on race in the post-civil-rights era would seem to refute any "victimization" argument, opting instead to explore the continuing unpleasant legacy of race in America. In *Debating Race . . .* Michael Eric Dyson confronts white privilege. Of equal interest

is Dyson's *I May Not Get There With You*, Dyson's "warts and all" discussion of the life and legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. Dyson's unrelenting willingness to confront continued American racism would seem to contrast the more conciliatory approach offered by the Bailey *Dolly!*

Methodology

In terms of methodology, this study relies on both primary and secondary source material.

In terms of primary source material, the Pearl Bailey-led production of *Hello, Dolly!* is a fairly recent production, having occurred within the last half-century. As such, much of the original journalism and support material surrounding the production can be found in the musical theatre archives extant. Sources for such material include the Lincoln Center Library in New York City, as well as archives available through the Museum of the City of New York.

This is not to say that a great deal of primary material exists with respect to the Bailey *Dolly!* After all, even for the most celebrated of Broadway productions, little exists with respect to primary research material beyond opening night reviews and liner notes from original cast recordings. Nevertheless, the material left behind by the Bailey *Dolly!* is extensive and leaves a great deal of room for extrapolation.

In terms of secondary source material (covered in the prior section on scholarly sources), the study will use lenses of evaluation and analysis from an eclectic selection to evaluate the aims and impact of the Bailey *Dolly!* Such lenses will cover all portions of the spectrum, from the most left-leaning separatist philosophies to the most assimilationist. The attempt will be made to show sensitivity to competing lines of argument, especially with regard to the

potentially sensitive topic of race. Part of the appeal of this particular topic, the *Bailey Dolly!*, lies in the ability of the observer to view the production through such a variety of eclectic lenses and to make conclusions that take into account this grand variety.

In short, this study will examine the balancing act/conundrum of David Merrick in his efforts to promote the *Bailey Dolly!*, examining materials with focus on how Merrick advanced a reform-minded show while walking the tight-rope of maintaining appeal to commercial audiences. By first investigating secondary materials, the study will create a theoretical framework by which primary materials can be analyzed. In this process, the observer will see that the *Bailey Dolly!* embraces certain centrist, conciliatory ideologies, politics, and narratives that would not threaten or alienate the core audience, yet at the same time challenge the legacies of minstrelsy and Jim Crow from bygone eras in an effective manner.

Chapter Summaries

This study consists of seven chapters.

Chapter I introduces the concept of vertical class structures, as espoused by Benjamin Bowser via Max Weber. In such class structures, shared cultural norms trump commonality of economic status. This sense of shared cultural norms proves important in discerning the significance of the *Bailey Dolly!* in terms of its effect on the African-American experience, especially with respect to the complicated issue of entrée into mainstream American bourgeois society. Much of the import of this vertical class divide can be explained in a discussion of white privilege, cooperation, and condescension. We discover that the logical response to such condescension is a desire on the part of African Americans to achieve a sense of full adult citizenship. The civil rights era following World War II would see fitful attempts to breach

vertical class structures and achieve full adult citizenship for African Americans. The focus of much of this effort would involve attempts to achieve *entrée* into the bourgeois mainstream of American society on the part of African Americans, an effort reflected in the plotline of *Hello, Dolly!* Such bourgeois *entrée* would prove to be a two-pronged affair. At once, it was the culmination of the reasonable aspirations of those fighting the civil-battle. At the same time, it clouded attempts for actualization on the part of African Americans in terms of preservation of culture and appreciation for those left behind.

Chapter II considers the political ramifications of the socially based divide between African Americans and mainstream, bourgeois America. Of special concern in this discussion is the disappointment faced by African Americans in the era following World War II. Having fought ethnic-based strife abroad, African-American soldiers returned home to the same racism they had faced for centuries in America. At one end of the political spectrum, those identifying with the left promoted a paradigm that valued confrontation over cooperation with the white hegemony in order to enhance black consciousness. (The *Bailey Dolly!* would serve as the near antithesis of such a point of view.) In contrast, President Lyndon Johnson (who, with his wife, had adopted the *Bailey Dolly!* as the White House's semi-official Broadway musical) promoted a centrist "Great Society" paradigm that valued cooperation over confrontation. The intellectual engine behind this Great Society would be provided by the likes of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, each of whom would present an imperfection in the Great-Society armor. Years after his involvement in the formation of Johnson's race policies, Schlesinger would rail against the multi-cultural vogue of the post-civil rights era. Moynihan would prove problematic from the start, encouraging the idea that the social problems faced by African Americans were "pathological," i.e., of sufficient difficulty that the involvement of social science personnel was necessary to correct the problems. In addition, Johnson's political problems on

race would be complicated on the right by what was the genesis of the Republican Party's "southern strategy" and on the left by the presence of liberal Republican John Lindsay as the "anti-Johnson" on race. All of these complications and difficulties would, to some extent, leave the Bailey *Dolly!* rudderless in terms of connection to a political paradigm. Despite these political complications and difficulties, the Bailey *Dolly!* would serve as a seminal effort of conciliation and cooperation on the issue of race in American entertainment.

Chapter III discusses the importance of light romantic comedy as a means for bourgeois entrée for marginalized populations. We begin by exploring the non-masterpiece (for example, Stewart and Herman's *Hello, Dolly!*) for its social ramifications. Attendant to this discussion is the exploration of whether, in the case of African Americans, attempts to achieve bourgeois entrée through the use of light romantic comedy might smack of air-brushing of the cruelties of the African-American reality. Yet we find that there is universal appeal in such light romantic comedy, even in pre-colonial Africa. Thus, reclaiming this genre can be envisioned as a path to liberation. This exploration of reclaiming light romantic comedy leads to an in-depth discussion of the history of race and popular entertainment. In this subsequent discussion, an arc develops starting with the condescension of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries to efforts to correct such condescension in the post-World-War-II civil rights era, especially with the advent of television. The chapter concludes with a comparison of comedy and tragedy in terms of their respective effects on marginalized populations. Such in-depth discussion of popular entertainment creates a yardstick by which the achievements of the Bailey *Dolly!* can be measured.

Chapter IV addresses the issue of race and musical theatre, with specific focus on the lingering effects of the legacy of minstrelsy on the genre. As with the state of the American entertainment industry, the history of commercial American musical theatre presents an arc that

starts with the cruelty of nineteenth-century minstrelsy and ends with fitful attempts at reform in the post-World-War-II civil rights era. Specific focus is given to the role that Jewish Americans played in the promotion of the stereotypes of minstrelsy. Attention is given to Hammerstein and Kern's *Show Boat*, a seminal production of the era that saw the beginning of attempts to reform the racist imagery of minstrelsy. Another area of concern focus in the chapter deals with pre-Bailey-*Dolly!* attempts to convert musical theatre material that previously involved only white performers with black casts – productions like *Carmen Jones* and the *Swing* and *Hot Mikados*. As we approach the era of the Bailey *Dolly!*, we discover two options for blacks on Broadway – portrayal as exotics and so-called “street reality” – in the 1950s. Immediately preceding the Bailey *Dolly!*, we see more focused attempts at dealing with African Americans as fully realized adult citizens.

Chapter V deals with personnel and production aspects surrounding the Bailey *Dolly!* itself and how such aspects fit in to the re-definition of race roles in America. We discuss the five primary creative personnel behind the production – director/choreographer Gower Champion and his genius at crafting “non-masterpiece” entertainment for the bourgeois masses; composer/lyricist Jerry Herman and how the mildly racist references in his other works compare to the race-neutrality of the *Dolly!* score; performer Pearl Bailey and her ethic of Christian reconciliation on race; performer Cab Calloway and his more confrontational attitudes on race; and producer David Merrick, with his larger than life persona, an attribute that allowed him to pull off what was at the time a great gamble/experiment in race relations. A short discussion of race issues surrounding the Bailey *Dolly!* production follows, including an evaluation of Herman's complicit, if mild, racism in his score for the musical *Mame*.

Chapter VI deals with journalistic coverage of the Bailey *Dolly!* that preceded the opening of the production, with special attention given to the *Amsterdam News*, New York City's

premier African-American print-news outlet. Another area of special interest discussed in this chapter is the publicity surrounding the rare event of this replacement cast recording a new cast album. A short discussion of the personal accolades Pearl Bailey would receive precedes an in-depth discussion of theatre-scholar reaction to the Bailey *Dolly!* In comparison to print-journalism reaction, such scholarly reaction would be negligible to non-existent. It is, however, in the realms of print- and broadcast-journalism reaction that we find the overwhelming positive response to this seminal production.

Chapter VII explores the aftermath of the Bailey *Dolly!* We begin with a discussion of changes in the racial climate in America, including the tendency toward polarization on both sides. Furthermore, we explore the phenomenon of black neo-conservatives, whose political point-of-view would put them in tandem with the racial ethic promoted by the Bailey *Dolly!* The chapter continues with discussions of changes in the treatment of African Americans in mass media, the issue of cross-racial casting, and changes in the racial landscape in commercial American musical theatre. Of particular interest is the waning of interest in black-infused adaptations of previously “white only” properties. Two productions in this regard stand out: a) A failed attempt by Pearl Bailey to revive her role as Dolly Levi in the mid-1970s. b) A revival staged by Harold Prince in the 1990s of *Show Boat* that was rife with difficulties on issues of race. The chapter concludes with a discussion of recent efforts to deal with issues of race in commercial American musical theatre, with specific regard to attracting black audiences to Broadway productions.

Significance of the Study

The Pearl Bailey-led production of *Hello, Dolly!* finds significance in an apparent conundrum. On the one hand, what transpired onstage had the appearance of race neutrality, as the Bailey *Dolly!* presented African-Americans in situations that stressed commonality among the races, thus making the import of the production accessible to bourgeois audiences. Until the Bailey *Dolly!*, participation in a production that stressed such commonality had been restricted for African-Americans on the basis of race. On the other hand, reaction to the Bailey *Dolly!* on the part of the New York theatre-critic establishment as well as the public was significantly race-informed. After all, this was the first instance of a mega-hit first-run Broadway musical in which the replacement cast was all-black. At once, one could observe both race invisibility and race consciousness in a single production.

David Merrick's gamble, replacing the all-white cast of *Hello, Dolly!* in 1967 with an all-black cast, had paid off in huge commercial success. Furthermore, Pearl Bailey's star turn might be considered the most significant performance in Broadway musical theatre of the decade. But these material measures of success did not take into account half the significance of this groundbreaking production. A number of additional factors enhance the significance of the Bailey *Dolly!* First, Bailey and company presented the opportunity for black performers to present a plot situation that showed African-Americans engaged in bourgeois activities normally reserved for the mainstream. Keeping Benjamin Bowser's discussion of vertical class structures in mind, we note that participation in such activities by the Bailey company caused these class structures to disappear as if they had heretofore never existed. This breakthrough at once attempted to ignore race in its effort to make a contribution that was wholly race-conscious. Second, the Bailey *Dolly!* took place at the epicenter of the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Without

having to organize marches and demonstrations that were so common to the period, the followers of Martin Luther King, Jr., had taken control, at least at the level of performance, of what was previously an all-white domain, i.e., light bourgeois entertainment in the form of commercial American musical theatre. Finally, in terms of the craft of musical theatre, the Bailey *Dolly!* succeeded in presenting a situation in which being marginalized was *not* the issue. Where Broadway had made significant contributions in the past of showing, if only in terms of light entertainment, the struggle of the marginalized against the mainstream, this was a rare instance in which being a member of a marginalized population figured in neither the plot-arc of the play itself nor in its presentation.

Previous scholarship concerning the Bailey *Dolly!* has been incomplete at best. The typical encyclopedic discussion of musical theatre (e.g., Richard Kislán's *The Musical*) reduces discussion of this production to not much more than a few paragraphs. John Bush Jones (*Our Musicals, Ourselves*) makes the fatal mistake of ignoring the 1967 Pearl Bailey-led production of *Hello, Dolly!* altogether, focusing instead on a revival of the Bailey cast in the 1970s which failed. Thus, the theatre scholar who appreciates the contribution of commercial American musical theatre to the cultural health of the nation will find this study a worthwhile and satisfying endeavor. In this study, the theatre scholar will find how a balance of interests combined to create a significant breakthrough in how race was treated by the commercial American musical theatre establishment, and how this breakthrough had repercussions in both the larger entertainment industry as well as the politics and sociology of the nation.

In discussing commercial American musical theatre in the Broadway venue, the theatre scholar often is tempted to dismiss any effort at finding significance in any given production as an act of futility. After all, Broadway makes no effort to disguise its purpose, i.e., to provide entertainment that sells tickets and provide backers with financial benefit. These base

motivations might be seen as counter-productive to any possibility of true reform, here with respect to race. It is the hope that through this study, such a theatre scholar will come to appreciate that David Merrick's gamble proved that when the stars align properly, even the most venal capitalist motivation can have real social, political, aesthetic, and economic significance.

CHAPTER I – SOCIAL STRUCTURES

Chapter Introduction

To understand how the Bailey *Dolly!* challenged the ideology and structure of race relations in America,¹ one needs to explore the underlying structures of American racism in depth, potentially discovering how these structures explain the significance of the Bailey *Dolly!* Important to this potential discovery is the understanding that much of racial injustice in America derives from a cultural rather than economic bias. This cultural bias could both reinforce *and* work independently of any economic hierarchy that oppressed African Americans. The Bailey *Dolly!* would attempt to address this cultural bias, presumably for the betterment of the African American, in two ways. First, it would set forth a situation onstage in which African Americans, perhaps for the first time in the history of commercial American musical theatre, would be presented in a manner that portrayed *exact* parity with similarly situated white people. In this portrayal, the idea of black people achieving entrée into the mainstream of bourgeois American society was paramount. Second, the Bailey *Dolly!* metatheatrically celebrated recently won victories of the civil rights movement of the late 1960s. Any acceptance of this production on the part of white journalistic critics and audiences demonstrated tacit acknowledgement and tacit endorsement of these victories. Such acceptance, especially on the part of white audiences, further represented a willingness on the part of these audience members to eschew at least some part of the privilege white people had enjoyed, especially in the post-Civil-War era, both in terms of social status and the ability to enjoy the economic bounty available to middle-class Americans. Thus, the Bailey *Dolly!* represented a peaceful revolution of sorts, challenging both white privilege and, implicitly, the economic status enjoyed by the white majority. This challenge often came in the form of African Americans attempting what we will call “bourgeois

entrée” – access to the economic benefits and activities previously reserved for the white majority only.

In this chapter, we will explore race in terms of economics and culture, white privilege, and the interface of race and bourgeois aspiration. While we will delineate the negatives of such bourgeois aspiration, we will also make a case for the positives of such aspiration, especially when considering the goals of the post-World-War-II civil rights movement. Ultimately in this study, this exploration of race, culture, and bourgeois aspiration will reflect and resonate with the effort to create an all-black milieu for Stewart and Herman’s *Hello, Dolly!*

Vertical Class Structures

As will be demonstrated later in this study, the Bailey *Dolly!* challenged previously held racial assumptions, with specific attention to deconstructing white privilege and affecting bourgeois entrée for African Americans. In order to grasp the import of this challenge, we begin by analyzing vertical (social) and horizontal (economic) class structures that illuminate these issues of bourgeois entrée and white privilege. The Bailey *Dolly!* would seek to challenge these barriers based on cultural affiliations and identities, with the aim of eradicating them.

In discussing the dismantling of barriers based in white privilege, one must first consider the structural differences that exist between black and white middle-class models. In “Race/Class Interactions in the Formation of Political Ideology,” Monica McDermott presents a case for race as a separable variable concerning any discussion of middle class aspirations.

McDermott writes

It has been asserted that attempts to divide blacks into any kind of [economically defined] social classes is invalid, as the shared experience of racial oppression has rendered the concept of class

irrelevant to blacks. Others point to the differences between blacks and whites in the factors that constitute membership in the middle class with such variables as occupation and income having different significance for different populations. [. . .] Class models developed on the experience of whites are not always accurate for analyzing stratification within the black community [. . .]²

McDermott presents a situation in which black strata would differ from similar white strata with respect to non-economic factors. Similarly, Benjamin Bowser offers a sociological model on race that both explains the cultural structure of race *and* places this structure in the context of continued economic difficulties faced by significant numbers of African Americans. At the outset, Bowser stresses the need to examine two distinct sides of the issues surrounding the creation and maintenance of a middle class that includes all races *and* why, at the same time, issues that define a black middle class are *not* always comparable to those that define a white middle class. Bowser's study places the black bourgeoisie in America in a historical perspective. Bowser stresses the importance of a binary focus.

[. . .] It is important to ask the same questions about the emergence and vulnerability of the middle class for both blacks and whites and then to compare the two. We need to know what sustains the white middle class and what factors would indicate its decline. And we need to know whether the answers to these questions are the same for blacks. Is the ability of the black middle class to sustain itself based upon dynamics that are the same of different from those for whites?³

With respect to the Bailey *Dolly!*, it is important to note how this phase shift of the difference between black and white middle class values comes into play. We would need to determine whether putting Pearl Bailey, Cab Calloway, and their African-American cohorts into 1890s finery serves the purpose of addressing the problem of racial bias by eliminating cultural differences. We need to discern whether the addition of such opulence makes the African-American company of *Hello, Dolly!* effective in this task.

Bowser furthermore suggests that this invention of race as a means of oppression cannot be considered merely in economic terms. Instead, Bowser's sociological model on race involves the comparison between horizontal and vertical stratification. Put simply, horizontal stratification takes an approach to class based on Marx, defining class in terms of economic status. In contrast, vertical stratification takes Weber's view, who described class as a shared set of cultural attributes. These two contrasting views of social stratification can work hand-in-hand for mutual reinforcement. Each view, however, offers a contrasting image of social stratification.

The classic example of Weber's view of class came in Weber's own comparison of Protestants in the north of Germany with Catholics in the south of Germany. Weber believed that the Protestants in the north of Germany enjoyed greater economic success than their Catholic counterparts in the south because Protestant culture – what Weber called the “Protestant ethic” – promoted capitalistic risk, resulting in the accumulation of wealth. In contrast, Catholic culture of the era displayed a mistrust of commerce. To Weber, this commonality of shared culture trumped any commonality of economic status. Interpreting Weber, Bowser comments, “People form social groups where they have common social affiliations, which can be based on *levels of prestige* [italics added], specific lifestyles, or property ownership.”⁴

Bowser makes particular mention of the first legal definitions of race emanating from the colonial-era legislatures in the colonies of Virginia and North Carolina in the early eighteenth century.⁵ With these legal definitions, the state conferred a *level of prestige* on white people of all economic strata which granted whites superior status to blacks. Thus, class commonality based on race became the more important definition of one's place in southern agrarian society. The creation of race as a conferring of prestige on poor white southerners served not only to subjugate the black slave population; it also served to bind the poor white southerner with her/his

white economic betters. Thus, the rising of a common proletariat against a cruel ruling class, as might have been predicted by Marx, would never happen in the American south.

Elsewhere in this study, we acknowledge that horizontal and vertical class barriers often worked in tandem to subjugate the African American in the centuries that preceded the civil rights movement. For the moment, it is important to clarify essential differences between horizontal (economic) versus vertical (social) class structure, especially in terms of movement between and among classes. Horizontal class structure deals with money; vertical class structure deals with social grouping or social identity. One can make a move in horizontal class by getting more money. This view thus begs the question of how one makes a move in vertical class. In other words, if one is a member of a subjugated vertical cultural group as defined here by skin color, what avenues are available for an individual to avoid the negative consequences of such group membership?

The symbolic mathematics of the situation offers interesting insights. A good comparison of the social versus economic axis exists in the latitude/longitude system used to designate locations on the world globe. Let's use rounded-off approximations for Chicago (40 N latitude, 90 W longitude), New York (40 N latitude, 75 W longitude), and New Orleans (30 N latitude, 90 W longitude). In this approximation, if one travels from Chicago to New York, one travels 15 degrees eastward along the parallel 40 N, which measures distance north of the Equator. If one travels from Chicago to New Orleans, one travels 10 degrees southward along the meridian 90 W, which measures distance west of Greenwich, UK. In other words, east-west travel involves movement along a line that measures north/south, and north-south travel involves movement along a line that measures east/west.

In a similar configuration, any economic class – for example, annual income between \$40,000 and \$50,000 per year – can be seen as a horizontal band, with band borders defined

along a vertical axis. While such bands based on income might be horizontal, movement along the income continuum happens vertically. In contrast, social classes – in particular in this instance, white versus non-white – can be seen as discrete vertical bands, with movement in a horizontal direction.

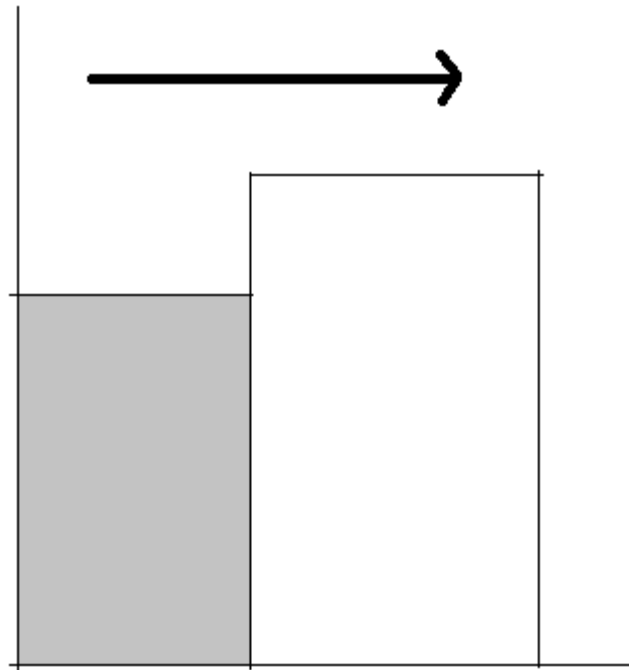


Figure I.1 – Weber-based Social Structures

Figure I.1 provides a graphic representation of social class in the model of Weber. The grey vertical band represents non-whites, while the white vertical band, as one might expect, represents whites. Each class is represented by a vertical band. Thus, a sociologist like Bowser would call these social classes based on race “vertical.” This nomenclature is used *despite* the fact that movement in and out of is horizontal, as shown by the arrow.

In contrast, Figure I.2 provides a graphic representation of economic class model of Marx. In this representation, economic class (here, less than \$50,000 annual income (grey)

versus greater than \$50,000 annual income (white)) is represented as a horizontal band.

Movement between the classes is vertical, as shown by the arrow.

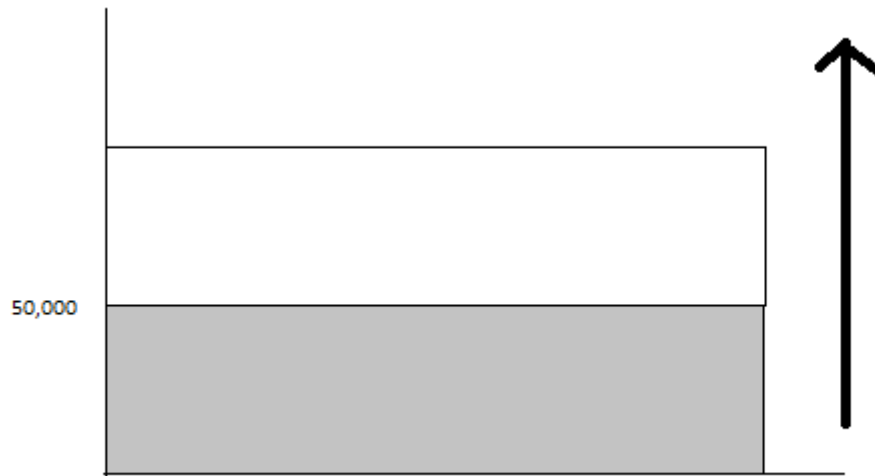


Figure I.2 – Marx-based Social Structures

It is important to note that although social class is represented by a vertical band, movement between social classes happens along a horizontal axis. Similarly, economic class is presented as a horizontal band, yet movement between economic classes happens along a vertical axis. Let us repeat this important mathematical concept – social class, represented by a vertical class band, moves along a horizontal axis while economic class, represented by a horizontal class band, moves along a vertical axis.

Possession of money or wealth, the variable that defines the vertical axis of the Marx model, can be seen as a continuum. The participant can possess various amounts of economic capital moving in a smooth, vertical motion when the money situation changes. This change occurs in a continuous, rather than discrete, manner. In contrast, movement involving a change in vertical social class band along a horizontal axis is more discrete (as opposed to continuous). No matter how close the individual might come in permeating the class barrier between white

and non-white, the class barrier remains, and is comparable to the old saw of being “a little pregnant.” As long as the class barrier remains, one either *is* or *is not* white. To change vertical position of one’s horizontal economic class, one merely needs to add money. To change horizontal position of one’s vertical economic class, one needs to either negotiate the class barrier *or* obliterate the barrier entirely.

Negotiating any class barrier based on race and skin color might involve avoiding the issue entirely. On such skin color issues, Amy Robinson, after an insightful discussion of “passing” (as white) as a performance issue, brings up the strange situation of Homer Plessy, the black man involved in the railroad-car occupancy case which the Supreme Court used to codify the “separate but equal” doctrine in American law in 1898. The case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, would entrench Jim Crow for at least another half century, until the civil rights efforts of the post-World War II era. Robinson casts Plessy’s act of defiance as performative. Robinson furthermore argues that it is this very performativity that allowed the Supreme Court to rule against Plessy, writing

Homer Plessy’s act of strategic passing, ironically dedicated to the demise of racial discrimination, was read by the Supreme Court as an act of appropriation, as an unqualified theft of an identity imagined as property – as that which is properly and privately owned by a “legitimate” white subject. The Supreme Court’s decision, while reprehensible and historically unforgivable, was by no means merely idiosyncratic; it was precisely in the name of identity *as* property that the Plessy case waged its battle against segregation and in the name of “natural” ownership that the Plessy claim was denied.⁶

Clearly, Robinson takes into account racial identity based on skin color as a negotiable commodity of significant economic value upon which the possessor could trade.

Because of his light skin color, Homer Plessy could have passed, thus personally negotiating the vertical barrier. However, Plessy's personal, if dubious, achievement provided no solace for his fellow African Americans. Barriers based on race remained in place.

Negotiating a class barrier based on race might also involve denying the effects of past mistreatment. Later in this chapter, we will compare the lives of African-American celebrities of the early civil rights movement like Nat "King" Cole with the lives of more recent African-American celebrities, such as Oprah Winfrey. One might contend that where Cole was "fighting the good fight" and deserves credit for the barriers he sought to tear down, Winfrey's biography glosses over any struggle. Rather, Winfrey's celebrity is based on what Knowles describes as a sugar-coating of the difficulties Winfrey faced having been brought up in a racist, impoverished situation in the American south. Even if one were to find fault with Knowles's analysis, one still might conclude that Winfrey's success, like Plessy's potential success in fooling the white train conductor into thinking that he (Plessy) was white, does nothing to break down barriers.

In these examples, we can see that negotiating a class barrier based on race implies that the class barrier will remain in effect. The alternative to such negotiation would be to make efforts to obliterate the class barrier entirely. Such attempts at obliteration might be seen on a continuum. At one end of this continuum lie efforts based on white cooperation. On the other, obliteration of the race/class barrier is based on efforts based on either confrontation with or avoidance of the white hegemony. At the most extreme circumstance for the "cooperative" ethic, one imagines the black person who takes on white cultural attributes. Examples such as W.E.B. DuBois's "talented tenth," as discussed later in this study, might fit this rubric. In this "talented tenth," the problem of breaking the race-based class barrier is framed in a rubric in which black culture is seen as inferior almost by definition. In this "cooperative" frame of reference, one might also think of the slightly ridiculous example of the "Carlton" character on

the television show *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*. Carlton, in contrast to his hip-hop-infused cousin (the title character), would seem black in appearance only, celebrating his admiration for such white-culture icons as singer Tom Jones of “It’s Not Unusual” fame. At the other end of this continuum, the civil rights era would see the rise of separatist, confrontational responses to the cultural barrier based on race in the form of the politics of Malcolm X and Eldridge Cleaver, and the aesthetic response of adherents to the Black Arts Movement, each of which we will discuss later in this study.

At the center of the continuum lies the response imagined by those involved in the production of the all-black version of *Hello, Dolly!* This is a response that at once acknowledges that there are barriers to be torn down, yet seeks white cooperation in league with black assertion to achieve the tearing down of the barriers. Such a strategy offers both economic and social benefits to the black people involved. However, as blacks reap benefits from this approach, there remains lingering concern for how much “blackness” any black person might be ceding in exchange for such social and economic benefit.

Yet despite these potential negatives, Bowser’s model shows us how vertical versus horizontal class structures work both in contrast and comparison with one another. Other explorations of Marx versus Weber in terms of such class analysis offer similar twofold conclusions. For example, Reinhard Bendix writes, “Weber agrees that the economic and political solidarity of workers might overcome their initial fragmentation of issues. But solidarity of this kind is weakened by religious or ethnic differences.”⁷ In addition, Eric Olin Wright complains of Weber’s near ignorance of the concept of economic exploitation, yet acknowledges that Weber realized the interconnection between class based on culture and class based on economics. Wright writes

The problem of exploitation – the extraction of labor effort from workers – is treated [. . . by Weber] primarily as a problem of technical efficiency and economic rationality in creating work incentives and effective discipline. This conceptualization leads to a relatively impoverished understanding of the nature of antagonistic interests generated by class relations.⁸

Yet Wright acknowledges that Weber, at least early on in his career, was aware of the interplay between a Marxian sense of class and economic exploitation. Wright continues, writing, “Much of [. . . Weber’s early] work, especially the work on slavery in ancient civilizations, has a decidedly Marxian inflection.”⁹ It would seem, by both Wright *and* Bowser, that it is impossible to deny the interconnectedness of social and economic issues as concerns class analysis.

Bowser sees the racial component of class structure as greater than the sum of any vertical or horizontal class structure. He argues,

What neither Marx nor Weber could have anticipated was how important race was to the development of class outside Europe in the United States [. . .] They could not have known how race could be used to obscure who benefits most and is most privileged by [. . .] capitalism [. . .].¹⁰

Thus, Bowser has defined the terms of class structure as it applied to race. Unlike poor English settlers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries or the European immigrants who would follow in the nineteenth century, enslaved African Americans faced a near-impervious barrier created by the white hegemony based on racial classification which would prevent advancement based on intrinsic worth, Weber’s standard of vertical class structure. This impervious barrier can be seen in the history of American entertainment, from minstrelsy of the nineteenth century through much of the twentieth century through the end of World War II. Never mind the quality of the performer’s contribution – if the performer were black, this automatically limited in the kinds of performances in which the performer could engage. It would seem that it was the intent

of all concerned with the creation of the Bailey *Dolly!* to counteract this old presumption of limiting roles available for black performers.

Bowser does not discount the economic (as compared to sociological) nature of racism. In discussing the economic tenets of African-American slavery in the Americas, Bowser at once affirms Karl Marx's economic definition of class and at least mildly diminishes the importance of nineteenth century sociologist Max Weber's shared-cultural-attributes definition of class. Bowser writes, "[. . . S]lavery was an even more complete system of exploitation than Marx had imagined. Slaves received no wages and thus were totally exploited. Furthermore, a person's intrinsic worth and merit, as in Weber's view, did not determine whether he or she was slave or free."¹¹ Furthermore, argues Bowser, the economic consequences of racism did not disappear once slavery was abolished. "One of the by-products of Jim Crow," writes Bowser, "was the diminishing of black social classes in comparison to whites."¹² Bowser describes what might be seen as a "phase shift" that places, for example, the upper economic crust of Black America at the same level as upper-middle-class whites, middle-class blacks on the same level as working-class whites, and so forth. Bowser bases such analysis on measurements of long-term wealth versus immediate income.

The issue that Bowser would seem to ignore, or at least not completely explore, is that of relative permeability of vertical class structures. De Tocqueville offered a vision of America as a place where anyone – in particular, anyone of European heritage – could reinvent one's situation with a relative lack of obstacle. This vision played itself out with relative success among European immigrant populations of the nineteenth century. It is acknowledged fully that African Americans did *not* enjoy such opportunity, the result of entrenched racial barriers. It would therefore seem to be necessary to separate permeability as a distinct variable here. In other words, the fact the race in Bowser's America is a more complete barrier than religion (Catholic

versus Protestant) in Weber's Europe does not negate the possibility of viewing race as a possibly permeable vertical class structure.

We shall see in the civil-rights era that follows World War II, the permeability of the vertical race barrier is *not* absolute. As such, we must be flexible in interpreting Weber's vision of vertical, shared-cultural-norm class structure as it applies to the relative impermeability of race as a barrier in America. Such is the nature of the civil rights struggle that would follow World War II. This struggle would seek to cross barriers that had once seemed impervious to change. Crossing these barriers of vertical class structure would seem to lay at the heart of the social change the Bailey *Dolly!* attempted to accomplish.

Thomas J. Sugrue would seem to concur in Bowser's assessment of vertical class structure issues informing the mid-twentieth century civil rights struggle. Sugrue begins his analysis of changes in the American racial landscape with a reference to W.E.B. DuBois's concept of a "talented tenth:" "the highly educated, deeply religious, and well-connected black men and women who saw their mission as uplifting the race."¹³ In this instance, Sugrue would seem to echo Bowser in terms of the importance of vertical class structure as critically important to the genesis of the civil rights movement. Sugrue notes a shared cultural dimension that could be seen as paramount among upper-crust black women during the twentieth-century civil rights struggle. Such women would engage in social activities, creating what Sugrue calls "an extraordinary base of sororities and clubs."¹⁴ Sugrue continues, writing

As much as clubwomen liked to don their fine dresses, hats, and gloves, they were motivated by a higher purpose, a deep sense of responsibility toward their disadvantaged sisters. As "race women," they had a twofold duty: first, to embody the very virtues that whites believed were inherently lacking in black culture, and, second, to instill those virtues in the downtrodden.¹⁵

It should be noted that attention paid by these upper-crust black women to “the very virtues that whites believed were inherently lacking in black culture” raises the specter of whites controlling the terms of black advancement. This stress on the part of bourgeois African Americans to impose their values on their lower-class brethren would continue. At once, this imposition of values could be seen as a positive effort to improve the lives of impoverished African Americans. More critically, however, the imposition could be seen as the foisting of a white value system and an extension of slavery mores on now technically free blacks.

At the height of the post-World War II effort to secure civil rights for African Americans, Sugrue describes a change in tone in the NAACP from grassroots activism to bourgeois gentility, as perhaps reflected in the milieu offered by *Hello, Dolly!* The militancy once perhaps prevalent on the part of those seeking racial parity would give way to bourgeois politeness. Arguably, this change in tactics could be seen as amplifying the idea that a quasi-Marxist political approach to black issues needed to give way to a Weber-style focus on potentially shared bourgeois values. To amplify this change of focus on the part of African-American leadership through the civil-rights era, Sugrue argues, “[. . . O]nce militant NAACP chapters became havens of middle-class respectability whose members put most of their energy into fund-raising. Tea parties, dances, and fashion shows became the public face of many branches.”¹⁶

Both Bowser and Sugrue offer potent evidence to the idea that race subjugation owes much of its animus to vertical rather than horizontal class issues – that shared cultural norms are perhaps more important to the maintenance and destruction of racial barriers as economic considerations. Carolyn Knowles would seem to concur as well, offering that “[. . .] Whiteness [. . .] is made in performance. Examples of performance of whiteness are codified in social etiquette and rituals [. . .] Of more interest are the performances *undermining* [italics sic] social boundaries and racial categories [. . .]”¹⁷ The key point that Knowles would seem to make here

is that cultural practices often define, limit, and maintain class behaviors and expectations. Such cultural issues inform the Bailey *Dolly!* with respect to its transformative effect on racial practices on the Broadway stage.

White Privilege/White Cooperation/White Condescension

Until the civil rights era of the mid-twentieth century, any treatment of African Americans by the white hegemony that even approached fairness depended on the maintenance of racial barriers. These barriers created a level of privilege for white Americans that, perhaps until recently, African Americans had never enjoyed. Knowles describes this privilege of whiteness as, “[. . .]like other racial categories, [. . . an entity] manufactured through a series of overlapping social processes on the shifting sands of the political landscape [. . .]”¹⁸

Breaking down such white privilege must be seen as a highly complex process, one in which the principals of the Bailey *Dolly!* would attempt to engage. On the white side of the divide, in order for the Bailey *Dolly!* to succeed in dismantling previously held privilege, whites involved in the production needed to show complete respect and faith in the abilities of the black performing staff and create a stage environment in which the black performer could garner the same accolades, both artistic and financial, as a similarly situated white performer. Nevertheless, any attempt to achieve this kind of fairness for African Americans could be presented in terms of two extremes: negotiating the racial divide in a cooperative manner on one hand, or opting for separate existences for blacks and whites on the other. In these separate existences, black complaint coupled with white denial would seem to maintain a tense status quo. Knowles offers an interesting observation on this strained equilibrium. While acknowledging that “[. . .] White folk have the most to give up and a great deal of the past for which to make amends,” Knowles

would seem to give tacit endorsement to the positive purpose of finding practical results in the privilege renegotiation. “[. . .]It is not until we acknowledge this [racial divide] and do something about it in practical and material, rather than theoretical, terms that the present can be transformed and we can begin a reckoning with the past. Black and ethnic minorities have been telling us this for years. It is time we listened and acted.”¹⁹ In its all-black nature, the Bailey *Dolly!* would seem to have been taking steps to deal with the divide in such a “practical and material” manner.

The motivation for black people, especially in the civil rights era, to be involved in any effort to neutralize the effects of white privilege and attempted bourgeois entrée would seem obvious and self-explanatory – moving past the misery and suffering of slavery and Jim Crow. For whites, the issues are not quite as cut and dry, and often not as humanitarian. As Susan Curtis comments, “One can point to any number of artistic achievements that represent the combined efforts of blacks and whites, but joint efforts do not necessarily mean that all contributors will receive the same recognition for their parts in the whole.”²⁰ Such lack of recognition of the value of African-American contribution would plague the entertainment industry in general, and, as we will discover, commercial American musical theatre in particular. To a great extent, the accolades we will see concerning Pearl Bailey and *Hello, Dolly!* can be interpreted as countering such lack of recognition.

And so, African Americans of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, burdened with vertical class structures that made bourgeois entrée difficult, would attempt to eradicate such structures. Often, such attempts were accompanied by white cooperation of varying degrees and effects. To describe the mixed motives of such white philanthropists in the early twentieth century, Knowles uses a term coined by Zora Neale Hurston for white race liberals: “Negrotarians – business liberals like Albert Barnes, Otto Kahn, Horace Liveright, and Florenz

Zeigfeld – [who] combined noble sentiments with keen market analysis.”²¹ Knowles provides further observation on what was perhaps the crassly capitalist motivation of such race liberals.

While most Negrotarians were enormously pleased merely to socialize and patronize, the composers, critics, editors, impresarios, and publishers were more calculating and discerning in their Afro-Americans contacts. The Knopf New Year’s party that Langston Hughes excitedly described [. . .] was, for all its interracial glow, an experiment in enlightened professional self-interest. [. . .] Afro-American material could yield handsome returns.²²

Whether such capitalist motivation is a plus or a minus in the transaction on privilege is, of course, a matter of political perspective. Nevertheless, the keen observer must acknowledge that Knowles presents a multifaceted picture of early-twentieth century white race liberals as having less than humanitarian motivation for any change in race relations which complicates any analysis of black/white interaction. Taken one step further, one might deduce that such less-than-high-minded “Negrotarians” might have sought to exploit the talents of their black cohorts for self-aggrandizing personal gain.

In muted support of Knowles on this issue, David Levering Lewis reports that “[t]he motives of WASP philanthropy [in the early part of the twentieth century] were an amalgam of inherited abolitionism, Christian charity and guilt, social manipulation, political eccentricity, and a certain amount of persiflage.”²³ While a mild improvement over Knowles’s depiction of nearly raw, uncontained capitalism, Lewis’s description adds a dimension of condescension to the mix. Thus, the negotiation over racial privilege would seem to provide the opportunity for whites involved to gain prestige, moral superiority, and even some entertainment value.

Those behind the Bailey *Dolly!*, of course, would likely argue that their acknowledged otherwise capitalist motivations behind the production were more pure and beneficial than those described so far on the part of these “Negrotarians.” Some excellent specific examples exist in the history of American race relations to back up such a claim. Certainly, the era that surrounded

and followed World War II had its moments of triumph on the part of white race liberals. As an icon of this era, Eleanor Roosevelt would lead the way in 1939 by resigning from the Daughters of the American Revolution for their refusal to allow black opera star Marian Anderson to sing at Constitution Hall, thus becoming a member of “the small pantheon of whites, including Abraham Lincoln, whom nearly every black admired.”²⁴ Roosevelt’s protest of the DAR showed her support of the idea that a competent and talented adult like Marian Anderson had the right to fair and dignified treatment.

In a similar time frame, Roosevelt’s husband, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, found himself embroiled in his own difficulties surrounding the politics of race. During the 1940 election cycle and in contrast to Roosevelt, FDR’s Republican opponent Wendell Wilkie attempted to outflank FDR on the issue of racial integration. Attempting to be re-elected to an unprecedented third term, FDR found himself attempting to maintain this coalition between racist southerners and northern labor interests. In the process, Roosevelt found himself outflanked on race issues by his racially progressive Republican opponent Wendell Wilkie. In a position paper on race, Wilkie explained the need for immediate action against recalcitrant southern racism of the Jim Crow variety. A brief excerpt of this position paper reads

[. . . W]e had best start now to educate the South. That education cannot be left to well-meaning but numerically weak civilian organizations. Government itself should take over-and vigorously. After all, Washington is the place where the conductor comes through every South-bound train and says, “Colored people, change to the Jim Crow car ahead.”

That car, in these days and times, has no business being “ahead.” War’s freedom train can hardly trail along with glory behind a Jim Crow coach. No matter how streamlined the other cars may be, that coach endangers all humanity’s hopes for a peaceful tomorrow.²⁵

Wilkie would represent the last Republican presidential nominee devoted to the idea that the Republicans were in fact the “Party of Lincoln,” the president who freed the slaves. Though this Republican stance on race would change after the civil-rights era, Wilkie’s dedication to racial fairness provides a fine example of positive white cooperation with the interests of African Americans.

The life story of Philip Rose, the producer of Lorraine Hansbury’s ground-breaking Broadway play *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959), provides another example, like that of Eleanor Roosevelt and Wendell Wilkie, of a well-intentioned white person involved in racial reconciliation enjoying some level of success. Rose’s experience would demonstrate the potential for optimism for the achievement of full adult citizenship for the African American, contrasted with a pragmatic realization on Rose’s part of the obstacles involved in achieving such a goal. At the outset of his observations, Rose displays an apparent optimism on the future of American race relations among race liberals in the post-war era. Rose describes an effort to procure employment at a camp in the summer of 1949, writing

[. . .] What distinguished this camp from the others was that black families were as welcome as whites, making it almost unique among the famous Catskill resorts, as well as less expensive. Its openness carried over into the camp’s personnel, including the waiters and waitresses, the cleanup crews, the entertainment staff, and just generally the faces to be seen around the grounds.²⁶

Presumably, these “faces” included black ones. Rose’s description shows the hope for which white people of good will yearned in the post-war era. Yet once he would begin his attempt to produce a black-informed Broadway play, Rose would face some hard and fast realities concerning how difficult it would be to change attitudes on race in America. When he set forth on his objective to produce *A Raisin in the Sun*, Rose described the many hardships he faced in the racial environment that was 1950s Broadway. These hardships included finding experienced

black acting talent, willing investors, and bourgeois audiences of any race that could support such an enterprise. “If the play did manage to attract black audiences,” Rose wrote, “wouldn’t that scare away the white audience whose attendance was essential for the play’s success?”²⁷

Rose further worried about being able to find a theatre owner willing to rent to his company.

Rose comments on the long odds of success for Hansbury and himself, writing

[. . . T]he play could easily be dismissed or ignored in view of the following additional irrefutable facts: this was a new play, a serious play, but by a woman, a young black woman with no apparent writing credits. And who supposedly was going to produce the play? A young white man, a struggling singer who had absolutely no producing credentials, apparent or otherwise: “Forget the names Lorraine Hansberry or Phillip Rose. You’ll never hear them again.”²⁸

Certainly, Rose’s description reflects how race relations in the Broadway theatre have evolved since that time frame. And Rose’s self-described “naivete and ignorance” ultimately would provide for fine legend-making and a satisfying ending for Hansbury’s playwriting effort.

Unfortunately, these qualities did not necessarily compose the complete reality of race relations in the post-war era.

One must also add to the equation of white interaction with African Americans the issue of white control of the negotiation process. In her volume dealing with stories of white women’s involvement in the civil rights movement in the American south, Gail S. Murray points to how these white women would set the terms of the negotiation. Of particular interest in Murray’s introduction is the story of how the white Jessie Daniel Ames refused to join African-American journalist Ida B. Wells-Barnett’s bi-racial coalition formed to fight lynching in the south in 1930.

In describing Ames’s motivation, Murray writes,

[Ames] employed a strategy designed to appeal to white women’s sense of Christian brotherhood and justice without raising the specter of racial equality, thus winning support for her cause from thousands of white women who would have rejected membership

in any interracial organization. By seeking out church-women in small towns and rural settings, she extended racial awareness more broadly than could more urban-based organizations like the YWCA.²⁹

The Ames/Wells-Barnett anecdote points to the question of whether a bi-racial effort can be more effective than a whites-only one. Murray's volume goes on to tell about the not unreasonable fear on the part of black women involved in education improvement for black children in South Carolina. The black women feared that philanthropic white women were involved in the effort only because they sought to hire better-trained servants.³⁰

Attempts to break down race barriers based in white privilege informed the post-World-War-II civil rights movement. White cooperation, for good or ill, often accompanied such attempts. While white condescension often accompanied such cooperation, one could take heart in the examples of Eleanor Roosevelt, Wendell Wilkie, and Philip Rose. While difficult, white cooperation with the legitimate aspirations of black empowerment was *not* impossible. Such cooperation would be the defining ethos behind the creation of the Bailey *Dolly*!

Bucklin Moon and Adult Treatment

A significant and legitimate response to white condescension – especially the kind we saw in the “better trained servants” episode – was described by Bucklin Moon³¹ in the volume *Primer for White Folks*. In the mid-1940s, approximately in the time-frame of the end of World War II, Moon put together a volume of articles and essays describing ideals envisioned by black people seeking racial cooperation. Moderate in tone, Moon's introduction to the volume provides a critical connection between the African American and a critical desire for treatment as an adult member of the larger community. Moon writes

Primer for White Folks was conceived, not as a book for the expert in race relations, but rather for the average American who is disturbed by the rising racial tension which he feels around him and by the paradox of white and Negro relationships in a democracy waging a war of liberation and equality [presumably a reference to World War II]. [. . .] It is an attempt to present a picture of the Negro – his backgrounds, his relationship with whites, his everyday denial of first-class citizenship, and what he really wants in American life.³²

This explanation demonstrates the desire on the part of the African American for “first-class citizenship.” Lack of such “first-class” treatment could be seen in many of the stories and essays in the *Moon* volume. In particular, Dorothy Parker’s story “Display in Black and White” in the *Moon* collection engages in a daring sense of cynicism and crass reality in dealing with white condescension.³³ The story deals with an unnamed white society matron who attends a party in honor of the fictional Walter Williams, a black singer who would seem perhaps to be a prototype for Paul Robeson. This matron engages in truly vile acts of verbal condescension towards Williams in particular and African Americans in general. For example, in discussing the racial attitudes of her southern husband Burton, the matron remarks,

“[. . .] He’s really awfully fond of colored people. Well, he says himself he wouldn’t have white servants. And you know, he had this old colored nurse, this regular old nigger mammy, and he just simply loves her. Why, every time he goes home, he goes out in the kitchen to see her. He does, really, to this day. All he says is, he says he hasn’t got a word to say against colored people as long as they keep their place. He’s always doing things for them-giving them clothes and I don’t know what all. The only thing he says, he say he wouldn’t sit down at the table with one for a million dollars. [. . .]”³⁴

The matron in Parker’s story soon begins to reveal her own attitudes on race. If nothing else, the matron finds African Americans a source of throwaway entertainment. “They’re just like children – just as easygoing, and always singing and laughing and everything,” says the matron. “Aren’t they the happiest things you ever saw in your life?”³⁵ In her praise of

these apparent childlike qualities, the matron denies the African American a shred of adult dignity.

The criteria for full, adult citizenship in the plotlines of the stories presented in the Moon text were not always particularly complex. In these stories, such citizenship could present itself as the acceptance of simple social equality of the races. One story in the collection, Shirley Jackson's "After You, Alphonse," demonstrates just such a reality. "Alphonse" tells the story of two boys, one white and one black, who play together as the mother of the white boy announces it is lunch time. Before lunch, the boys play games of pretense that are typical of the era.

"Johnny," she called, "you're late. Come in and get your lunch."
"Just a minute, Mother," Johnny said. "After you, my dear Alphonse."
"After *you*, my dear Alphonse," another voice said.
"No, after *you*, my dear Alphonse," Johnny said. Mrs. Wilson opened the door. "Johnny," she said, "Johnny," she said, "you come in this minute and get your lunch. You can play after you've eaten."³⁶

As the liberation of France in World War II remained newsworthy in the time-frame of the story, the title game would seem to refer to the stereotype of French manners and politeness. The story becomes more fraught with tension when Mrs. Wilson, the mother of Johnny, the white boy, begins to discuss the employment situation of the parents of the black child, Boyd. This interchange is instigated by Boyd's refusal to eat the stewed tomatoes that Johnny's mother offers him. Mrs. Wilson attempts to provoke guilt on Boyd's part, telling him that he won't grow up to be strong enough to work in the factory, presumably like his father. "Boyd's father doesn't have to," replies Johnny. "He's a foreman."³⁷ With these three little words – "He's a foreman" – the condescending, if perhaps charitable, white woman's view of black people as by definition pitiable and automatically in need of charity is shot to pieces. Insult is added to injury from Mrs. Wilson's perspective when the subject of Boyd's mother comes up. It turns out that rather than having to work outside the home, presumably as a domestic servant, Mrs. Wilson

discovers that Boyd has a stay-at-home mother just like Johnny. Further insult is added to Mrs. Wilson's zone of privilege when Boyd begs off from Mrs. Wilson's kind yet condescending offer of used clothing.

At the end of the story, Boyd and Johnny compare notes on Mrs. Wilson.

"After you, my dear Alphonse," Johnny said, holding the door open. "Is your mother still mad?" Mrs. Wilson heard Boyd ask in a low voice.

"I don't know," Johnny said. "She's screwy sometimes." "So's mine," Boyd said. He hesitated. "After *you*, my dear Alphonse."

In dealing with black/white relations in America, it often is easy to assume that there are no universals or points of commonality. Enter Boyd and Johnny, whose interactions, especially this final one, show us that there *are* points in which blacks and whites, seemingly in constant conflict, find commonality. The trope of the "crazy mother" shows through here, giving the boys a moment in which they are co-conspirators in an archetypal battle between children and parents.

An important theme in the Jackson story is a sense of control of black fortunes by what Zora Neale Hurston described earlier as "Negrotarians" – the economically comfortable white people possessed of a variety of motivations to befriend and offer aid the African American. Lewis describes these motivations among white people attracted to the Harlem Renaissance of the 1930s, writing

There were many motives animating [such] Negrotarians. Some [. . .] were drawn to Harlem on the way to Paris because it seemed to answer need for personal nourishment and to confirm their vision of cultural salvation coming from the margins of civilization. Some expected the great renewal in the form of a Political revolution and [. . .] anticipated that the Afro-Americans perceived lack of cultural assimilation from a liability into a state of grace. [Many] were possessed by that wistful urge Sherwood Anderson wrote of to [H. L.] Mencken: "Damn it, man, if I could really get inside the niggers and write about them with some intelligence, I'd be willing to be hanged later and perhaps would be." It was a standard white lament of the era [. . .]³⁸

Offering both comparison and contrast, Woodie King, Jr., provides a description of what he sees as a sinister conspiracy among rich white people to control black intellectual life in this period, thus denying the African American full adult treatment. King writes

From the so-called Harlem Renaissance through World War II [black] artists had patrons. The patrons were wealthy white people who loved the primitive nature of [b]lacks who were artists. It was impossible to exist during that time without a patron. But [. . .] these patrons represented another form of slavery. They controlled the writings of these artists as well as their bankbooks.³⁹

In dealing with the condescending aid and comfort offered at the hand of such “Negrotarians,” the sad, typical truth of the situation was that the African American would often be forced to relinquish control of her/his destiny, based not only in economic realities but in the kinds of Weberian social structures that enforce racial privilege. Here, the African American has lost the power of self-actualization at the expense of her/his dignity. The post-World War II civil rights movement would deal with attempt to regain such dignity. The Bailey *Dolly!* would reflect this attempt to the extent this attempt was successful in the 1960s.

As argued earlier in this study, the “Negrotarian” dilemma operates in a situation in which economic oppression, though perhaps tacitly operating in the background, is *not* the overriding issue. Leonard Wallace Robinson’s story “Trouble Keeping Quiet,” also featured in the Moon text, trades in a more working-class milieu than the Parker and Jackson stories. In such a story, economic issues might be expected to come to the fore. “Trouble” tells the story of two black dock workers, one older and one younger, who are walking to the subway in New York City after a hard overnight shift of work and a short session of drinking after work. They are out of cigarettes and decide that the older one will be responsible for replenishing their supply of tobacco. Given race realities of the era, this could be a daunting task. The younger one describes the recent encounter of a friend attempting to get service at a public

accommodation, saying, “I wouldn’t go in for nothin’ [. . .] Charley Oakes went in one place like that on Forty-second Street last week and he said that counterman like to throw that food at him. Charley says never again, it’s too much trouble not sayin’ anything.”⁴⁰ Returning a moment to the aforementioned Marx/Weber dichotomy, if Marx were to have held sway, Charley Oaks and the counterman on Forty-second Street would have found commonality in economic oppression. Instead, vertical structures enforcing racial superiority came to the forefront.

Anticipating such a troublesome encounter yet trying to avoid difficulty, the older man enters a restaurant hoping to find a working cigarette machine. Robinson creates significant dramatic tension in letting the encounter between the counterman and the older dock worker proceed without incident. Even more to its credit, the dock worker’s encounter with the counterman turns out to be rather pleasant, in contrast to the humiliation encountered by the unfortunate Charley Oakes.

The Parker story in the Moon volume certainly demonstrated the problems faced by black people at the hand of white people who refused to accept black people as more than mere entertainment. In contrast, and much like the Bailey *Dolly!* that would follow twenty years up the road, stories like those written by Jackson and Robinson presented in the Moon volume offered American society, both black and white, the opportunity to see what the world would look like given the acceptance of African Americans as full adult citizens. As with the examples from later in this chapter, we see in these stories from the Moon volume although black/white cooperation presents its difficulties, such cooperation remains possible to envision. Again, the Bailey *Dolly!* aspired to such cooperation.

Fitful Attempts to Break Down Barriers

Moon's stories of the civil rights struggle show satisfying instances in which the attempt on the part of African Americans to gain full adult treatment is taken seriously. Nevertheless, such instances need to be contrasted with cynical sidebars that demonstrated continued obstacles in the period following World War II for black achievement of full adult citizenship. Sugrue describes the breakthrough in professional baseball when the Brooklyn Dodgers hired Jackie Robinson. After describing Robinson's service as the target of racial epithets from white fans in Philadelphia, Sugrue writes of how

[. . .] baseball officials and most of the press rallied around Robinson, portraying him as the exemplar of a post-racial America. By the time of his retirement in 1957, Robinson had become a celebrity whose personal life was fodder for the black press and whose compelling story of triumph over racial injustice turned him into the white media's feel-good example of America's changing racial order. But Robinson's breakthrough, however celebrated, was largely symbolic. It would take much more than a handful of black sports heroes to transform race relations in postwar America.⁴¹

Here, Sugrue raises the ugly spectre of tokenism, the practice of providing a "feel good" example which has little effect on the larger picture.

Another case of a cynical sidebar to a heroic example in post-World War II race relations lies in the story of Rosa Parks's refusal to give up her seat on an Alabama bus in 1955. As recently as November 2009, *The New York Times* reported that at least two teenagers, each deemed insufficiently media-genic, attempted to challenge still-existing public accommodations laws in Alabama. One, Mary Louise Smith, was deemed a poor choice because of her father's alleged alcoholism.⁴² The more prominent case involved Claudette Colvin, a teenager at the time whose attempt to end Jim Crow treatment on public busses led to her arrest months before either

Parks or Smith. Despite the fact that her internment included the indignity of arresting officers trying to guess the size of her bra, Colvin was deemed by civil rights professionals as too “mouthy,” “emotional,” and “feisty” to be the ideal candidate for trailblazer.⁴³ In comparison, Rosa Parks presented a more sanitized image, an image more tolerable to white people. Apparently, these civil rights professionals believed that even tolerant and good-willed whites put limits on their race-boosting.

Race would always matter to Claudette Colvin. But more to the point of daily living perhaps than the Colvin incident is a simple story of a desire on the part of many African Americans to have race simply not matter. Sugrue writes, “At a Philadelphia gig in the early 1960’s, black comedian Jackie ‘Moms’ Mabley turned her experience of the glowering stares of white patrons in a fancy restaurant into a comic indictment of white racism: ‘I don’t want to go to school with any of you. I just want a piece of cheesecake.’”⁴⁴ Such an attempt on Mabley’s part to de-politicize the often-cruel politics of race could be seen as a tempting alternative to confrontation.

This era immediately following World War II showed incremental progress in attempts by African Americans to achieve full adult citizenship. Yet in examples like those of Rosa Parks/Claudette Colvin, Jackie Robinson, and Jackie “Moms” Mabley, we see little in the way of direct response to the economic deprivation endured by African Americans. Rather, these instances had more to do with the Bowser/Weber model of racial barriers based on cultural attributes. “Moms” Mabley didn’t encounter difficulty in getting her piece of cheesecake because she didn’t have the means to pay for it; the denial was based in the expectation that someone of her skin color should not be given service in a fancy Philadelphia restaurant. This expectation is not directly related to economic issues. It is based in a culture that denies prestige to African Americans.

Skin-color expectation, like Mabley and the “cheesecake” incident, informed the Bailey *Dolly!* as well. Before Bailey, one expected Dolly Levi to be white. After all, it would be difficult to situate bourgeois African Americans in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Yonkers, New York, without a complete reconsideration of privilege based on race.

Bourgeois Entrée and Imperfect Progress

Mabley’s desire simply to enjoy an unencumbered piece of cheesecake could serve as a metaphor for black inclusion in typical bourgeois activity that had heretofore been reserved for whites only. The choice to include African Americans in a previously whites-only enterprise – as stars in a musical that had been envisioned in a Euro-centric milieu – would inform the trajectory of the Bailey *Dolly!* David Merrick’s attempt at a solution in 1967 was, in fact, an effort that placed an all-black cast into a situation redolent of bourgeois gentility, a privilege previously reserved for whites only.

Andrew Wiese describes a similar situation, not unfamiliar in the post-civil-rights era. Wiese writes,

Spring sunlight dapples onto lawns of Melbenan Drive in west suburban Atlanta. Two dozen brick homes sit back from the street; behind them wooden decks and living-room windows open onto an expanse of pine trees. Residents returning from work swing European sedans through brick gateposts and step from their cars in polished shoes and business attire. They walk to their front doors past azaleas, sculptured evergreens, and magnolias in blossom.⁴⁵

As one might imagine, Wiese describes a black upper-middle-class venue in suburban Atlanta. In considering the Bailey *Dolly!* and its status as an entry point for black middle-class aspirations in the civil rights era, it is important to consider the long, rich, and often contradictory history of

attempts of African Americans to reach the goal of vertical (and perhaps, as a result, horizontal) class-parity with white America. Bowser, for example, associates the presence of a black middle class to the assuaging of white guilt. Bowser comments, “By having a black middle-class, there is the impression that all is normal and progressing well: the American dream exists – even for blacks.”⁴⁶

Despite already described difficulties, this race barrier would prove not completely impervious and progress could be made by blacks adopting tenets of bourgeois aspiration. The end of World War II and the post-civil rights era would see an expansion of black middle class opportunities. For example, Wiese writes, “[. . . T]he 1970s and 1980s [. . .] witnessed the rise of a ‘new black middle class,’ rooted in comfortable outer city and suburban neighborhoods. Supported by gains in civil rights, college-educated African Americans moved upward in step with their white peers. By 1998, more than a third of black households earned more than the national median of \$35,000, and 12 percent earned more than \$50,000, a jump from just 4 percent in 1980.”⁴⁷ Yet Bowser treats what he calls this post-civil-rights-era “diversity” black middle class which would follow in the ashes of Jim Crow with some disdain. “When and if members of the [diversity] black middle class address racial inequality,” Bowser comments, “it is out of race consciousness, not because of their social class.”⁴⁸ Bowser would seem to envision a struggle among African Americans that considers both race and economic status as necessary to progress for African Americans.

At the heart of this disdain for contemporary black middle classes on the part of numerous commentators lies a mistrust of buying into the consumerist American ethic. This belief in consumerism as redemption would prove problematic. This consumerist ethic is well described by Wiese in his discussion of the history suburbanization among black people. For

example, in describing contemporary Prince George's County, Maryland, Wiese lays out the terms for the conundrum facing the contemporary African-American middle class, writing

In Upper Marlboro, the county seat, the cavernous buildings of the Marlboro Tobacco Market and the Planter's Tobacco Warehouse bespeak [. . .] its Jim Crow traditions: sharecropping, segregated schools, political exclusion, and police brutality. Just down the road is the neat county administration center, designed in the style of a suburban office park and presided over since 1994 by an African American chief executive.⁴⁹

Here, Wiese describes one version of the realization of the American dream for African Americans in suburban terms, along with its striking contradictions. Knowles describes a similar intra-African situation taken to horrifying extremes: the conversion of slave-trade-era Ghanian slave castles into discos and night clubs, an even more jarring contradiction.

In the early 1990s a group of African American pilgrim/tourists protest[ed] at the way in which Ghana has treated its former slave castles, once used as holding tanks for slaves awaiting transportation from Africa to the New World. To the local Ghanian population, not resettled by slave traders, the castles hold no special significance. Once serving as post offices, some were converted into night-clubs and discos, given a fresh coat of paint and bright lights. Are these castles shrines to slave-memories or nightclubs?⁵⁰

Despite its African, not American, venue, Knowles's description of insensitivity in the Ghanian-slave-castle anecdote rings true in a purely American context as well as a purely African context. Knowles's description here would seem to beg the question of whether even the most optimistic and well-intended portrayal of African Americans in popular entertainment, as might be found in a property like the Bailey *Dolly!*, could be interpreted insensitive to past mistreatment.

Furthermore, this anecdote begs the question of whether the breakdown of vertical race/class barriers inherently leads to a sense of insensitivity to any continuing struggle against racism.

On the other side of the dilemma lies the challenge of reforming the gross mistreatment African Americans faced throughout American history, the gauntlet thrust down to the post

World-War-II civil rights generation of African Americans to affect positive reform in such treatment. The terms and a striking visual image of this challenge can be seen in a mock “for rent” advertisement in a 1948 NAACP publication.

Ten-room house, at least 670 years of age, badly in need of repair and redecoration. House is cold in winter and hot in summer. Conveniently located near smoky factories, noisy railroad yards, and receives frequent fragrance from nearby stockyards. The neighborhood is highly deteriorated and is well supplied with all the factors that encourage crime and delinquency. Heavy truck traffic in area. No nearby playgrounds. Firetrap school house within walking distance. Best thing available for nice Negro family at exorbitant rent.⁵¹

In relating this clever if deeply sad quip, Wiese makes the implicit argument that the post-World-War-II struggle for fair treatment of African Americans, here in the arena of fair housing practices, displays a tradition of fighting for that which was formerly denied. Success here is measured in terms of bourgeois entrée, similar to the kind of entrée Bailey, Calloway, and company would seek in performing *Hello, Dolly!*

In a more concrete realm, Lewis describes the conversion of New York City’s Harlem neighborhood from (white/Jewish) suburbia to an African American enclave. Lewis describes how landlords would charge premium rents to African-American renters, thus causing such families to settle in Harlem. Lewis writes,

[. . .] Most resident owners found the lure of higher rents so attractive that they encouraged their tenants to move out. Some feigned regret, as a 1916 owner’s notice showed: “We have endeavored for some time to avoid turning over this house to colored tenants, but as a result of . . . rapid changes in conditions . . . this issue has been forced upon us.”⁵²

Lewis’s description of the unbridled exploitation of otherwise middle-class African Americans demonstrates the cruelty displayed by white property owners, playing one race cynically against the other for crude financial gain. Thus, this issue of inclusion must be seen not a mere matter of

crass bourgeois aspiration. Such race-based real estate wars of the twentieth century cannot be seen as the mere worship of shallow materialism. Rather, it is central to the day-to-day difficulties faced by African Americans in the post-World-War-II era and beyond. This issue of fair housing practices for bourgeois African Americans presents a paramount example of an issue that straddles the vertical/horizontal class discussion earlier in this chapter. Despite conforming to any cultural norms required to be part of a Weberian middle class, bourgeois African Americans are prevented from doing so merely on the basis of race, thus suffering economic oppression.

Sugrue takes us further by describing the controversy surrounding the development of the Levittown housing development in Pennsylvania along racial lines. “[The developer of Levittown] was unabashed in defending the racial homogeneity of his planned communities,” writes Sugrue. “‘We can solve a housing problem or we can try to solve a racial problem,’ he argued, ‘but we cannot combine the two.’”⁵³ This developer may have sought to turn a deaf ear to the fair and reasonable housing needs of post-World War II African Americans. Yet Sugrue refuses to let the developer off the moral hook, and explains the underlying significance of housing to the struggle for civil rights and inclusion in American society.

[. . .] Breaking open the housing market would provide blacks access to better-funded, higher-quality schools. It would give them the opportunity to live in growing communities-near the shopping malls, office centers, and industrial parks where almost all new job growth happened. And it would narrow the wealth gap between blacks and whites. The battle against housing discrimination – in Levittown and elsewhere – was perhaps the most consequential of the entire northern freedom struggle.⁵⁴

Again, like Wiese, Sugrue presents a picture of bleakness in which black America is denied access to the economic bounty available to the rest of America.

With respect to bourgeois entrée as a milepost for success in the struggle against racism, Wiese's discusses pioneerism among blacks facing racist housing markets. Often, African Americans in the civil rights era sought to avoid confrontation in seeking open housing markets for fear of retribution. Wiese describes a number of such African Americans, writing

[. . .] One Philadelphia mother told her daughter, "I realize that somebody has to be a pioneer, but I don't want it to be anyone in my family." Thus, a black professional in Syracuse, New York, spoke for many when he claimed, "I don't want to be a pioneer. I don't want to have to lie awake thinking someone may throw a rock through my window or set fire to my house."⁵⁵

Proximity regardless of real or imagined economic status is as important an issue here as economic status itself. In this regard, Wiese presents a Norman Rockwell illustration from the cover of a 1967 issue of *Look* magazine, coincidentally contemporary with the *Bailey Dolly!* In this illustration, we see a group of white suburban children watch on as a black family moves in next door. "Rockwell's sentimental optimism aside," writes Wiese, "his illustration signaled a provocative truth. During the 1960s and 1970s, the number of black suburbanites more than doubled. [. . .]"⁵⁶ Wiese continues by outlining the appeal of the suburban bourgeois lifestyle for the newly liberated African American family by citing an opulent description of the black-upper-middle-class Addisleigh Park neighborhood in Queens, New York, as showcased in a 1950s issue of *Ebony* magazine. Of particular interest in this *Ebony* piece is the clear message that consumerism equals freedom; that owning a house in Addisleigh Park equals "wealth and taste." However, even with the arguably negative consumerist mindset apparent in the *Ebony* article described by Wiese, one must consider Wiese's poignant description of Nat "King" Cole's valiant and perhaps revolutionary attempt to purchase a home suitable for a star of his status in the 1950s. Wiese writes

[. . .] Even [. . .] Cole, often criticized for his conservative personal politics, appealed in a language of civil rights when white

neighbors tried to block his purchase of a fourteen-room “ivy covered English Tudor style home” in the Hancock Park section of Los Angeles near Beverly Hills, California, in 1948. “I am an American citizen,” Cole exclaimed, “and I feel that I am entitled to the same rights as any other citizen. My wife and I like our home very much, and we intend to stay there the same as any other American citizen would.”⁵⁷

Yet while germane to the positive struggle for social and economic parity of the 1950s, Cole’s desire to assert his rights of citizenship might pale in the face of post-civil-rights era realities. Knowles provides an interesting perspective on the issue of celebrity and “diva lifestyle” as redemption for African Americans. In discussing the biographical details of Oprah Winfrey life, Knowles writes,

[. . . Oprah] Winfrey’s life is massaged into a popular Cinderella cartoon in which the beautiful, hence deserving, self is engaged in a struggle against the odds – in which race is just one of the many other obstacles – for success. The “celebrity genre,” of course, demands this kind of narrative of an American TV chat show host and mega star. This is inevitably a story of progress from rags to riches, obscurity to fame, detailing obstacles overcome en route. Inside this well-worked parable of success lies another more political narrative in which some of the contours of the political landscape are drawn, but only as background. [. . .] Race has only a walk-on part in this story in which the self is de-raced. The problem with this account [. . .] is the status of race as incidental [. . .]⁵⁸

There are two sides to the coin Knowles presents. First is the obvious interpretation that Oprah Winfrey’s life reflects an effort to airbrush the effects of racism on and failure to acknowledge recalcitrant economic strife among African Americans. This, of course, is a less than desirable outcome. The other, perhaps more difficult, interpretation is that Winfrey’s success in contemporary America must be considered in light of the kind of struggle faced by the Pearl Baileys, Roy Campanellas, and Nat “King” Coles, African Americans who populated the world of celebrity in the 1950s and fought the good fight to make opportunity for mega-success and more complete class entrée available to the likes of Winfrey.

In what might be considered a further rebuttal to this “material satiation equals liberation” line of reasoning and echoing concerns expressed by Bowser earlier in this chapter, Cornel West describes the rational fear black people might expect from the process of buying into an “American dream” bourgeois lifestyle from which they were formerly barred. West is especially concerned about the often overwhelming consumerism that accompanies entrée into this bourgeois lifestyle: how this consumerism might eat at the soul, and how it so closely resembles white privilege that it conflicts with a reasonable sense of racial pride. In talking of the explosion of black membership in America’s middle class following the civil rights epoch of the 1960s, West writes,

Like any American group achieving contemporary middle-class station for the first time, black entrée into the culture of consumption made status an obsession and addiction to [material] stimulation a way of life. For example, well-to-do black parents no longer sent their children to Howard, Moorehouse, and Fisk “to serve the race” [. . .] but rather to Harvard, Yale, and Princeton “to get a high paying job” [. . .]⁵⁹

In West-world, addiction to consumerist stimulation leads to a vacuum in leadership. This leadership vacuum in turn leads to a failure to affect the lives of those left behind. This vacuum leaves a gaping hole of recalcitrant poverty with which the materially comfortable member of the black bourgeoisie becomes unwilling to deal. In other words, bourgeois aspiration leads to a mutually defeating class war and a leadership void. “Quality leadership,” writes West, “is neither the product of one great individual nor the result of odd historical accidents. Rather, it comes from deeply bred traditions and communities which shape and mold talented and gifted persons. Without a vibrant tradition of resistance passed on to new generations, there can be no nurturing of a collective and critical consciousness [. . .]”⁶⁰ For West, the dilemma becomes how to balance reasonable economic viability with racial pride. While it is possible to interpret the import of the Bailey *Dolly!* as having accomplished balancing these interests – economic

advancement, both in terms of the image presented in the play of bourgeois entrée *and* actual financial gain by the working performers involved in the production – the production might fail a purer test of black pride. After all, in all its previous incarnations (Oxenford, Nestroy, Wilder), the story was conceived in a Euro-centric milieu.

While bourgeois entrée might have seemed like a reasonable aspiration for post-World-War-II African Americans, the road to such entrée was fraught with difficulty. What Knowles describes as a “diva lifestyle” could be seen as doing harm to the maintenance of a strong African-American culture. And yet, there remained a need to break down vertical race barriers. Difficulty could be found in the dialectic of reconciling these two seemingly opposing needs, a task to which those creating the Bailey *Dolly!* would seem to have hoped the project was suited.

The Case for African-American Bourgeois Assimilation

In the end, Wiese would seem to justify the need for tying African-American progress with material gain and a strong dollop of race consciousness. Wiese writes,

While wider ideological currents had shifted, tracing a drift from explicit integrationism to more varied expressions of nationalism, suburbanites’ individual spatial struggles turned on very similar issues. Freer than ever before to select a home on the basis of their preferences and their pocketbooks, African Americans sought to create suburban spaces that supported both their economic interests and racial sensibilities in ways that fitted them as individuals.⁶¹

In further commentary, Wiese argues that this sense of economic democracy might be an initial signal of end of race as a barrier for participation in mainstream American life. “By the 1990s,” writes Wiese, “economic hardship and spatial segregation – key pillars of racial inequality, but also black identity in the twentieth century – were beginning to weaken, leading some to question whether suburbanization might herald the denouement of ‘African American culture’

altogether.”⁶² Caution must be imposed, of course, that the “denouement” described here might be code for what West describes, and by implication Bowser concurs in, as a leadership vacuum among contemporary African Americans, not to mention a weakening in the vitality of African-American culture.

African Americans who came of age in the post-World-War-II struggle for civil rights were faced with a conundrum in attempting to nullify vertical, culturally-based barriers against full citizenship. Certainly, one wanted to improve the lot of the African American so that s/he would never have to face the “ten-room house” situation described in the NAACP advertisement. However, one also did not want to buy so fully into what Knowles described as the “diva lifestyle” as to lose a strong sense of African-American culture and community. Again, this begs the question of whether the Bailey *Dolly!* could meet the requirements of this bifurcated task.

Chapter Conclusion

To understand how the Bailey *Dolly!* challenged the ideology and structure of race relations in America, one needs to explore the underlying structures of American racism in depth, potentially discovering how these structures explain the significance of the Bailey *Dolly!*

In this chapter, we explored the co-supportive and sometimes independent vertical and horizontal class structures as envisioned by Weber and Marx respectively, leading to the conclusion that class barriers can be as much cultural (vertical) as economic (horizontal). That established, we moved to a discussion of race privilege—the aim being an analysis of past efforts (and problems) and later efforts to address and change race privilege. In this exploration, we would see both negative examples of white attempts at cooperation as well as positive examples. The “better servants” episode among southern women attempting race liberalism and the stories

of Eleanor Roosevelt and Philip Rose come to mind, respectively, as seminal examples of negative and positive interracial cooperation.

The legacy of the Bailey *Dolly!* begs examination of access to middle class nicety as one way of addressing vertical/cultural racial barriers and white privilege. Of particular importance were the stories in the Moon volume and the situations that surrounded the racial mistreatment of early black baseball star Jackie Robinson, would-be bus protestor Claudette Colvin, and comedian Jackie “Moms” Mabley, describing small yet important moments depicting how such adult treatment was withheld from the African American and, more importantly, how such adult treatment might work in a practical venue. Failure to achieve such treatment would cause major disappointment for African Americans in the post-war era. We then used the fight for fair and open housing policies as a comparison to the kind of entrée black performers sought in commercial American musical theatre. In both venues, problematic aspects arise. Any analysis of the Bailey *Dolly!*, therefore, would need to take into account the positive aspects of such bourgeois aspiration – redress of past grievances, reasonable material comfort – with negative aspects – what might be seen as the stealing of the heart of the black struggle.

In this exploration of black bourgeois aspiration, we discover that middle-class access is one way many have sought to solve racial injustice. This dynamic would seem to have been the intent of the Bailey *Dolly!* and where the Bailey *Dolly!* achieved its greatest impact. We find a direct connection between the goals of the Bailey *Dolly!* and those of the post-World-War-II civil rights movement. Specifically, the portrayal on the part of Bailey *Dolly!* of African Americans enjoying bourgeois opulence is a reflection of the desire on the part of those involved in the civil rights movement to gain access to mainstream, bourgeois activities once reserved for whites only.

And yet, the difficulties involved in such bourgeois aspiration, as voiced by the likes of Knowles and West, leave the Bailey *Dolly!* open to fair criticism.

In the end, the Bailey *Dolly!* might be seen as a mixed bag. On the one hand, the production aided in attempts to achieve Moon's aspiration of full adult citizenship for African Americans by depicting how such citizens might behave in a mainstream bourgeois environment once give fair and equal access. Yet at the same time, the Bailey *Dolly!* could be seen as buying into unsavory aspects of a so-called "diva lifestyle." Knowles and West connect these unsavory aspects to a loss in cohesion of strong community values – the kind of values African Americans needed as a community to overcome past injustices. Thus, this otherwise simple romantic comedy – in what was then the novel milieu casting this once "whites only" show with an all-black cast – would reflect a conundrum of substantial progress accompanied by a modicum of regression. This conundrum provides dramatic tension to any analysis of the Bailey *Dolly!*

Endnotes

¹ In this study, the words "America" or "American" will be used to refer to the United States of America rather than the Americas in general. While this usage may be an oversimplification and ignore the contributions of other nations and regions in the Western Hemisphere, we use this generalization for the sake of clarity of language.

² McDermott, Monica. "Race/Class Interactions in the Formation of Political Identity" in *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 347-366, 1994, 349

³ Bowser, Benjamin P. *The Black Middle Class: Social mobility – and vulnerability*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007, 5

⁴ Bowser, 18

⁵ Bowser, 27-28

⁶ Robinson, Amy. "Forms of Appearance of Value," in Diamond, Elin (ed.), *Performance of Cultural Politics*. London: Routledge, 1996, 238

⁷ Bendix, Reinhard. "Inequality and Social Structure: A Comparison of Marx and Weber" in *American Sociology Review*, Volume 39, Number 2, April 1975, 149-161, 152

⁸ Wright, Erik Olin. "The Shadow of Exploitation in Weber's Class Analysis" in *American Sociology Review*, 2002, Volume 67 (December: 832-853), 832

⁹ Wright, 832

¹⁰ Bowser, 26

¹¹ Bowser, 29

¹² Bowser, 66

¹³ Sugrue, Thomas J. . *Sweet Land of Liberty*. New York; Random House Publishing Group, 2009, 4

¹⁴ Sugrue, 9

¹⁵ Sugrue, 9

¹⁶ Sugrue, 106-107

¹⁷ Knowles, Caroline. *Race and Social Analysis*. London: Sage Publications, 2003, 183

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- ¹⁸ Knowles, 179. One assumes that Knowles uses the term “manufactured” in contrast to any concept of race based in biology or nature.
- ¹⁹ Knowles, 206
- ²⁰ Curtis, Susan. *The First Black Actors On The Great White Way*. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1988, 14
- ²¹ Knowles, 151. Please see also <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-11382839.html> (accessed March 1, 2010).
- ²² Knowles, 151
- ²³ Lewis, David Levering. *When Harlem was in Vogue*. New York: Penguin Books, 1997, 99.
www.dictionary.com (accessed February 28, 2010) defines “persiflage” as “frivolity.”
- ²⁴ Sugrue, 51
- ²⁵ Moon, Bucklin. *Primer For White Folks*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., Inc., 1945, 455
- ²⁶ Rose, Phillip. *You Can’t Do That on Broadway!* New York: Limelight Editions, 2004, 42
- ²⁷ Rose, 60
- ²⁸ Rose, 60
- ²⁹ Murray, Gail S. (ed.). *Throwing Off the Cloak of Privilege: White southern women in the civil rights era*. Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2004, 15
- ³⁰ Murray, 135
- ³¹ http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nap/Weary_Blues_Hughes.htm (accessed July 30, 2010) identifies Bucklin Moon as Langston Hughes’s editor at Doubleday publishers.
- ³² Moon, xi
- ³³ Such crassness and cynicism might be expected from Parker, the noted Algonquin Round Table wit and raconteur. Once, when asked to use the word “horticulture” in a sentence, Parker replied, “You can drag a *horticulture* [italics added] but you can’t make her think.” Please see http://thinkexist.com/quotation/you_can_drag_a_horticulture-but_you_can-t_make/157967.html (accessed June 13, 2010) for more Dorothy Parker quips. A fear in presenting material from Parker’s “Black and White” story in this study lies in the possibility that the reader might mistake Parker’s portrayal of the matron as racism on Parker’s part. Clearly, it is Parker’s intent to satirize rather than glorify her subject’s quaint, condescending, and ultimately harmful racism.
- ³⁴ Moon, 214
- ³⁵ Moon, 215
- ³⁶ Moon, 206
- ³⁷ Moon, 207
- ³⁸ Lewis, 99
- ³⁹ King, 16
- ⁴⁰ Moon, 210
- ⁴¹ Sugrue, 121
- ⁴² <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/26/books/26colvin.html> (accessed April 7, 2010)
- ⁴³ <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/26/books/26colvin.html> (accessed April 7, 2010). These descriptors of Claudette Colvin are attributed to Phillip Hoose, who won National Book Award for Young People’s Literature for *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice* in 2007.
- ⁴⁴ Sugrue, 153
- ⁴⁵ Wiese, Andrew. *Places of Their Own*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004, 1
- ⁴⁶ Bowser, 157
- ⁴⁷ Wiese, 260
- ⁴⁸ Bowser, 112
- ⁴⁹ Wiese, 270
- ⁵⁰ Knowles, 77-78
- ⁵¹ Wiese, 143
- ⁵² Lewis, 25-26
- ⁵³ Sugrue, 201
- ⁵⁴ Sugrue, 201. On page 203, Sugrue describes how African Americans real-estate professionals were barred by the National Association of Real Estate Boards from using the word “realtor” to describe their service during the suburban real-estate boom in the 1950s. Such African-American professionals had to use the term “realist.”
- ⁵⁵ Wiese, 130
- ⁵⁶ Wiese, 211
- ⁵⁷ Wiese, 131

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- ⁵⁸ Knowles, 72
⁵⁹ West, Cornel. *Race Matters*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993, 36
⁶⁰ West, 37
⁶¹ Wiese, 284
⁶² Wiese, 257

CHAPTER II – THE POLITICS OF RACE

Chapter Introduction

In Chapter I of this study, we considered the social structures that created racial divides in American society and how such structures interacted with the social import of the Bailey *Dolly!* Of particular importance were discussions of the rich history of the black middle class in America, vertical (social) and horizontal (economic) structures of the suppression of African-American interest in group and individual advancement, and the ubiquitous presence of white privilege in all discussions of race. Each of these aspects relates to attempts at bourgeois aspiration on the part of civil-rights-era African Americans. While we found downsides to such aspiration, we also found that such aspiration reflected the reasonable desire on the part of African Americans in the civil rights era to lay claim to mainstream activity previously reserved for “whites only.” The Bailey *Dolly!* thus could be seen as working in tandem with this desire and aspiration on the part of civil-right-era African Americans.

In Chapter II, we consider the politics of African-American response to these social structures, especially as concerns the disappointment faced by the forces fostering a civil rights during the post-World-War-II era. In a large picture, any desire on the part of African Americans for full adulthood and citizenship coupled with the disappointment faced in the post-World-War-II era would inform the Bailey *Dolly!*, placing it squarely in the struggle for fair and equal treatment for African Americans.

Despite some successful cooperation between the races during this period, a larger sense of disappointment would be reflected in various political paradigms of the civil rights era that followed: confrontation and separatism in contrast to the mainstream Great Society ethos. The

Bailey *Dolly!* would find itself aligned squarely with this Great Society ethos, almost to the point of taking on the role of “mascot” for the Johnson administration’s race policies. To the extent that the Bailey *Dolly!* either reflected or was a part of this struggle, we need to consider how effective its mainstream modality served the needs of the struggle. Furthermore, we need to consider the failures of the Johnson administration in race relations as making any connection between the Great Society and the Bailey *Dolly!* difficult.

Disappointment on the part of African Americans in the era following World War II called for new visions in American race relations. The separatism of Malcolm X and Eldridge Cleaver and Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society offered two such visions. The Bailey *Dolly!*, to a great extent, embodied the latter. The Bailey *Dolly!* served as a vehicle for or embodiment of the Great Society ethos, selectively affirming centrist and center-right visions of American racial attitudes available in the 1960s. The vision of racial cooperation embodied by the Bailey *Dolly!* may not have been the best solution of America’s lingering racial difficulties for all times. Nevertheless, the production served as a reflection of the mainstream Great Society race politics of its era -- even as this Great Society vision of American race relations itself came under critique.

World War II and Full, Unconditional Inclusion

Sarah Turner and John Bound confirm heightened black expectations based on their support of the World-War-II effort. Turner and Bound write, “Before the start of the war, the black press and the NAACP launched the ‘double V’ campaign, urging black Americans to work toward victories over Jim Crow at home and fascism abroad.”⁶³ This dream of connecting the fight against the racist Nazi regime with the acceptance of African Americans at home as fully

adult citizens – similar to what we saw in Chapter I in the Moon volume – would fail to come to pass and lead to significant disappointment on the part of African Americans. In addition to the disappointment this post-World War II milieu presented to the African American, this milieu would serve as a catalyst for the more confrontational “black power” ethos. For example, Malcolm X displayed a keen understanding of this issue of adulthood and citizenship for African Americans. Malcolm presented an eloquent statement describing the white hegemony’s failure to include African Americans as full members of the larger society, writing

[. . . It] never dawned upon [white people] that I could understand, that I wasn’t a pet, but a human being. They didn’t give me credit for having the same sensitivity, intellect, and understanding that they would have been ready and willing to recognize in a white boy in my position. But it has historically been the case with white people, in their regard for black people, that even though we might be *with* them, we weren’t considered *of* them. Even though they appeared to have opened the door, it was still closed. Thus they never did really see *me*.⁶⁴

This theme – the search and desire for full, unconditional inclusion in the larger society – informs the post-World War II civil rights movement regardless of the political stripe of the source.

The demarcation of World War II as a critical moment in time in the civil rights struggle is of great importance here. The fight against the Nazi’s racist motivations that informed World War II represented the ultimate American hypocrisy – American-led allies fighting to prevent the genocide of the Jews in Europe, contrasted with the maintenance of race-based class structures here at home. The attempt to dismantle such race-based class structures ultimately would inform the politics surrounding the Bailey *Dolly!* Thus, we embark on an exploration of racial politics in the World War II and the post-war era. In this exploration, while not excluding more radical views *pro forma*, we will pay particularly close attention to the kind of cooperative ethic on race

relations which informs the Bailey *Dolly!* In all these views, the idea of attaining full treatment of adult citizenship for African Americans is the paramount goal.

Raising Black Consciousness

Already, we have seen examples from the struggle for fair housing practices, such as the Levittown example, that demonstrate the difficulties faced by those attempting to change race relations in the post-war period. Bowser describes the disappointment faced by African Americans as a result of these difficulties, writing that “[d]espite the fact that millions of Europeans lost their lives and thousands of US soldiers died to end Nazism in World War II, the US prototype of Nazi racial oppression [i.e., Jim Crow] survived for two more decades after World War II until it was dismantled by the federal government.”⁶⁵ Bowser’s comments here display the difficulty in ignoring the level of disappointment reasonably attributed to those involved in the struggle to end the systematic mistreatment and failure to achieve full adult citizenship on the part of African Americans in this era. This struggle would be reflected in various responses reflecting various political points of view.

First, we consider a separatist, Afro-centric response to the disappointment of African Americans in this post-World-War-II era. In his *Soul on Ice*, Eldridge Cleaver writes, “At times of fundamental social change, such as the era in which we live, it is easy to be deceived by the onrush of events, beguiled by the craving for social stability into mistaking transitory phenomena for enduring reality.”⁶⁶ Cleaver goes one step further, arguing that before the 1960s civil rights era, blacks sometimes saw themselves as passive participants in the conspiracy to maintain their own subjugation. Cleaver describes his own passive participation, with specific reference to his reaction to the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling. Cleaver writes

Of course I'd always known that I was black, but I'd never really stopped to take stock of what I was involved in. I met life as an individual and took my chances. Prior to 1954, we lived in an atmosphere of Novocain. Negroes found it necessary, in order to maintain whatever sanity they could, to remain somewhat aloof and detached from "the problem."⁶⁷

Such a fear of anesthetizing the true and reasonable interests of African Americans seeking full adult citizenship did not appear suddenly out of the blue. Rather, this fear was based on a century or more of disappointment over misplaced faith in white efforts to deal with endemic racism. In the previous chapter, we discussed the idea of privilege based on race. Such privilege connects Malcolm's sense of anesthetization with the subjugation of the African American. Michael Eric Dyson describes privilege used as a tool of subjugation, control, and mollification. Dyson writes

Whiteness us a funny thing in the lives of white people, certainly in this country. People have gotten into a habit in the twentieth century of making being white the normal state of affairs, the condition of a regular person. Race, then, is used as a marker to describe people who are set apart? It's transparent. White life in America is just life in America. White history is history. [. . .] Is there a construction of identity around whiteness that is not the kind found at white Aryan resistance meetings? Is there a history of whiteness in America, the ideas around it, its uses, its definition that is a worthwhile field for academic study?⁶⁸

One notices immediately and specifically that Dyson is *not* talking here about the cross-burning miscreants who participated in so-called "white pride" resistance movements. More to the point, Dyson is talking about the white person who takes racial privilege for granted. With respect to the subject at hand, Dyson could be talking about a typical white audience member in the Broadway milieu – the white audience member for the *Bailey Dolly!* in particular.

Malcolm X became a sort of prophet against the anesthesia in the era immediately preceding the *Bailey Dolly!* Sugrue describes both the swagger and gravitas associated with

Malcolm X's ascendance to national prominence. Sugrue describes Malcolm's maturation as a result of his involvement in the Nation of Islam, writing

[. . .] The Nation [of Islam] provided Malcolm, like many of it jail-cell converts, with a blueprint for rehabilitation: a life of military-like discipline and hard work, a strict dietary regimen that included abstinence from alcohol and pork, and a theology that called for self-emancipation by breaking the shackles of white-imposed economic and psychological "slavery." Most of all, it gave young men like Malcolm [. . .] a way to channel their rage away from themselves, their families, and their neighborhoods. "The white man is the devil," noted Malcolm, "is a perfect echo of the black convict's lifelong experience."⁶⁹

In Sugrue's description of Malcolm, we see the essence of black confrontation of the white hegemony. Malcolm's response to white subjugation of black people called for an ascetic militarism designed to afford the African American self-actualization on his own terms. This would have the effect to place all African Americans in a virtually permanent state of war with the white majority. Such resistance to the white hegemony by Malcolm could be located in his argument, from earlier in this chapter, on the failure of white people to recognize African Americans as full human beings. In his comparison of Malcolm to Martin Luther King, Jr., James H. Cone confirms this observation, writing

Malcolm focused his criticism on the failure of white people to treat black people as human beings. That and that alone was the heart of his critique. There was nothing fancy or sophisticated about it. Just plain talk – telling the truth about the crimes against blacks that white people did not want to hear about and few blacks had the courage to confront.⁷⁰

For Malcolm, the issue of built-in economic advantage as the apex of white privilege comes to the fore. Malcolm X deals with white economic advantage head-on by comparing it to professional gambling, writing

[. . .] If you see somebody winning all the time, he isn't gambling, he's cheating. [. . .] It's like the Negro in America seeing the white man win all the time. He's a professional gambler; he has all

the cards and the odds stacked on his side, and he has always dealt to our people from the bottom of the deck.⁷¹

Supporting Malcolm's argument of the inherent lack of fairness in black/white economic interaction, Sugrue demonstrates the inherent lack of fairness in black/white economic transactions as observed by Malcolm by quoting Langston Hughes. Sugrue writes,

In series of acerbic letters to white shopkeepers, published in *The Chicago Defender* [. . .] Langston Hughes explained [. . .] mounting black anger: "We know you live in nice neighborhoods with trees and lawns, where we cannot live. And we see you at the bank with those big bags of our hard-earned money – so that makes us mad."⁷²

To at least some extent, the Bailey *Dolly!* would serve as a relief from the kind of disappointment Hughes presented in his rebukes to white shopkeepers – a sort of victory celebration for the positive changes in American race relations that took place during the turbulent 1960s. What remained to be seen was how effective such a "victory celebration" could be in the white-dominated milieu of commercial American musical theatre.

The Evolution of the Black Arts Movement

Before the civil rights upheavals of the 1960s, such efforts to counteract the kind of endemic racial segregation and economic subjugation discussed by Hughes often yielded less than successful results. Thus, as we see in our descriptions of the political ideology of Malcolm X, much of black political reaction in the period preceding the civil rights era of the mid-1960s had, out of frustration and disappointment over "dreams deferred," given way by the 1960s to a more confrontational desire for self-actualization on the part of African Americans. Whether as a reflection of the confrontational politics of the period or as an instigating agent to such politics, artistic expression for African Americans in the 1960s displayed a similar sense of confrontation.

In a discussion of the *Lethal Weapon*-style interracial “buddy movie,” B. Lee Artz confronts the idea that those concerned with social justice based with respect to race can find no comfort in existing social structures. Artz writes

[. . .] Pleasing to [b]lacks and comforting to [w]hites, the fictions of interracial buddy movies simplify race relations, reassuring America of its continuing goodness. Viewed by millions of Americans, cultural vehicles such as interracial buddy movies help negotiate popular consent for the “new” racism – touting equality while ignoring the actual condition of race relations.⁷³

Like the “buddy movies” Artz describes, the any black/white artistic interaction could be accused of “touting equality while ignoring the actual condition of race relations.” This situation would seem to beg for a solution, at least in theory. In his seminal *The Empty Space*, Peter Brook discusses the search for theatre as a transcendent experience, writing

More than ever, we crave for an experience that is beyond the humdrum. Some look for it in jazz, classical music, in marijuana and in LSD. In the theatre we shy away from the holy because we don’t know what this could be – we only know that what is called the holy has let us down [. . .]⁷⁴

Brook’s words here may seem dated to the contemporary reader. Nevertheless, these words make sense in the context of the civil-rights upheaval of the 1960s. They echo what has been said already by Cleaver and Malcolm and reflected artistically by Arntz. Any true artistic reflection of the black experience would have to be an explosion of pent up rage and stifled creativity – in Brook’s words, “holy” – something truly remarkable and transcendent, something that might make the dream of full adult citizenship for the African American come to pass at last.

One might consider as a candidate for this “holy” experience the effort offered in the early twentieth century of the Harlem Renaissance. James Smethurst described an idealized version of this epoch, writing

[. . . M]uch of the impetus for this renaissance came from the emergence and growth of a new black political activism and new

political institutions in the period immediately before, during, and after the war. Harlem became the headquarters of a host of political organizations covering a wide political spectrum, including the NAACP, the Urban League, Marcus Garvey's UNIA, the 21st A. D. (Assembly District) Socialist Club, and the black socialist (and pro-Bolshevik and nationalist) African Blood Brotherhood.⁷⁵

Harry Elam, Jr. and David Krassner note that in the era that preceded the Harlem Renaissance, the racially insensitive "Tom Show" served as a popular means of portraying African-American life in America. "The 'Tom Show,' as the eventual cavalcade of adaptations *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were called," declared Elam and Krasner, "was the most widely produced play in the history of the United States, and despite the longevity of contemporary musicals, has yet to be surpassed."⁷⁶ Comparison to the plethora of "Tom Shows" allows the observer to view the Harlem Renaissance under the most optimistic circumstances. And in such a discussion, the efforts of the Harlem Renaissance could be seen as nobly advancing the interests of African Americans, generating at least a rudimentary political force expressed in terms of Afro-centered rhetoric. Yet these efforts towards promoting a "new Negro" as offered by the Harlem Renaissance were highly flawed, providing a less-than-ideal vision of the full adult citizenship African Americans sought in the post-war era.

In response to these flaws, the 1960s saw the advent of the Black Arts Movement. In contrast to the cooperative ethic promoted by the Harlem Renaissance/New Negro Movement earlier in the century – a cooperative ethic reflected in the stories in the Moon volume – the Black Arts Movement sought not to cater to a white sense of aesthetic achievement. Rather, it sought to define a new aesthetic, based totally on the idea that black culture was sufficient to define such achievement. In the process, the Black Arts Movement would attempt to redefine what the concept of full citizenship meant to the African American. Adam Gussow focuses on

Black Arts Movement response to the “mistakes” of the Harlem Renaissance/New Negro movement, writing

As Larry Neal concluded about the Harlem Renaissance: “The Black Arts Movement represents the flowering of a cultural nationalism that has been suppressed since the 1920s. I mean the ‘Harlem Renaissance’ – which was essentially a failure.” [. . .] Harold Cruse sees white patronage as having played a significant role in the failure of the New Negro Movement. In his view, “the Harlem Renaissance became partially smothered in the guilty, idealistic, or egotistical interventions of cultural paternalism.” Like Addison Gayle, Jr., Harold Cruse felt that the Black Arts Movement should serve as an “ideological tonic that cures misguided assimilationist tendencies.”⁷⁷

As described here, the Harlem Renaissance, in its promotion of the so-called “new Negro,” allowed black art to be judged by white standards, and thus failed African Americans in the quest for full adult citizenship. The Harlem Renaissance might have promoted “new” and presumably “improved” Negro. As we saw in the Dorothy Parker story in the Moon text (involving the black singer and the patronizing white matron), such so-called improvement, unfortunately, often catered to white standards and, in turn, encouraged white condescension. What was needed to achieve full adult citizenship was not a “new Negro.” What was needed was a new cultural paradigm, entwined with a new political mode of thought.

Not only could the Harlem Renaissance be seen simply as a failure in terms of aesthetic theory. In practice, the Harlem Renaissance would provide no great improvement in the moral, economic, or political lot of African Americans. Lewis writes

[. . .] Harlem was its own worst exploiter, it seemed. “We are without that civic pride that would drive these hells from among us,” intoned a righteous *Amsterdam News*. “[. . .] We are without all the elements that have seen white men dying if necessary for wholesome communities which have meant so much in their onward march to progress. . . .”⁷⁸

If the Harlem Renaissance attempted to serve as a space in which the races could mix, it did so in a manner that often inflamed deleterious stereotyping of black people. Thus, such cooperation between blacks and whites was suspect.

In radical contrast to the cooperative, if condescending, ethic of the Harlem Renaissance/New Negro Movement, the Black Arts movement could at times promote a violent schism between blacks and whites, even among whites who were supportive of black progress. Gussow explores this idea in a discussion of the separatist treatment of whites by the Black Arts Movement as compared to the conciliatory tone of the Harlem Renaissance/New Negro movement, writing

Just as some Harlem Renaissance intellectuals needed to distinguish themselves from peers whom they considered to be too focused on the expectations of whites, Black Arts Movement spokesmen clarified the racial purity of their own objectives and beliefs by juxtaposing them against the “interracism,” as Harold Cruse characterized it, practiced by the Harlem Renaissance.⁷⁹

Even use of the word “Negro” became suspect among Black Arts adherents. In assessing Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) with respect to use of the word, Gussow writes, “Like other Black Arts Movement spokesmen, Jones often used the term ‘Negro’ to refer to, in his own words, ‘white-oriented schizophrenic freaks of a dying society,’ African Americans he considers less progressive, less revolutionary than his own cohort.”⁸⁰ To Gussow, this distinction between “Negro” and “black” was of critical importance in defining the new paradigm of citizenship. “More than simply a semantic shift,” declares Gussow, “the mythological distance between ‘Negro’ and ‘black’ was as necessary, meaningful, and mysterious to the Black Arts Movement as was the stretch between ‘Old Negro’ and ‘New Negro’ for the Harlem Renaissance.”⁸¹ In a similar vein, Ed Bullins sought to define the contrast between those from earlier eras who sought

Euro-centric validation and those of his contemporaries who sought genuine black expression.

Bullins writes

The commonality of aesthetic stance among the artists of this period was in the impulse to migrate away from European references in their conceptualizations, in the practice of their arts, and in their very lives. For [b]lack seeking advanced degrees in English Victorian literature, for Afro-Americans militantly struggling for integration armed with little else than 19th-century European ideas, for Negroes waging pyrrhic battles upon the marriage beds of Euro-America, for all those niggers who in their heart of hearts believe that [b]lack [m]en cannot create original works and discover a contemporary aesthetic founded in a Black Ethos, the attempts to establish a working Black Arts community verged upon irrationality and were extremely threatening.⁸²

Where the Harlem Renaissance stood accused by its opponents of promoting the kind of mollification described by Bullins, the Black Arts Movement often sought to encourage the expression of black culture laid down by past generations. Mary Lennon writes

Black culture as an essential tool of liberation was anything but a new concept in the late 1960s. The culture created by enslaved Africans had nourished and sustained efforts to survive and ultimately win their freedom from bondage. Nationalists like Marcus Garvey celebrated the distinctive beauty and power of the clothing, music, and art of people of African descent. The Civil Rights Movement, although essentially about constitutional guarantees, drew its strength from the networks, philosophy, and music of the African American Christian church. But in the late 1960s, the Black Power Movement elevated culture to the heartbeat of its quest for emancipation and power.⁸³

A further example of this sense on the part of the Black Arts Movement in reclaiming a lamentably lost culture can be seen in the words of noted African playwrights Thiong'o Ngugi wa and Mugo Micere Githae. Here, Ngugi and Githae connect all African writing – and by extension, the interests of the Black Arts Movement – to a sense of populist urgency, writing

[. . . A]ll African Literature [. . .] is on trial. We cannot stand on the fence. We are either on the side of the people or on the side of imperialism. African Literature and African Writers are either fighting with the people or aiding imperialism and the class

enemies of the people. We believe that good theatre is that which is on the side of the people, that which, without masking mistakes and weaknesses, gives people courage and urges them to higher resolves in their struggle for total liberation. So the challenge was to truly depict the masses (symbolized by Kimathi) in the only historically correct perspective: positively, heroically and as the true makers of history.⁸⁴

Such reclamation of lost culture on the part of the Black Arts movement could be seen optimistically as enabling the desire for full adult citizenship. Yet as important as a theoretical engine that empowered black expression, highly important to such the success of the Black Arts Movement – to the creation of the kind of remarkable and transcendent artistic experience which Brook described earlier – would be the creation an aesthetic establishment controlled solely by African Americans themselves. To this end, in the 1970s, playwright Ed Bullins would spend significant effort and personal capital challenging the ability of white critics to evaluate black art.

[. . .] Bullins's open letters to the *New York Times* and other papers during the 1970s sparked public debated and put the heat on white critics, especially, to achieve greater fluency in the assumptions and history of African-American theater and to take responsibility for racist comments (conscious or otherwise). That particular issue was so heated for Bullins that he [and his cohorts at the New Lafayette Theatre] banned white reviewers from their productions, a decision that stood until funding difficulties demanded a rethink.⁸⁵

Yet in addition to attempting to define the role of white critics in black art, Bullins's interactions with the *Times* would seem to have displayed a severe flaw in the Black-Arts-Movement mindset. All the high-minded racially sensitive theory in the world could not make up for the fact that a) despite modest subsidy from the power elite, rank-and-file white people were not going to subsidize their own discomfort, and b) like white people, rank-and-file black people wanted to be entertained as well as enlightened. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., comments,

“Populist modernism,” a phrase coined by literary scholar Werner Sollors, characterized the regnant ethos of that time and place – its aspirations to an art of high seriousness, which would engage the

energies of the masses. But between the ideals of modernism and those of populism, one or the other had to give. Oyama – who, like many more senior luminaries of the Black Arts Movement (Baraka and Ed Bullins among them), was affiliated with the blacker and artier New Lafayette – recalls that the Harlem theater’s highflown airs accompanied by paltry audiences. “There was a condescending attitude toward this community, buttressed by the fact that it was getting five hundred grand from the Ford Foundation every year,” he recalls. And the [Negro Ensemble Company] was similarly provided for. This is not to say that worthy and important work was not created in these theaters: but these companies do provide a textbook example of how quickly beneficence becomes entitlement, and patronage a paycheck.⁸⁶

Amy Abugo Ongiri brings up the important and similar point of accountability in the Black Arts Movement to the mass of African Americans.

The notion that the urban poor experience is definitional in the construction of African American identity is largely a result of the Black Arts/Black Power Moment. The central questions first cogently posed by the Black Arts Movement continue to remain unanswered and mostly unexplored. How would African American artists and intellectuals be accountable to the masses of African American people?⁸⁷

Implicit in Ongiri’s analysis is what would seem a tacit “out” for the *Bailey Dolly!* If, as Ongiri argues, advocates of the Black Arts Movement are to be held accountable to the rank and file of the African-American community, then one must consider that the mass of African Americans most likely supported the goals and results of the *Bailey Dolly!* and its success. If a purist Black-Arts-Movement interpretation of the *Bailey Dolly!* were to hold sway, then the masses would be ignored.

The Black Arts movement provided a rubric by which a pure interpretation of the African-American experience could be expressed. If there was a problem with this rubric, it could be in its narrow audience and lack of significant support among rank-and-file African Americans. In contrast, the *Bailey Dolly!* offered a popular alternative to the Black Arts

movement – a way for rank-and-file African Americans to take part in the greater participation of African-American performers in mainstream American entertainment.

Lyndon Johnson, the Great Society, and Race

In contrast to the politics and aesthetics of confrontation of the Black Arts Movement, there existed a more centrist paradigm in race relations, embodied as a political methodology in Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society." Because of its more conciliatory approach to the goal of full adult citizenship for African Americans, an easy connection among Pearl Bailey, *Hello, Dolly!*, Lyndon Johnson, and this ambitious Great Society came about. For the legacy of the Bailey *Dolly!*, reality intervened and the connection became complicated. These complications, arising from differing points of view on race and civil rights, would inform political response to racism in America in the era surrounding the Bailey *Dolly!* If the Bailey *Dolly!* represented the apex of any cooperative effort in race relations, it becomes germane that we explore in significant detail these centrist machinations of race politics in the 1960s.

At the center of such machinations was Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, that would combine for the first time recognition by the federal government of the intersection of social (what we have called "vertical") issues of racism considered in light of recalcitrant economic difficulties for African Americans. Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey, historians of the legacy of domestic policy expert Daniel Patrick Moynihan, describe an auspicious opening salvo to Lyndon Johnson's declaration of War on Poverty. In a speech at Howard University on June 4, 1965, Johnson focused on the economic plight of black people living in northern ghettos. Rainwater and Yancey write

[. . .] After brief mention of civil rights legislative accomplishments over the past eight years [. . .] he announced the “next and most profound stage of the battle for civil rights,” in which the goal would be that “all of our citizens must have the ability to walk through the [gates of opportunity].” He emphasized that although some Negroes [. . .] were steadily narrowing the gap between themselves and their white counterparts, for the great majority of Negro Americans “the walls are rising and the gulf is widening.”⁸⁸

For the first time in American history, a president was investing full political capital to the improvement of both the social and economic lot of African Americans. It was a time of great promise coupled with a belief that Johnson’s Great Society and War on Poverty could and should achieve the goal of full adult citizenship for African Americans. In the black community itself, such optimism was at a fever pitch. Sugrue explains,

Black’s enthusiasm for the Great Society was not only the result of their disproportionate representation in the ranks of the poor. It was also evidence of their real faith in government, especially liberal government, as an agent of positive social change. Even if the Kennedy administration’s civil rights and antipoverty efforts had been halting, experimental, and incomplete, blacks held great expectations for the Democratic White House. In 1963, a remarkable 83 percent of blacks saw the federal government as “helpful” to them.⁸⁹

And so the Johnson administration, born of the ashes of a Kennedy regime cut short by assassination, sought to connect itself with the optimism of the Great Society and its promise for a positive future for African-Americans. This promise included both an end to Jim Crow segregation and marginalization of African Americans. Thus, in 1964, Lyndon Johnson was a hero to African Americans for, among other reasons, his dedication to the civil rights agenda. Paul K. Conkin supports this assertion, writing that Johnson’s legislative victories in this sphere “completely dwarfed [that of] all [presidents] who preceded him.”⁹⁰

Grand in its expectations, the Great Society would nonetheless indicate a belief in an orderly redefinition of the role of African Americans in the larger American society. The Bailey

Dolly! represented a similar orderly redefinition. Both the political solutions of the Johnson administration on race and the conciliatory effort reflected in the Bailey *Dolly!* clung to an ethos that rejected radical alternatives. All would be well, according to both these efforts, if we as a society stayed the course and allowed gradual, measured, orderly change the opportunity to work its magic.

The connection in between the Great Society and the Bailey *Dolly!* was strong not only in its shared belief in change through orderly reconciliation. At the 1964 Democratic National Convention, convention attendees had welcomed a heroic Johnson to the strains of “Hello, Lyndon!,” a celebratory parody of Jerry Herman’s then *very* popular title song,⁹¹ so a visceral, real-world connection between Lyndon Johnson and the play itself already existed by the mid-1960s. This connection would grow stronger with the advent of the all-black cast in 1967. Having seen a performance of the Bailey *Dolly!* in a Washington D.C. preview try-out on its way to triumph in New York City, both President Johnson and his wife Lady Bird had as good as adopted the Bailey *Dolly!* as the Johnson administration’s semi-official Broadway musical.⁹² At the end of this performance, Mr. and Mrs. Johnson even went so far as to appear onstage to join the company during the curtain call. Thus, the Johnsons had connected the Bailey *Dolly!* inexorably to the administration’s racial and social justice reform efforts. This all-black production of *Hello, Dolly!* had become a visceral symbol for the successes of the Johnson administration in the arena of civil rights. These successes included the passage of landmark legislation like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

In turn, the Bailey *Dolly!* could be seen as a blue-print for the end-product of Johnson’s civil rights effort. The production presented a world in which bourgeois African Americans interacted in a manner similar, if not exactly the same as, their white counterparts. Change in American race relations, in this Bailey *Dolly!* vision, need not involve unpleasant social

upheaval. Rather, through reasonable treatment of the African American, past difficulties would find resolution.

Arthur Schlesinger and a Middle Ground on Race

As mentioned, Johnson's dedication to civil rights and social justice for the African American was unparalleled in the history of the American presidency. However, it must be understood that this was a dedication to a relatively centrist agenda based on government action and broad consensus, not to the kind of radical change many in the African-American community demanded and as described earlier. As with Kennedy, Johnson relied to a great, though not exclusive, extent on the scholarly expertise of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. It is important to note the contribution here of Schlesinger, the so-called "house historian" to the Kennedy administration, because of the text he would write years after the heyday of the civil rights upheavals of the 1960s. This text, *The Disuniting of America*, argues against the multi-culturalist paradigm that would follow the civil rights era and will become important later in this study. Thus, Schlesinger – a supporter of the Great-Society non-confrontational civil rights agenda at the front end and critic of multi-culturalism at the back end – and his views become an important milepost in the discussion of American race relations. In terms of the Bailey *Dolly!*, we will see that Schlesinger's views on race affirm a cooperative ethic and reject polar-opposite separatism, the tenets upon which the racial import of the production relies.

In his New Frontier/Great Society incarnation, Schlesinger supported efforts to garner full adult citizenship for African Americans. Yet Schlesinger was a pragmatic liberal. Political historian Stephen Depoe describes Schlesinger's distaste of the impracticality he saw in much of the progressive community, writing

[. . .] Schlesinger especially chastised the utopian sentimentality of “doughface progressivism.” [. . .] “Progressivism was not prepared for Hitler,” continued Schlesinger, “because the pervading belief in human perfectibility” had “disarmed progressivism in too many of its encounters with actuality.” The “fatuity of Progressive presumptions” made them “if not an accomplice of totalitarianism, at least an accessory before the fact.” By the end of the 1940s, Schlesinger had dismissed the vision of progressive philosophy as at best naïve and at worst politically dangerous.⁹³

Such disdain for utopian liberalism informed Schlesinger’s approach to governance. Depoe continues, describing Schlesinger’s belief in a centrist mode of governance that would disdain extremes of either the right or left. At the root of this belief stood Schlesinger’s argument “that the American political system functions best when members of the public, liberals and conservatives alike, engage in reasoned discourse and gradualism rather than in utopian idealism or the often violent radical protest of the 1960s – protest that reflected dissatisfaction with race relations as well as the Vietnam War.”⁹⁴

Schlesinger’s rejection of the radical extremes came to the fore as political expression in the 1960s became more and more violent, from anti-Vietnam War protests to inner-city rioting. Concerning such violence, Schlesinger seemed in no way naïve to the reality of violence in American life. Depoe writes, “Schlesinger asserted that ‘the evil is in us, that it springs from some dark intolerable tension in our history.’ An ‘impulse to destroy’ and an ‘impulse to create’ coexisted in the nation’s consciousness as the result of ‘the mixed nature of our historical inheritance.’”⁹⁵ Yet Schlesinger retained a core belief in the failure of violence as a means of social change, calling such violence a “failure of reason.”⁹⁶ Schlesinger was especially suspicious of the radical aspirations of the New Left that informed the politics of the anti-Vietnam War protest movement. Schlesinger found the style of protest of the New Left immature and impractical to the point of being counterproductive. “The ‘venting of adolescent

outrage’,” wrote Depoe on Schlesinger’s take on the New Left, “only strengthened the forces [Vietnam protestors] claimed to be fighting against.”⁹⁷

Through its association with the Great Society and, by extension, the policies of Schlesinger, the Bailey *Dolly!*, could hardly be seen as the “venting of adolescent outrage.” Rather, this production served as a staid, measured response to past race-based grievances. In contrast to more confrontational artistic efforts to include African-American interests, this Bailey *Dolly!*, forever associated with the Johnson administration, was as mainstream and centered as the metaphoric “mom” and “apple pie.”

Southern Strategy

Schlesinger’s distrust of radical extremes in political expression would form the theoretical backdrop and shared point of view for Johnson’s Great Society. And despite the best of intentions on the part of the Johnson administration, the Great Society did not flourish to the extent once dreamed, the result of reaction on the right *and* impatience on the left. So any association between Johnson and the Bailey *Dolly!* would have its difficulties. Any analysis of the Bailey *Dolly!* in terms of its shared ethos with the Great Society of orderly change in American race relations would have to answer to critiques of the Great Society and any failure on its part to improve the state of such relations.

Not the least of Johnson’s problems in promoting the Great Society transpired in the political arena, in which a realignment of the two major parties along racial lines would soon take place. This realignment would present yet another rival view of civil rights and the adult treatment of African Americans when compared with the radicalism of the far left and the centrism of Great Society advocates. Historically, in the era preceding the civil rights movement

of the 1960s, Democrats had attempted to forge an uneasy alliance between Jim-Crow-supporting southern whites and northern labor interests, while the Republicans, the so-called “Party of Lincoln,” found its roots in the fight against slavery and the reformation that followed in the nineteenth century. One could see this historical political-party/racial realignment play itself out as recent to the Bailey *Dolly!* as the presidential election of 1940, as we saw in Chapter I in FDR’s negotiation of the race issue when confronted with the race liberalism of Republican Wendell Wilkie. Yet by the 1960s, any desire on the part of Republicans to outflank the Democrats on race had begun to dissolve. At the same time, the Democrats had moved in a more liberal direction on race. In the early days of the Johnson administration that followed the Kennedy assassination, Johnson’s investment in the civil rights movement was unequivocal. Kruse describes Johnson’s unwillingness to spare the American south from his broad civil rights sword and how Johnson was able to connect his zeal on race issues to the legacy of the slain JFK, writing

As the push for public accommodations legislation stalled in Atlanta, the campaign in Washington gathered speed. In the wake of John F. Kennedy’s assassination, Lyndon Johnson had connected the nation’s mourning with the cause of civil rights. “No memorial oration or eulogy could more eloquently honor President Kennedy’s memory than the earliest possible passage of the civil rights bill for which he fought so long”⁹⁸

Such dedication to a cause would exact a price for both Johnson and his Democrats. Kruse describes Johnson’s realistic attitude on the subject of politics and race, writing

Indeed, the rise of southern Republicanism [. . .] was largely due to the white backlash against the Civil Rights Act. No one understood this fact more than the President Lyndon Johnson. Upon signing the landmark legislation, he famously told an aide that he had just “delivered the South to the Republican Party for a long time to come.”⁹⁹

The national election in 1964 raised this issue of southern white backlash to a boiling point. Johnson's Republican opponent, Barry Goldwater, stood firm on principle. Although he personally found Jim-Crow-style racism abhorrent, Goldwater believed that intervention by the federal government in civil rights matters ran counter to constitutional principles. On the issue of school integration, for example, Goldwater offered a statement that attempted to demonstrate his distaste for the cruel racism of segregated schools. "It is wise and just for Negro children to attend the same schools as white," Goldwater wrote in 1960. Nevertheless, Goldwater would equivocate by saying, "I am firmly convinced . . . that the Constitution does not permit any interference whatsoever by the federal government in the field of education."¹⁰⁰ "Not surprisingly," Kruse concluded, "Barry Goldwater won every state in the Deep South [in 1964]."¹⁰¹

So despite great Republican concern for issues of importance to African Americans from the Civil War at least through the Wilkie campaign, Johnson's admission of the difficulties the Democrats would face over civil rights support would prove accurate. From the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 until the election of Barack Obama in 2008, Republicans dominated presidential politics. Any Democrat elected President in this era would derive from the old Confederacy – specifically, Jimmy Carter of Georgia (1976) and Bill Clinton of Arkansas (1992 and 1996). Carter was the last Democrat in the era to carry the south completely. Clinton would put the south into play and carried a few states, but derived his electoral majority primarily from the northeast, Great Lakes, and Pacific coast states.¹⁰² Black political moderates like Pearl Bailey herself, as we shall see later in this study, would still maintain a connection with the values of individualism as espoused by Republicans. Nevertheless, this departure by the Republicans from its pro-civil-rights past to a strategy designed to appeal to white backlash could be seen as a repudiation of the efficacy of the cooperative ethic implicitly espoused

politically by the Bailey *Dolly!* and its effort to effect a model of full adult citizenship for African Americans.

As we discussed earlier, the Bailey *Dolly!* would be forever associated with the Johnson administration's centrist Great Society ethos on race politics. An attack from the political right-wing by the Republicans on Johnson's race politics would place the race-politics ethos of the Bailey *Dolly!* somewhat in jeopardy. The Bailey *Dolly!* provided an environment in which white audiences could view an event fraught with significance for the African American. At the same time, members of this white-audience base faced little or no threat to their status as socially and politically superior to African Americans. It is thus possible that the white audience member who went to see the Bailey *Dolly!* one day could be seduced by the Republicans' southern strategy the next. Such a conundrum could only serve to fuel any argument that the Bailey *Dolly!*, despite its underpinning of racial progress, only served to mollify the white hegemony. Any racial cooperation envisioned by the Bailey *Dolly!* thus could be coopted by such mollification.

The Moynihan Report

Lyndon Johnson's support of a vision of racial harmony based on orderly change would ultimately give way to erosion based on critique from both the left and the right. This vision, as shared with the Bailey *Dolly!*, was indicative of a given historical moment, one that was challenged and uprooted by its contemporaries. Such challenge and uproot would leave the Bailey *Dolly!* perhaps to appear dated, nostalgic, or beside the point.

Yet despite such challenges to its precepts, the conciliatory Great Society ethos on race would have its heyday. Lyndon Johnson would monopolize the political center, especially on

race, against Barry Goldwater in 1964, yet Nixon's "southern strategy" would tear the Democrats' ability to control the political center asunder by 1968. Johnson's initial idealism on social issues seemed to hold sway over the more utopian elements on the left at the start of his administration. This would not remain the case. Soon after the aforementioned speech at Howard, the subject changed from civil rights and social justice to the sociology of the African-American family, a subject that resonated strongly with the overriding goal of full adult citizenship. Rainwater and Yancey describe Moynihan's *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* as having given "voice to views that Moynihan had been formulating for over a year and reflected his belief that policy making in the government should make greater use of the social sciences for problem diagnosis and description."¹⁰³

Moynihan demonstrated via this report that he viewed racially-based difficulties as pathological, i.e., something to be cured by intervention by the appropriate professional. Thus, Moynihan provided a subset of the centrist, Great Society view of race relations. In this subset, Moynihan, to the potential embarrassment of his mentor Lyndon Johnson, connected improvement of the social and economic lot of African Americans with social science and pathology. Sugrue comments on the post-World War II connection between race and professional social science. Describing the shared optimism among social scientists that the ills of racism could be cured by intervention by social science professionals, Sugrue writes

Syracuse University social psychologist Joseph Masling expressed the optimism of his discipline. "Over and over again, there have been data that show you can change people's prejudices." [. . .] Gordon W. Allport, a Harvard psychologist and author of an influential study of prejudice, argued that [. . . w]hites, if given the chance to interact with blacks on a daily basis, would jettison their irrational claims of racial superiority. And blacks, if they were removed from their isolation and freed from the inferiority complex that it engendered, could assimilate into mainstream American culture rather than remain entrapped by the

“frustration,” emotional repression, and pathologies of the ghetto.¹⁰⁴

Such social science professionals as Masling and Allport who dealt with race in the post-war epoch held great sway. Few social science professionals were more highly qualified than Moynihan, a credentialed Ph.D. in sociology from Tufts University. Earlier in his career, Moynihan, in conjunction with Nathan Glazer, created a study on the failure of the “melting pot” model among rival ethnic groups in New York City. In this study, Glazer and Moynihan declared, “Perhaps the meaning of ethnic labels will yet be erased in America,”¹⁰⁵ expressing an optimistic, if perhaps naïve, desire to rid America of racism and thus create a post-racial society. Glazer and Moynihan further argued that the melting-pot model had not worked, at least among rival ethnic groups in New York City. “American society itself [. . .],” they wrote, “could not, or did not, assimilate [all] immigrant groups fully or in equal degree.”¹⁰⁶ Glazer and Moynihan pointed to the cruel economics of segregated neighborhoods in New York City as what would seem an insurmountable block to social progress among New York City’s African-American population, writing

[. . .] The problem is not those with the capacity to go on to college or even to get a good commercial high school education – there is always, at least, a government job for them. The problem is those who will have to work with their hands, in a society that has less and less work for people with only hands.

[. . .] Who can become an electrician, a plasterer, a bricklayer, a machinist, unless he has connections? The problem is not just discrimination against the Negro but discrimination against any outsider.¹⁰⁷

The one fed on the other, and vice versa. The social pathologies Moynihan would later describe in his *Negro Family* report for the Johnson administration would breed economic hardship, while economic hardship would cause further pathological behavior among ghettoized African Americans.

If Moynihan's *Negro Family* report was accurate and professional, it raised some untenable incongruities among African Americans concerning the pathologies it described.

Sugrue points to negative reaction among African-American leadership to the Moynihan's *Negro Family* report. Sugrue writes

[. . .] CORE's Floyd McKissick railed at Moynihan's assumption that "middle class American values are the correct ones for everyone in America." *The Chicago Defender* criticized Moynihan's "sophomoric treatment of illegitimacy." James Farmer contended that the report blamed the victim and offered a "massive academic cop-out for the white conscience."¹⁰⁸

Such criticism did not preclude some mild, soul-searching support for Moynihan's conclusions on the state of the black family. Sugrue continues

[. . .] Black columnist G. C. Oden, for example, argued that it "pretty well verified what we knew about ourselves." An Associated Negro Press writer took the lesson from the report that "swift, uncompromising national action in favor of Negro family structures is imperative."¹⁰⁹

Thus, the *Negro Family* report Moynihan and company prepared for the Johnson administration would create a significant instance of distance between Johnson and African-American leadership. Rainwater and Yancey write

[. . .] Early in November [1965], a week before a White House [civil rights] Conference [. . .] sixty representatives of New York churches and civil rights organizations, under the leadership of the Commission on Religion and Race of the National Council of Churches and the Office of Church and Race of the Protestant Council of New York City, met to adopt a resolution urging the President to strike questions of "family stability" from the agenda of the conference.¹¹⁰

This difficulty with African-American constituencies for the Johnson administration did not end with the Moynihan controversy. Dyson discusses the breakdown in relations between the Johnson administration and perhaps the individual who had been the leading advocate of non-violent solutions to racial difficulties, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. To Dyson, King

was the anti-Malcolm X, the kind of black leader for whom the Great Society and War on Poverty were specifically designed to impress. Thus, any break with King would indicate a failure of Johnson's domestic agenda. With regard to King's centrism and non-violence, Dyson points to the aftermath of King being named *Time* magazine's "Man of the Year" in 1964, observing that in the context of the *Time* honor, "King was made the poster boy for Safe Negro Leadership,"¹¹¹ a respectable and circumspect black leader who did not threaten the white hegemony.

King would break with the Johnson administration over Johnson's handling of the war in Vietnam. This criticism would cause Johnson to characterize King as "that goddamned nigger preacher."¹¹² Dyson comments on how deeply betrayed Johnson felt by King, writing

Johnson's confession to King during one of their last conversations was particularly odd: that [King's] criticism of the war had the same effect on Johnson as if he had discovered that King had raped his daughter. In the anguished statement, Johnson tapped the tortured white male Southern soul: its jealousy and fear of black men, its selective rebuff to interracial sex (after all, thousands of white men aggressively pursued it), and its unquestioning use of white women to show how forbidden sexual desire is tied to political betrayal.¹¹³

Clearly, Johnson must have felt mightily betrayed by King to have offered such a powerful and personal rebuke, one for which Dyson's interpretation adds so much more insight. King's betrayal seemed unfair to Johnson because of the huge investment Johnson felt he had made in the advancement of civil rights for African Americans. Ideologically, as King was staking out a greater alliance with the left wing politically, he was slowly abandoning the comfort offered to white people, Johnson included, of being the "safe Negro."

Throughout all of this tumult with King, Pearl Bailey and cast (despite the confrontational attitude on race that Cab Calloway might have demonstrated, as we shall see in Chapter V) remained "safe Negroes," entertaining white audiences perhaps exhibiting the same

signs of Novocain intoxication as Cleaver's apolitical blacks, discussed earlier in this chapter. The question remained as to whether it would be possible to see the Bailey *Dolly!* as a progressive agent in race relations or a mere window-dressing throwback.

John Lindsay

Johnson would feel a similar sense of betrayal as he had with Martin Luther King, Jr., deriving from members of the commission his administration would create to investigate inner-city race-based violence. Headed by former Illinois Governor Otto Kerner (whose name is often used to cite the report of the commission), the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders had a diverse membership which included then-New York City Mayor John Lindsay. A liberal Republican, Lindsay's personal intervention had prevented New York City from blowing up in the riots that plagued African-American neighborhoods elsewhere in America. Lindsay would soon become Johnson's liberal nemesis on race issues – the socially left-of-center politician who, in contrast to Johnson, had a more practical and genuine approach to race issues than Johnson's centrism.

Concerning race, Lindsay was an enigma, representing yet another alternative in America's journey to find a solution to its racist legacy. A Yale graduate who represented Manhattan's tony upper east side (the so-called "silk stocking district")¹¹⁴ in Congress, Lindsay was a WASP's WASP. Yet as a member of Congress, Lindsay stood aside from most of his fellow Republicans and voted in favor of Johnson administration civil rights legislation. Once elected mayor of New York City in November 1965, Lindsay would continue to display empathy for African Americans, especially those who were living in poverty. In the supporting materials

that accompanied a celebration of the Lindsay years at the Museum of the City of New York in 2010, Charmayne Hunter-Gault writes,

John Lindsay may not have been black or poor, but he seems to have possessed an instinctive understanding of the issues, the unmet needs and yes, even the emotions, of black and poor people-qualities that got him into trouble with other groups but that saved New York City from the fate of many other urban areas during the mid to late 1960s, when simmering rage in poor black neighborhoods boiled into outrage that ignited cities from Newark to Los Angeles.¹¹⁵

Thus, in yet another response to America's history of racism, Lindsay stood in a position to outflank Johnson on race issues. Typical of Lindsay's strategy was rather than to ostracize potential perpetrators of rioting and violence, Lindsay befriended such people. Hunter-Gault tells the story of how "[w]hen Neil Armstrong became the first human to walk on the moon in 1969, one of the most vocal of the street agitators watched it in [Lindsay aide] Teddy Gross's apartment."¹¹⁶

Lindsay gained national attention as the urban mayor who would walk the streets of African-American ghetto neighborhoods in order to diffuse potential violence. No more poignant a story exists to bolster this reputation than the events that transpired the night the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated. Hunter-Gault reports on Lindsay's perseverance that night, despite entreaties from even his closest allies among black politicians that the streets of Harlem were too unsafe for him, writing

Undaunted, Lindsay remained in the street until the Manhattan borough president, Percy Sutton, a black man, who earlier that evening had advised Lindsay against coming to Harlem and was now sensing that the crowd was turning ugly, literally pushed the mayor into his car, driving him away from potential danger. The mayor returned to Gracie Mansion but went back to Harlem in the wee hours of the morning, walking now-calmer streets. [. . .]¹¹⁷

In the aftermath of the King assassination, Lindsay's relations with black New Yorkers would become strained, but not irrevocably. During Lindsay's 1969 re-election campaign, Roy Innis of the Congress of Racial Equality would attempt to silence Lindsay as the mayor attempted to electioneer in Harlem. It was through the efforts of a young black man who had been aided by the Lindsay administration's plethora of programs for the urban poor that the power to Innis's loudspeaker would be cut off. Lindsay media adviser David Garth reported of the same incident that "the only fight developed was which group wanted to protect John Lindsay first,"¹¹⁸ showing a disconnect in Lindsay's favor between black leadership and rank-and-file.

Lindsay became a major player in the Great Society of Lyndon Johnson as a result of his participation in the Kerner commission. In the process, he became forever connected with the "money quote" from the commission's report: "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white – separate and unequal,"¹¹⁹ once again providing evidence of Lindsay's visceral connection with the black and poor. Lyndon Johnson, not willing to accommodate this conclusion, would reject the findings and recommendations of the Kerner Commission. In the process, a political rift between Lindsay and Johnson would come to the fore. Fred Harris was a Kerner Commission member who was then a senator from Oklahoma. Harris would run for president in 1972 against, among others, John Lindsay, who by then had defected to the Democrats. Harris describes his interactions with Lyndon Johnson concerning the commission's report, claiming that after receiving a private rebuke concerning the Kerner report from LBJ,

[. . . he] later learned that Johnson suspected that [Lindsay] was preparing to run against him. [He] tried unsuccessfully to disabuse the president of that idea. [. . . Johnson] believed the false word someone gave him that the report actually condoned and encouraged riots and gave his administration virtually no credit.¹²⁰

The tension between Lindsay and Johnson created an odd space for racial politics in New York City, especially as concerns the Bailey *Dolly!* At once, Lyndon Johnson and his wife had

associated themselves with the show as evidence of their commitment to black empowerment. Simultaneously, Johnson's credibility on civil rights and social justice issues would be damaged by his inability to balance this progressive agenda on race and poverty with the difficulties in Vietnam. Johnson's rejection of the Kerner Commission's conclusions would only reinforce the damage. Lindsay, on the other hand, stood poised to bear the mantle of the "great white hope" of the civil rights era, displaying calm during the riots that plagued America's inner cities during this period and bold initiative in dealing with the problems of the urban poor.

In terms of the *Bailey Dolly!*, Lindsay's negotiation of the civil unrest in America's ghettos the summer of 1967 provided as ideal an environment for a racially cooperative effort like the *Bailey Dolly!* as one could expect or want. Furthermore, Lindsay's conciliatory attitudes on race, especially for a Republican, connected the *Bailey Dolly!*, in addition to the LBJ connection, to an important political paradigm of the civil rights era. Despite any difficulties between Lindsay, in his role on the Kerner Commission, and Johnson, New York City had become the one environment in which the once fresh ideals of Johnson's Great Society could flourish. If Johnson had become his own worst enemy on race, Lindsay stood poised to pick up the pieces of Johnson's failure. Therefore, despite any connection to Johnson and the Great Society, the *Bailey Dolly!* survived unscathed in Lindsay's New York City, fully prepared to take advantage of Lindsay's success in race relations.

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, we explored how the observer might place the *Bailey Dolly!* among the wide variety of political response to the difficulties faced by African Americans in the era that followed World War II. Such political response could be found in a broad range of options,

from a far right response which took advantage of white backlash – the Republican party’s southern strategy, in particular – to the separatism espoused by the likes of Malcolm X and Eldridge Cleaver. The Bailey *Dolly!* would attempt to achieve a cooperative ethos on race, one in keeping with the precepts envisioned by Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society.

We began this chapter with a discussion of the desire on the part of African Americans to be treated as fully adult citizens. Commentators from the more centrist Moon to the separatist, confrontational Malcolm X demonstrated that a diversity of political opinion could rally around this single and critical goal for African Americans. The Bailey *Dolly!* would attempt to achieve this goal through a centrist, conciliatory response to race.

We then investigated separatist, non-cooperative political responses in the post-World-War-II era to this failure of proper treatment of African Americans as espoused by the likes of Malcolm and Cleaver. At the center of such response was a sense on the part of its advocates of the ubiquity of continued white privilege and condescension. Such response would gain an artistic voice in the evolution of the Black Arts Movement, itself a rejection of the more cooperative ethos of the Harlem Renaissance. In the process of analyzing any confrontational response to white racism, we found that the Bailey *Dolly!* could be seen merely as a mild rejoinder, one not very effective at enumerating past grievances. Rather, the Bailey *Dolly!* found itself in a situation in which it could be accused of glossing over the core of black outrage against the white hegemony.

A discussion followed on the positives and negatives of more centrist responses to the need for African Americans to be treated as fully adult citizens. At the epicenter of such centrist response lie the race politics of Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society, for which the Bailey *Dolly!* served as a near-mascot. The association of the Bailey *Dolly!* with Johnson administration race policy offered the advantage of raising the profile and import of the production. Nevertheless,

this association was fraught with difficulty. Within the Johnson administration, the racial politics of Great Society academic theorists like Schlesinger and Moynihan would insert a wedge between Lyndon Johnson and even the most centrist of the black leadership. Furthermore, attempts would be made to outflank Johnson's centrist response on race from both sides of the political spectrum. Such opposition would emanate from the right with the Republican southern strategy as well as from the left with the liberal mayor of New York City, John Lindsay, outflanking Johnson on race. With its association with Johnson's Great Society ethos on race, the Bailey *Dolly!* would find itself perched in a precarious, centrist location politically. In turn, any connection to this centrist position on race could be used to position the Bailey *Dolly!* as an ineffectual throwback.

In the end, Lindsay would offer a response on race that outflanked Johnson and the Great Society on the left. This response would provide a theoretical backdrop to the success of the conciliatory Bailey *Dolly!*

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⁶⁴ Malcolm X (as told to Alex Haley). *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1992 (Originally published: New York : Grove Press, 1965), 27

⁶⁵ Bowser, 51

⁶⁶ Cleaver, Eldridge. *Soul on Ice*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1968, 66

⁶⁷ Cleaver, 3

⁶⁸ Dyson, Michael. *Debating Race with Michael Eric Dyson*. New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2007, 115

⁶⁹ Sugrue, 262-263

⁷⁰ Cone, James H. "Martin and Malcolm on Nonviolence and Violence" in *Phylon*, Volume 49, Number 3/4, Autumn-Winter, 173-183, 178

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⁷² Sugrue, 69

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⁷⁴ Brook Peter. *The Empty Space*. New York: Atheneum, 1987, 48

⁷⁵ Smethurst, James. *The Black Arts Movement*. New York: University of North Carolina Press, 2005, 108-109.

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- ⁷⁸ Lewis, 219.
- ⁷⁹ Gussow, 261.
- ⁸⁰ Gussow, 261.
- ⁸¹ Gussow, 261-262.
- ⁸² Bullins, Ed. *Twelve Plays and Selected Writings*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2006, 289-290.
- ⁸³ Lennon, Mary, “A Question of Relevancy: New York museums and the Black Arts Movement, 1968-1971.” In
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- ⁸⁷ Ongiri, Amy Abugo. *Spectacular Blackness*. Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia, 2010, 23.
- ⁸⁸ Rainwater, Lee and William L. Yancey. *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press, 1967, 1-2
- ⁸⁹ Sugrue, 357
- ⁹⁰ Conkin, Paul K. “Review: The Johnson Years: An Essay Review” in *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, Volume 56, Number 1, Autumn 1972, 59-64, 60
- ⁹¹ This popularity was the result of the Louis Armstrong hit recording that had knocked the Beatles out of the number one position on the Top 40 in 1964. Details of Armstrong’s connection to *Hello, Dolly!* will be discussed in Chapter V.
- ⁹² Please see Prideaux, Tom, “A bedrock Christian turns the show into a love-in,” *Life Magazine*, December 8, 1967. According to Prideaux, this was the first time an American president had appeared on a theatre stage before an audience.
- ⁹³ Depoe, Stephen P. *Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., and the Ideological History of American Liberalism*. Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press 1994, 8
- ⁹⁴ Depoe, 11-12
- ⁹⁵ Depoe, 92
- ⁹⁶ Depoe, 89-90
- ⁹⁷ Depoe, 84
- ⁹⁸ Kruse, 219
- ⁹⁹ Kruse, 231
- ¹⁰⁰ Kruse, 231. Goldwater’s belief that civil rights legislation went beyond constitutional limits would be echoed in the libertarian/objectivist beliefs of Ayn Rand and her acolytes. Rand believed that racism was the ultimate example of the dreaded collectivism – the idea that the group could enforce its beliefs, rational or otherwise, on the individual. She writes, “Racism is the lowest, most crudely primitive form of collectivism. Racism is a doctrine of, by, and for brutes. The respectable family that supports worthless relatives or covers up crimes in order to ‘protect the family name’ (as if the moral stature of one man could be damaged by the actions of another) – the bum who boasts that his great-grandfather was an empire-builder, or the small-town spinster who boasts that her maternal great-uncle was a state senator and her third cousin gave a concert at Carnegie Hall (as if the achievements of one man could rub off on the mediocrity of another) – the parents who search genealogical tress in order to evaluate their prospective sons-in-law – the celebrity who starts his autobiography with a detailed account of his family history – all of these are samples of racism, the atavistic manifestations of a doctrine whose full expression is the tribal warfare of prehistoric savages, the wholesale slaughter of Nazi Germany, the atrocities of the so-called ‘newly emerging nation.’” Furthermore, as Goldwater might have done himself, Rand defends capitalism at the ultimate tool to deal with collectivist racist excesses, pointing to the different political paradigms in operation in the capitalist north versus the collectivist agrarian south during slavery and Jim Crow. Rand writes, “Historically, racism has always risen or fallen with the rise or fall of collectivism. Collectivism holds that the individual has no rights, that his life and work belong to the group (to ‘society,’ to the tribe, the state, the nation) and that the group may sacrifice him at its own interests. The only way to implement a doctrine of this kind is by means of brute force – and *statism* has always been the political corollary of collectivism.” One might conjecture that Rand would find great solace in

the capitalist adventures of David Merrick's attempt to reconcile previous wrongs committed against African Americans in commercial American musical theatre via the Bailey *Dolly!* Please see Rand's works *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* (New York: Signet Books, 1967) and her essay on racism in *The Virtue of Selfishness* (New York: Signet Non-fiction, 1961, 1964).¹⁰⁰

¹⁰¹ Kruse, 231.

¹⁰² Please see <http://www.270towin.com/> (accessed June 17, 2010) for details on the electoral victories for Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton. Concerning the generational effect of this southern strategy, Paul Krugman of the *New York Times*, would comment in 2007 on the how successful Goldwater's attitudes on federal civil rights intervention would prove in national elections, writing, "More than 40 years have passed since the Voting Rights Act, which Reagan described in 1980 as 'humiliating to the South.' Yet Southern white voting behavior remains distinctive. Democrats decisively won the popular vote in [the 2006] House elections, but Southern whites voted Republican by almost two to one." Krugman, Paul. "Republicans and Race."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/19/opinion/19krugman.html> (accessed April 18, 2010).

¹⁰³ Rainwater and Yancey, 3-4

¹⁰⁴ Sugrue, 217-218

¹⁰⁵ Glazer, Nathan and Daniel Patrick Moynihan. *Beyond the Melting Pot: the Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press, 1964, 12

¹⁰⁶ Glazer and Moynihan, 14

¹⁰⁷ Glazer and Moynihan, 39

¹⁰⁸ Sugrue, 379

¹⁰⁹ Sugrue, 397

¹¹⁰ Rainwater and Yancey, 4

¹¹¹ Dyson, Michael Eric. *I May Not Get there with You: The true Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Touchstone, 2000, 6

¹¹² Dyson (King), 61

¹¹³ Dyson (King), 61

¹¹⁴ Hunter-Gault, Charlayne, "Black and White" in Roberts, Sam. *America's Mayor John V. Lindsay and the Reinvention of New York*. New York: Museum of the City of New York/Columbia University Press, 2010, 43

¹¹⁵ Hunter-Gault, 44

¹¹⁶ Hunter-Gault, 47

¹¹⁷ Hunter-Gault, 49

¹¹⁸ Hunter-Gault, 49

¹¹⁹ Hunter-Gault, 51

¹²⁰ Hunter-Gault, 56

CHAPTER III – THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ORDINARY

Chapter Introduction

The Bailey *Dolly!* begs the question of how ordinary, frothy musical theatre – in this case, Stewart and Herman’s *Hello, Dolly!*, which is perhaps the quintessential example of light, romantic, and not terribly provocative musical theatre – can serve as important a social function as racial reconciliation and social prejudice. We will discover that this non-masterpiece, *Hello, Dolly!*, well-serves the purpose of dealing with these social issues, especially when considered in light of the unfair treatment of African Americans by the entertainment industry in the period that preceded the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

To accomplish the task of connecting the Bailey *Dolly!* to issues of social justice, we will first explore the idea of the importance of ordinary popular media fare in analyzing more serious issues of social import. We follow this with discussions of various genres of popular media, and how such media informed and were informed by the racial sociology and politics discussed earlier in this study. These discussions are intended to connect the Bailey *Dolly!* to a line of reasoning that suggests that light, domestic comedy retains a tradition of social commentary as well as a link to attempted bourgeois entrée on the part of marginalized populations. On the issue of bourgeois entrée, we will connect light, romantic comedy with the discussion of vertical class permeability in which we engaged with Chapter I.

In addition, in order to understand the import of the Bailey *Dolly!*, we need to understand how race played out in the era preceding the Bailey *Dolly!* in American entertainment. The Bailey *Dolly!*, therefore, did not exist in a vacuum. This production was part of a long history of

social commentary connected to light domestic comedy, as well as a response to racism inherent in venues of American entertainment that preceded it.

We conclude with a discussion of the relative merits of comedy and tragedy in dealing with marginalization. Where tragedy explains the pain and cruelty of marginalization, we will find that comedy allows us to envision alternatives to such marginalization, especially as concerns attempts at bourgeois entrée.

“Poor Theatre”

We begin with a short anecdote from the annals of academic theatre. The topic of the Mid-America Theatre Conference in Chicago in March 2009 was “poor theatre.” Most presenters¹²¹ interpreted “poor theatre” to mean theatre having to do with economically oppressed classes. Not Patrick D. Murphree of Northwestern State University of Louisiana. Murphree began his presentation by distinguishing between so-called “masterpieces” and what he had dubbed “poor plays.”

[. . .] I'll define a masterpiece as a work valued by posterity for the insights it gives into human nature and/or for its stylistic achievements and innovations; such plays generally have long histories of revival. By contrast, a poor play effectively sustains the interest of its intended audience but without taking risks that might alienate that audience; as a result, it is generally commercially successful until its eventual disappearance from the repertory.¹²²

It is important to note that Murphree distinguishes the “simply bad” and the inherently mediocre “poor” play.¹²³ Murphree thus casts the aesthetic judgment of mediocrity on these less-than-masterpieces much in the way posterity might be imagined as casting the aesthetic judgment of “masterpiece.” Moreover, Murphree finds great social and cultural significance in the study of “poor” plays. He writes,

Poor plays give us more direct access to the historical circumstances of theatrical production. Producing organizations and audiences regularly reject works of innovative genius in favor of those that provide more uncomplicated pleasures. Since the audience for the avant-garde is inherently atypical, poor plays are a better route to understanding the theatrical mainstream.¹²⁴

To bolster this sense of lack of innovation and mass appeal as important to the understanding of a culture, Murphree continues by saying,

Mediocre plays generally aim for the middle of the road so as to attract the widest possible audience; thus the opinions enshrined within them reflect the prevailing consensus on social questions. [. . .] The timelessness and adaptability associated with masterpieces interfere with their ability to reflect cultural paradigms. Poor plays, uncontaminated by the effects of genius and revival, make more accurate mirrors.¹²⁵

So if a scholar's intent is to find societal mores reflected in art, Murphree would send such a scholar to the canon of "poor plays" rather than to masterpieces. "Poor plays," writes Murphree, "give us greater insight into the culture that gave birth to them. There are many reasons to study plays other than as documents attesting to historical mores, but if this is the intention, poor plays are far more useful in this regard than are masterpieces."¹²⁶

Of course, there exists the counterargument, that venues that offer popular entertainment cannot be worthy of any serious interest. Any argument that denies a place for popular entertainment in serious discussion may have fallen out of favor in recent years. Nevertheless, such an argument could be found in the era surrounding World War II. We have already seen, in Chapters I and II, how social and political thought from this era informed our discussion of the Bailey *Dolly!* Eric Bentley would seem to be an advocate of this point of view, as demonstrated in a 1946 essay on the topic of the plight of the contemporary playwright. Bentley writes

Of all craftsmen, the playwright is to be the most pitied. A man who writes serious stories, or plays the violin, can usually find some public outlet for his work, at least if he is proficient. But the man who writes plays is homeless and helpless. He has either to

give up his art altogether, confine himself to teaching it in college,
or prostitute it on Broadway.¹²⁷

Clearly, Bentley here displays little patience with the popular mediocrity that poses as the lively art of theatre in any commercial venue. It would be surprising, therefore, to imbue Bentley of any sense of interest in common, “prostituted” entertainment.

In contrast, Murphree’s enthusiasm concerning “poor plays” and other popular entertainment hardly stands alone in the study of the intersection of aesthetics and sociology. For example, Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson write, “Popular culture studies have until recently been treated as more or less unworthy of serious scholarly attention. But developments in anthropology, history, communication, American studies, and literary criticism have given the study of popular culture new analytic tools and legitimacy.”¹²⁸ Here, Mukerji and Schudson acknowledge, like Murphree, the need to consider the importance of popular culture. Furthermore, in their discussion of the importance of cinema, Lisa A. Barnett and Michael Patrick Allen take Murphree’s argument one step further. Citing sociologist, anthropologist, and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu, Barnett and Allen make a case for the possibility that the distinction between masterpiece and what Murphree calls the “poor” piece of art comes down to social control. By privileging the masterpiece over the more popular piece of art, the ruling hegemony would seem to create a hierarchy designed to maintain social control over the masses. Barnett and Allen describe Bourdieu’s concept of “cultural capital,” writing,

In proposing this concept, Bourdieu argued that cultural capital [. . .] contributes to the maintenance of boundaries between the members of different social classes. Specifically, he claimed that a familiarity with “high” culture serves as a basis for distinguishing members of the dominant class from members of subordinate classes.¹²⁹

Murphree would seem to argue that “poor” art offers a more satisfying reflection of a culture than masterpieces. Barnett and Allen, via Bourdieu, offer a utilitarian purpose to the

maintenance of distinctions between high- and middle-brow culture – to avail the ruling hegemony of a means to identify (and presumably segregate) its inferiors. Murphree’s argument would seem to avoid the issue of any motivation based in class warfare for these aesthetic distinctions. Barnett and Allen would seem to have found a conspiracy designed to prevent democratic interaction among the classes as at least part of the basis for the distinction of high versus not-so-high culture.

In assessing either Murphree or Barnett and Allen, and regardless of whether we attribute any kind of class warfare resonance to any analysis of popular art forms, it is apparent that such analysis connects the scholar to the culture of the time. The Bailey *Dolly!*, of course, was a significant part of this culture, especially in its reflection on racial attitudes of the era. We will see in Chapter V that the text of Bailey *Dolly!*, in particular, resonates with the racial issues the Bailey *Dolly!* raises. However, just as important to the discussion is the importance of the Bailey *Dolly!* when considering the social climate concerning race in the 1960s.

Middlebrow Entertainment and African-American Interests

At the heart of the matter here lies what Murphree might call a “poor” play, the very middlebrow *Hello, Dolly!* and its all-African-American incarnation. Though perhaps not particularly interesting in terms of aesthetics, this particular production reflects the mores of American society with respect to popular performance and race. From Barnett and Allen’s point of view, this Bailey *Dolly!* might seem an appropriate venue for the democratic process to promote healthy interaction among the races. Using Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital, the original *Dolly!* can be seen as a means by which African Americans are prevented from participating in full adult citizenship. In the perfect Bourdieu example, class boundaries would

derive from the relative presence of intellectual heft to the aesthetic property in question. Here, in a somewhat modified version of Bourdieu, the boundaries for the social classes derive from Weber – vertical in nature, cultural in maintenance.

So this “poor” play, as Murphree describes it, takes on the power of maintaining social class separation based on race in one incarnation. It might stand to reason that once the social class boundary is removed in a subsequent incarnation, the “poor” play loses its power to segregate based on race as social class, and the problem is solved. This is not necessarily the case. Harry Elam, Jr. and David Krasner explore the potential delicacy of this concept of performance and race intersecting, writing, “[. . .] Are there times in everyday life when African Americans act out or “do” blackness? [. . .] In slavery times, slaves would wear the mask of ignorance and perform the expected role of black subservience in order to avoid punishment from the slave masters’s lash.”¹³⁰ Elam and Krasner’s discussion begs the question of whether it is possible for African American actors to be at all light-heartedly comedic when performing on stage without showing insensitivity to previous mistreatment of African Americans.

One alternative in this discussion might be to say that any attempt to show contemporary black actors involved in light domestic pursuits automatically harkens back to Elam and Krasner’s “mask of ignorance” – the “shufflin’/jivin’” stereotype of “happy little slaves” – and is therefore *prima facie* evidence of insensitivity on the part of white audiences and creative personnel. One could extend this idea to conjecture that light domestic comedy has no legacy in either African or African-American culture, especially in the light of any recalcitrant white mistreatment of African Americans. Any African American who plays in a light domestic comedy that does not address indigent American racism directly can be seen as an enemy to the cause.

Attendant to such concern over such indigent racism is the idea that any portrayal of a black middle class experience – even one that places us, albeit fictionally, in a venue informed by turn-of-the-twentieth-century Americana like the Bailey *Dolly!* – is somehow a less-than-genuine experience for African Americans. In order to be “truly” black, one would seem to be possessed of a need to be in touch with the street-level poverty of the urban ghetto. In director/screenwriter Paul Haggis’s 2005 film *Crash*, African Americans Cameron and Christine are an upper-middle-class heterosexual married couple who encounter racism on the part of a Los Angeles police officer in a routine traffic stop. Later that day, the couple engages in private conversation. Where Cameron argues a safety in silence, Christine argues a more vocal style of resistance to white racism.

Cameron: You know, sooner or later, you are gonna have to find out what it is really like to be black.

Christine: Fuck you man, like you know! The closest you ever came to being black, Cameron, was watching [*T*]he *Cosby Show* [italics added].

Cameron: Yeah? Well at least I wasn't watching it with the rest of the equestrian team.

Christine: You know what Cameron, you're right. I got a lot to learn 'cause I haven't quite figured out how to shuck and jive yet. Lemme hear it again? "Sorry Mr. Poh-lice Man, you sure is mighty fine to us poor black folk. You sure to let me know next time you wanna finger fuck my wife!"

Cameron: How the fuck do you say something like that to me? You know what? Fuck you.

Christine: That's right, a little anger! It's a little late, but it's nice to see!¹³¹

Of particular interest here is both Cameron and Christine’s reinforcement of the idea that an idyllic middle-class life such as that portrayed on NBC television’s *The Cosby Show* is somehow not “really” black. Cameron’s attempt to one-up Christine with the reference to “the equestrian

team” would seem to be an attempt on Cameron’s part to bolster his argument, that Christine’s point-of-view on what is “really” black already is clouded by her bourgeois background.

Cameron would seem not so much to disagree with Christine that the police officer was racist. Rather, he argues in favor of safety over venting. Again, in both Cameron and Christine’s arguments, this sense of middle-class existence being somehow not “really” black comes to the fore.

The bourgeois nature of the *Bailey Dolly!* subjects it to similar criticism as Christine’s criticism of the bourgeois *Cosby Show*. However, a defense of the *Bailey Dolly!* in a manner similar to Cameron’s defense of his behavior with the racist cop – avoidance of confrontation in order to avoid further nasty consequences – would seem a bit harsh. It is unreasonable to attribute the kind of racism both Cameron *and* Christine have attributed to the cop who stopped them to anyone involved in the production of the *Bailey Dolly!*

Christine in *Crash* would seem, in her derision of *The Cosby Show*, to deny or minimize the importance of a black middle class. Bowser, in contrast, offers historical precedent to the existence, strength, pride, and resistance of a black middle class. In the process, Bowser presents a history of attempts to create a black middle class in America that is necessarily, as discussed above as concerned “Negrotarians,” wary of white motivation. Early on, after a long discussion of the rise of the “middling sorts” – those lower-echelon white people who would do the bidding of the ruling class whites in order to keep the working class in line in mid-millennium England – Bowser comments,

Studies of the English middling sorts generally neglect to mention that the men in the middle were actually the same men who profited from the exploitation of the colonies [. . . and] slavery in the New World [. . .] They did not succeed simply because of their diligence and hard work, or because they had the right values, or even because they had God’s blessing. Rather, there was a

social and economic structure underlying the appearance of this new and expanding class.¹³²

Such “middling sorts” as described by Bowser provide an example of a positive tradition of bourgeoisie among African Americans. Yet one must take into account this underlying “social and economic structure” which Bowser mentions – the invention of race as a political, social, and economic tool. In the process of enslavement of Africans to provide slave labor for enterprises in the New World, Bowser notes that despite the stereotype of black slaves working in agricultural enterprise, a significant number of enslaved Africans received training in the tasks that their “middling sort” masters handled back in England. Thus Bowser documents a history of slavery that includes slaves learning tasks that would serve them well – tasks such as bookkeeping and skilled artisanship – once slavery was over after the Civil War.

Implicitly in the examples of the *Bailey Dolly!* and *The Cosby Show*, street realities are seen in a suspect light. Yet it is impossible to completely ignore the effects of urban realities on black culture and how this experience differed from similar white experiences. Richard Wade compares the urban experience of urbanized blacks to that of nineteenth and twentieth century European immigrants. In this comparison, Wade compares the temporary nature of white urban ghettos with what would become a more permanent state of affairs for black ghetto residents, arguing

[. . .] The earlier ghetto [inhabited by white ethnics] had been tolerable because its residents thought it temporary; the new ghetto became intolerable because its inhabitants increasingly considered it permanent. Initially, blacks thought escape was always possible and that hard work, education, and some luck would spring at least their most successful into the middle-class-white world beyond. The last generation has seen this hope fade and the ghetto triumph.¹³³

Here, Bowser’s model of vertical class mobility would seem to come to the fore. In Wade’s description, economics could not be considered the primary agent in preventing this “escape

valve,” so critical to white immigrant bourgeois aspiration, from coming into play for similarly situated African Americans. It was the culturally-based vertical structure of race – the barriers of white cultural prejudice – that prevented blacks in the early and mid-twentieth century from moving into nicer neighborhoods. The Bailey *Dolly!* and *The Cosby Show*, though ridiculed by more separatist elements, provided examples that sought to break down these vertical barriers.

Such light domestic comedy as *Dolly!* (and *Cosby*) might be possessed of difficulties concerning its lack of “street” credentials. Parallel to our discussion of the Black Arts Movement in the previous chapter, Bullins expands his description of this new paradigm in black expression contemporary with the Bailey *Dolly!* This new paradigm would seem only to have recognized the urban African-American experience as legitimate to black expression. Bullins writes

The young Black artists that formed Le Roi Jones’s [. . .] Black Arts Repertory Theater/School in Harlem [. . .] were mainly from the Black urban ghettos of America, a class that the Black bourgeoisie has traditionally hated for being less than “civilized,” or not imitative of European culture and values, and, hence, a conscious threat against the status quo values of Black middle-America.¹³⁴

The urban ghetto experience, an experience studiously avoided by the Bailey *Dolly!*, would present itself in serious theatre circles as paramount to black expression. The failure of the Bailey *Dolly!* to ascribe to this paradigm might plague the production with doubts as to its legitimacy with respect to African-American cultural concerns.

Amy Abugo Onigri would seem to concur in this observation. However, Onigri would seem to envision a downside to adherence to this sense of “true black experience” enumerated by Bullins. Onigri describes the mistrust those adhering to Bullins’s sense of “true black experience” have of the African American middle class in terms of creating an uncompromised black artistic experience. Onigri writes,

The anxiety [on the part of those seeking a “true black experience”] focuses in particular on the African American Middle class and a fear of losing the essential “struggle” quality, which the Black Arts Movement attributes to the Black experience [. . .] Black Arts poet A. B. Spellman’s image of white colleges in the future [includes] “turning out hundreds of black-talking *bourgies* with Ph. D.s in Malcolm X and John Coltrane” [. . .]¹³⁵

By Onigri’s analysis, one could as easily expect cooptation as liberation from any “true black experience” that might result from the efforts of the Black Arts Movement. In Onigri-world, “Ph. D’s in Malcolm X and John Coltrane,” presumably offered by universities that are beholden to the white hegemony, would be just as awful an outcome perhaps as the kind of non-ghetto, non-“street real” fare Bullins imagines in his worst nightmare as illegitimate.

For Bullins, anything presented in a theatrical context short of the truly disenfranchised African-American experience would thus be a lie and a disservice. Bullins especially catches this sense of needing to be “real” to the ghetto mindset in his one-act play, *Clara’s Ole Man* (1965). In the cutting that follows, we have just heard a discussion between Big Girl and her mildly developmentally disabled sister, Baby Girl. Baby Girl claims that she has seen a mother cat with kittens. Apparently, these cats do not exist, at least according to Big Girl. Jack, the third party in this scene written by Bullins as a “white wannabe,” questions Big Girl over her apparent dismissal of Baby Girl’s interest in these fictional kittens.

Big Girl: [. . .] She can’t fool me none. She just wants a cat but I ain’t gonna get none.

Jack: Why not? Cats aren’t so bad. My mother has one and he’s quite a pleasure to her.

Big Girl: For your mammy maybe, but all they mean round here (Singsong) is fleas and mo’ mouths to feed. With an invalid aunt upstairs, we don’t need any mo’ expenses.

Jack (gestures toward Baby Girl): It shows that she has very vivid imagination to make up that story about the kittens.

Big Girl: Yeah, her big sister ain't the biggest liar in the family.¹³⁶

For Bullins, a “vivid imagination” to the white or white-wannabe mindset is plain and simple “lying” to the ghetto-black mindset. Thus, the cross-racial re-imagination involved in the Bailey *Dolly!* could be considered as a Bullins-imagined “lie” in this context.

Bullins would seem to offer the tacit argument that any attempt on the part of a black performer to take part in a white-created piece offers troublesome questions of genuine black expression. This tacit argument raises the question of appropriation of any hegemonic piece of dramatic literature by members of a marginalized population. Richard Schechner discusses this question in his work on cross-cultural casting, offering examples in which crossing such cultural divides advances the cause of breaking down barriers of marginalization. Schechner writes, “Often, casting against type is the stock and trade of parody and travesty – witness the many plays Charles Ludlam wrote, directed, and starred in or the all-male Trocadero Ballet. Sometimes the intention is political – as when women play males at WOW Café or when Chicano farm laborers play white bosses at the Teatro Campesino.”¹³⁷ In these instances, pretending a race/gender/age/body-type role not possessed inherently by the performer, while not completely the truth, enhances the presentation of such cultural divides. Such pretense is no more a lie or, on the other hand, the result of vivid imagination than Baby Girl’s desire to adopt a kitten. Schechner continues by finding a connection for the lack of huge success for casting that ignores race, gender, body-type, and age with a Western fetish for naturalism – what Schechner calls “daily experience” – which dates back to the Renaissance. Schechner writes,

Attempts to destabilize this faith in daily experience – movements like surrealism and abstract expressionism in the arts or trance and speaking in tongues in religion – have only been minimally successful. The realities proposed by various artistic avant gardes and the charismatic churches are not wholly taken seriously by mainstream people who continue to measure “what’s real” by the yardstick of “common sense.”¹³⁸

Schechner continues by arguing that the only time ideas that run counter to such “common sense” find currency among the mainstream is when they have practical applications, offering the examples of “bombs” and “energy sources.” (One assumes Schechner makes at least oblique reference to the non-linear theory of relativity and atomic weaponry and energy, among other examples.) As cross-cultural casting runs counter to this “common sense” naturalism, audiences trained since the Renaissance to privilege such naturalism are reticent to accept any attempt at casting that does not match such expectation. Schechner imagines how if African-American football player Herschel Walker were to be cast as a Sylph, such a prototypical example of an assault on “common sense” naturalism would be met with disdain by an audience addicted to naturalism. In response to such prosaic attachment to naturalism, Schechner argues that “it is more delightful to see the gap than to mask it”¹³⁹ and points to Brecht’s concept of *Verfremdung* – “where the audience enjoys, and learns from, the dialectical tension between player and played”¹⁴⁰ – as a powerful tool in the exploration of cultural expectations. In the Bailey *Dolly!*, this idea of a “dialectical tension between player and played” expresses itself in a metatheatrical component. Onstage, there was no mention of race. Yet as we will see in Chapters V and VI of this study, race informed nearly every aspect of reaction to this production.

Philip C. Kolin recalls an off-Broadway production of *A Streetcar Named Desire* featuring black actress Hilda Simms as Blanche DuBois that was planned for a September 17, 1958 opening. Here, Kolin offers another example of a presumably Eurocentric property appropriated by a marginalized population. This production was cancelled because Tennessee Williams did not want it competing with the Broadway premiere of his new play, *Sweet Bird of Youth*, scheduled to open later that season. (In asking for the black *Streetcar* production to be postponed, Williams nevertheless offered support to such a cross-racial effort.) This black

Streetcar production would never take place. Yet Kolin relates Simms' excitement over the possibility of playing Blanche and writes, "Simms was looking forward to playing Blanche, she said, since 'most of the plays with roles for Negro actresses are inferior vehicles' and it is 'altogether plausible to play Blanche as a Creole, or mixed French, Spanish, and Negro ancestry.'"¹⁴¹ On her first point, one could well accuse Simms of a lack of loyalty to the cause of black expression. However, it is via a re-imagination implied by this second point – that Blanche is not necessarily white – that any breakdown of cultural barriers can transpire. Such a re-imagination is not the stretch of the imagination that Schechner describes with respect to Herschel Walker and Sylphs, being derivative of the text itself. Kolin writes, "A strong black presence has always inhabited *Streetcar*. Pulitzer-prize-winning black author Charles Gordone clearly sensed it when he remarked of Williams, 'in most of his plays I have always detected the black existential lurking between the lines.'"¹⁴² Kolin points to various side characters of diverse ethnicity and the very murkiness/fertility of the "brown" Mississippi River itself to link the text of *Streetcar* to the possibility of a black Blanche.

Appropriation of non-African forms for liberationist purposes runs counter to a direct, literal interpretation of Bullins' imagination/lying conundrum – that the only true expression of African-American reality must be "ghetto real." Nevertheless, in the cases of both Schechner and Kolin, we see where re-imagination fosters the cause of examining and deconstructing destructive cultural barriers. But such appropriation of non-African forms as described so far does not completely answer the question of whether light domestic comedy, as Elam and Krassner suggest earlier in this chapter, runs counter to serious black expression and is, by extension, somehow "un-African."

Yet examples of domestic comedy that was similar in form to equivalent European forms in pre-colonial African performance are *not* difficult to find. David Kerr describes a particularly

intriguing instance of such theatre in the Bamana kingdom in fourteenth century Mali, the *kote-tlon* – comedies that commented on anti-social elements among those involved in local agriculture production. Kerr quotes James Brink in detailing the nature of such anti-social behavior: “unfaithful wives, lovers, greedy persons, [and] morons” who are “punished” and “made to look absurd.”¹⁴³ We can also look to post-colonial popular theatre in Africa for similar universal tenets. Barber, Collins, and Ricard describe the blend of indigenous and colonial aesthetics reflected in the twentieth-century African concert party. Though this concert party form “was modeled on [1920s] vaudeville minstrelsy”¹⁴⁴, Barber, Collins, and Ricard describe how the concert party evolved into a more indigenous form.

The story of concert party [. . .] is not one of evolutionary progress from a “traditional,” indigenous form to a “modern,” foreign-inspired one; rather, it is a story of the increasing indigenization and popularization of what were indigenized, they were perceived as becoming more modern. In the end, the distinctions “imported”/ “indigenous,” and “traditional”/ “modern” become blurred and porous.¹⁴⁵

Thus, in twentieth-century Africa itself, this form of popular theatre became a model for a locally-informed light domestic comedy. A typical example of the plot line of such a concert party can be found in the Happy Star concert party troupe’s *Mister Tameklor*, a play involving a father, two sons, servants, and “Ghanian whores.”¹⁴⁶ Throughout Barber, Collins, and Ricard’s description of the twentieth-century African concert party, the observer sees the tenets of light romantic comedy, translated to an African-African idiom – light satire, romance, “rags to riches” trajectories, comic servants, agrarian values, and the lottery!

A purist, Black-Arts interpretation of black involvement in light, popular entertainment forms might come up short in terms of how such entertainment serves the goal of the liberation of African Americans from the cruelties of the white hegemony. Taking this interpretation to its extreme, someone like Ed Bullins would seem to be able to make the claim that any portrayal of

African Americans as anything less than “ghetto real” is tantamount to lying. Nevertheless, even a cursory investigation of the history of theatre on the African continent shows a connection between social commentary and light fare. In its lack of substance, therefore, it is possible to envision the Bailey *Dolly!* as a reclamation of this African legacy of light commentary as critical to the understanding of the African, and perhaps the African-American, situation.

Light, Domestic Comedy as Liberation

As seen in the *kote-tlon* and the twentieth-century concert party, cross-cultural ties have existed through history and continue to exist based on the tenets of such light comedy. Perhaps the crime of American racism is not exclusively the avoidance of dealing with black urban “street” reality. Perhaps an equally painful crime has been the tacit appropriation by the white hegemony of light romantic comedy of a non-condescending nature in order to affect the social ostracizing of African Americans. In Chapter I, we saw that the ability to engage in such light romantic comedy often defines dignity and adulthood, the two attributes most cruelly denied African Americans by the white hegemony. Furthermore, in Chapter IV, the question of whether commercial American musical theatre contains inherent biases against the possibility of portraying African Americans with dignity and adulthood will be explored.

In a diaspora like the one endured by African Americans, cross-cultural universality of light domestic comedy offers the possibility, real or imagined or some combination of both, of marginalized populations achieving parity with mainstream populations. In this search for parity, it is often the case that members of marginalized populations seek heroic role models in order to promote a sense of empowerment against historic mistreatment. Christopher Booker discusses a similar phenomenon in his treatment of the “rags to riches” archetypal plotline.

Again and again in the storytelling of the world we come across a certain image which seems to hold a peculiar fascination for us. We see an ordinary, insignificant person, dismissed by everyone as of little account, who suddenly steps to the center of the stage, revealed to be someone quite exceptional.¹⁴⁷

Booker continues by describing the instantaneous, “poof, like magic” transformation of such a hero. This messianic figure will often undergo an epiphany, transforming from a sideline figure to a figure possessed of a power with which to be reckoned. Booker offers the example of the transformation of Clark Kent into Superman, Popeye eating his spinach, and the mousy (female) secretary letting her hair down to reveal to her mild-mannered boss that she indeed is “beautiful.”¹⁴⁸

Similar moments involving members of marginalized populations being thrust into (using the word in Booker’s sense) “heroic” examples of bourgeois assimilation abound in commercial American musical theatre. Such examples can be viewed as an inspiration and empowerment to the disenfranchised; in contrast, such moments could be seen as assimilation for the outsider, that is, making the outsider fit into the norms of the status quo. A particularly interesting example of such a moment happens in Alan Jay Lerner’s libretto to *My Fair Lady* (1956). There, Eliza Doolittle aptly describes such a place of transcendence as “a room somewhere/far away from the cold night air” as her fellow Cockneys talk of jaunts to “gay Pa-ree,” “castles in Capri,” and “summers by the sea.” It is Eliza who has the right idea. The happier world of which she dreams is simple, filled with warmth and uncomplicated comfort, and conflict-free. As elaborate as it gets for Eliza is a box of chocolates and perhaps the companion whose head rests on her knee. Furthermore, Lerner’s often criticized choice to have Eliza return to Higgins at the end of the play does not necessarily negate any sense of ultimate triumph on Eliza’s part. She is, after all, *not* the heartless guttersnipe Higgins accuses her of being. She is, as Higgins now avers, a “consort battleship” worthy of Higgins’ genuine attention and even perhaps affection. Most

importantly, Eliza has earned her place in Higgins' world of bourgeois nicety of her own gargantuan effort. Such bourgeois nicety itself, however, may be suspect, demanding conformity to the standards of the overlord.

More specific to our discussion, an argument can be made that the Bailey *Dolly!* embraces a middle-class viewpoint, one that can allow for entrée of the marginalized. Again, such a view can be held to challenge, as it takes as a premise that the middle class world and values are good ones, ones that allow for accommodation and inclusion.

A few years before *My Fair Lady*, there occurred a similar transcendent phenomenon in Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific* (1949). Bloody Mary sings to us of the virtues of the quasi-mythical Bali H'ai. Like Eliza's warm room, Bali H'ai becomes a location in which one can engage in the pleasantries afforded to the bourgeois – pleasantries that offer both the benefits of creature comfort yet are beset by the negatives of possible cultural assimilation based on mainstream values. Yet even if this location is far afield from Joe Cable's Main Line Philadelphia roots, it represents a seminal fantasy of those members of the bourgeoisie who wish to escape the constrictions of these roots. In this location, in addition to finding bourgeois escape fantasy, an added advantage derives from the idea that no one is "taught to hate and fear" those "whose eyes are oddly made." Here in Bali H'ai, it is possible for Mary's daughter Liat, much like Eliza, to negotiate the divide between native drudgery and bourgeois nicety *and* to find a sense of race neutrality that will work to the advantage of the relationship between herself and Joe Cable. Unlike *My Fair Lady*, the plot of *South Pacific* takes a trajectory that places Joe Cable in a tragic situation. His dream of a race-neutral locus in Bali H'ai – a place in which Liat's "oddly made" eyes might not be problematic to the maintenance of his world of bourgeois nicety – dissolves from his own failings. When he sings "You've Got to Be Taught" to Nellie Forbush, he acknowledges that their mutual difficulties are of their own making. Each is capable

of getting to a race-neutral Bali H'ai paradise. Each remains burdened by what he or she has been "taught."

Cable presents a particularly American take on class structure and mobility. Born of economically advantage stock from the main line in what his potential mother-in-law Bloody Mary calls in Tonkinese pidgin "Phidadellia," Cable expresses deep regret for his inability to transcend class lines. In his *High Comedy in American Movies: Class and humor from the 1920s to the Present*, Steve Vinburg discusses this conundrum, i.e., the idea of American comedy's simultaneous infatuation with and repulsion of bourgeois nicety. Vinburg makes specific reference to the depression-era comedies of Philip Barry. In comedies like *Holiday* and *The Philadelphia Story*, Barry presents the conundrum of being wealthy in supposedly classless America. Vinburg writes

These wonderful plays [. . .] represent a particularly American approach to class [. . .] We're Americans, so we're not supposed to believe in the inflexibility of class boundaries. Therefore the heroes of Barry's play are restless, uncomfortable with their aristocratic status or with the demands it places on their behavior; or else they are non-aristocrats who have somehow infiltrated the club and feel compelled to commend on its strangeness and exclusivity.¹⁴⁹

As in Barry's plays, musical theatre of the Golden Age and beyond is filled with heroes of the first order – aristocrats uncomfortable with their station in life. Examples of this phenomenon that come to mind immediately would include King Arthur in Lerner and Loewe's *Camelot* (1960) and the slightly post-Golden Age son of Charlemagne in Fosse, Hirson, and Schwartz's *Pippin* (1972). Our concern in this section, however, is with an attendant phenomenon, i.e., the idea of the values of the disenfranchised member of society clashing with the values of the aristocracy. In all of the plays discussed so far, we can find this phenomenon easily: Eliza and

the aunt who was “done in,” Bloody Mary’s attempt to sell her daughter Liat into bourgeois nicety, among many others.

These examples – from Clark Kent to Popeye, from Eliza Doolittle to Bloody Mary, from *The Philadelphia Story* to *Pippin* – may seem trivial in any discussion of social marginalization. However, for the member of the marginalized population, the possibility for transcendence in such a situation of becomes emotionally powerful. If members of a marginalized population are reviled for low moral standards, the reputation of shiftlessness transforms into the embodiment of valor. If members of a marginalized population fail to meet a mainstream standard of beauty, the hooked or flat nose transforms into the face that is the object of sexual desire. Thus, there is a trade-off in this transformation – the reasonable, positive desire to improve one’s economic lot comes at the price of conformity on the part of the marginalized individual to mainstream cultural standards.

This conundrum reflects on the import of the Bailey *Dolly!* tremendously. As we saw in Chapter I, the issue of bourgeois entrée presents a similar double-edged sword as this issue of conformity to mainstream cultural standards. Furthermore, considering the more specific picture with respect to this study, we will see that the legacy of race in musical theatre will display a similar trade-off in Chapter IV.

Yet comedy—which can be reactive and prejudiced—can also challenge the status quo. One looks at the example of Barbra Streisand’s “Hello, Goregous!” persona from the 1960s and 1970. In this persona, Streisand at once pokes fun at her oddly shaped nose, yet never denies her own attractiveness. Thus, comedy can offer a model of inclusion of the marginalized.

Twentieth-century Popular American Entertainment and Race

Much as we have seen here in examples from musical theatre, broader American entertainments have exhibited instances that have set back racial progress, though other instances have offered pathways to progress. Thus, to offer a degree of comparison and contrast to what the Bailey *Dolly!* may have sought to reform, let us explore these other entertainment genres. In this exploration, we will see that the dignity of bourgeois entrée as presented in the Bailey *Dolly!* offered a progressive alternative to what it followed.

To conduct this exploration, let us take a thorough look at how mass media treated African Americans in the years leading up to the post-World War II civil-rights era. Three prominent issues present themselves when considering the portrayal of African Americans in early twentieth century mass media: negative (and exotic) stereotyping, the reinforcement of social hierarchies based on race, and cooperation among the races. In investigating these issues, one finds a continuum along the timeline from about the end of minstrelsy in the late-nineteenth/early-twentieth century to the end of World War II in which unabashedly cruel treatment gave way glacially to attempts to rectify past mistreatment. These attempts could be placed on a continuum from genuine and positive through ill-conceived and ill-considered, with many examples to be found in between.

A fourth variable, creative control by African Americans in the mass arts, is important because it connects directly with the idea of full adult citizenship for the marginalized as measured by control of economic circumstances. Unfortunately, this issue would appear to be possessed of less prominence than the three other issues already mentioned simply because there was so little of such control available to the African Americans in the mainstream media in the period that preceded the post-World War II-civil-rights era. Exceptions, however, did exist. For

example, George Herriman, creator of the *Krazy Kat* comic strip was of mixed race, making him “the first person of color to achieve prominence in cartooning.”¹⁵⁰ McLean comments that “African American scholars have indicated that there are aspects of life in Black America in *Krazy Kat*, particularly the comedy of reversal.”¹⁵¹ McLean takes particular note of Krazy Kat’s large size in comparison to Ignatz the mouse and how that compares with the vaudeville stereotype of the large, presumably “mammy”-ish black woman dominating her small husband who was skillful “at evading both obligations and punishment.”¹⁵²

As will be seen in many instances of black artistic interaction with mainstream America previous to the post-World War II civil rights era, a theme of having to compromise to accommodate white expectations comes to the fore, as in this *Krazy Kat* example. As discussed earlier, these acts of compromise lie at the heart of discussions of bourgeois entrée and conformity to white cultural standards. Retro-fitting a Euro-centric piece like Stewart and Herman’s *Hello, Dolly!* for a black cast might seem like an situation fraught with such compromise. As we will see in Chapter V, however, the transition of *Hello, Dolly!* from black to white turned out to be a relatively seamless affair. In some instances, the material made more sense for a black cast located temporally in the heyday of the civil rights movement than it did for a white cast. Thus, even with the difficulties we already have discussed concerning bourgeois entrée for African Americans, the Bailey *Dolly!* can be seen as having provided a positive instance of such entrée.

A perhaps more typical example of black attempts to control the creative process in mass media might exist in the world of cinema. Woll and Miller continue by discussing unsuccessful attempts on the part of the NAACP and Booker T. Washington to create a black-controlled film industry. Such attempts at black economic control of the mass media creative process either failed completely or were co-opted by white economic interests.¹⁵³

In the absence of a significant presence of African Americans at the creative end of mainstream mass media, we return to the issues mentioned earlier – negative stereotyping, the reinforcement of social hierarchies based on race, and attempts at cooperation. In mass media through the early twentieth century, a formidable challenge to racial harmony could be found in the tendency on the part of the white mainstream to portray African Americans in either a negative or exotic manner that bordered on ridicule. Such portrayal, no matter how kindly intended, served to ostracize the African American.

Salient examples of such poor portrayal can be found rampantly in the world of the syndicated comic strip. Scott McLean, a scholar of cartoons and comic strips, states the racially political stakes involved in early twentieth century comics and cartoons.

From the introduction of cartoons in newsprint, blatantly racist and derogatory minority stereotypes have been portrayed as the objects of hostility, ridicule, and humiliation. From the “savage natives,” representing indigenous cultures from North America to the Polynesian Islands, to black “Sambo” or “Mammie” depictions, minority characters have played the roles on the receiving end of physical and verbal abuse.¹⁵⁴

In fact, until the beginning of the post-World-War-II civil rights era, it was difficult to find a syndicated American comic strip that did not appeal to racist values. A specific example of such portrayal could be seen in the various non-white characters in the *Katzenjammer Kids* comic strip of the early twentieth century. Referring to Arthur Asa Burger’s landmark 1973 study of comic strips, McLean writes of transparent racism in the *Katzenjammer* strip.

The black in the strip fitted into the stereotype of the time – the African savage with a fancy little loin dress and names like “Captain Oozy Woopis” or “King Doo-Dab.” In an adventure dealing with pranks at school, one little boy is called “Sammy Snowball.” The Kids get their friends all dirty, when they start playing around ink, but Sammy, because he is already black, is not punished by the irate teacher.¹⁵⁵

The phrase “Ise glad ise black”¹⁵⁶ appears in the penultimate frame of the referenced strip as Sammy Snowball’s naïve reaction to the situation. At face value, especially given the era, the cartoonist’s use of Sammy’s remark could be seen as kindly, if mildly patronizing. To some extent, McLean concurs in this morally neutral interpretation, adding perhaps in contrast that “it was an accepted practice to portray characters of color as ignorant, dependent, and absurdly comical.”¹⁵⁷ Yet the contemporary observer possessed of any sense of fairness concerning the treatment of African Americans cringes at this comic strip’s lack of consideration for the black person as a full member of the larger society, worthy of stature and respect.

The ugly stereotype of the black person as being in a perpetual state of uncleanness because of her/his skin color comes to the fore in this “Sammy Snowball” incident. One is reminded of the scene in the Sidney J. Furie film *Lady Sings the Blues* (1972) in which Billie Holiday has lost a chance to perform on live Depression-era radio because the sponsor, the Sun Ray Soap Company, felt it could not fight this “blacks are unclean” stereotype among its predominantly white customer base.¹⁵⁸ To be sure, the sensitive observer of any race is disgusted by the stereotype. If nothing else, the “unclean” stereotype used to describe people of African heritage is the original blood libel against African Americans, a mark seen by the sinisterly racially motivated as the equivalent of original sin.

The situation in the film industry in the early twentieth century was no better for African Americans in terms of negative stereotyping than in syndicated comic strips. As compared to such two-dimensional comic strips, cinema, a medium noted for its verisimilitude, might have taken the opportunity to present a more three-dimensional, less condescending depiction of the African American. It was therefore highly demoralizing that the defining moment in the evolution of American film was also a defining moment in the formation of American racial

thought. In discussing the aesthetic import of D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), Allan Woll and Richard Miller write

[*The Birth of a Nation*] synthesized a generation of new advances and techniques in filmmaking and invented several new ones. Its narrative and visual sweep and its scale awed audiences and critics alike. Indeed, it attracted huge audiences, with probably more paid admissions than any other film in history, and it earned the imprimatur of President Woodrow Wilson who reportedly likened Griffith's movie to "writing history with lightning."¹⁵⁹

Perhaps the most repugnant aspect of Griffith's legacy through this film, though, was Griffith's intent to romanticize American racism directed against those of African descent. Woll and Miller continue, "Griffith's history, however, recalled the 'Lost Cause' myth [that romanticized the defeated Confederacy] and dressed it up with glory in battle, and pathos and courage in defeat." Attendant to this romanticizing of the Confederate cause was the insulting portrayal of African Americans and the justification of their subjugation.

Griffith's powerful images of blacks [. . .] included the trusting, loyal slave who shared the master's kindness and values in the big house, the malevolent mulatto who sowed discord, and the ignorant field hands and town dwellers who succumbed to blandishments and promises of power by corrupt (and corrupting) northern agents."¹⁶⁰

Like the "blacks are unclean" myth discussed above, the blood-libelous myth of profligate black male sexuality also came to the fore in Griffith's epic. Griffith used this myth with specific reference to African-American males in order to instill fear in white audiences and, as Woll and Miller describe, to justify any white response as reasonable.

Griffith [. . .] conjured up sexual fantasies about black lasciviousness and designs against white women, which he tried to make viewers believe justified the harsh and "necessary" punishments the Klan meted out at the end of the film to protect white womanhood and to overthrow the "tyranny" of the black South.¹⁶¹

A vivid reminder of Griffith's negative contribution to the lot of African Americans in early-twentieth-century America could be seen in the frenzy that surrounded the premiere of the film in New York City. Woll and Miller report, "The advertising campaign promoting the film, which included billboards featuring nightriders, and even hired robed horsemen riding through the streets of New York City, generated excitement and closed the historical distance between the film and its audience."¹⁶² But what might have been excitement and historical interest on the part of white audiences could be seen only as race-based subjugation directed toward black audiences. The net impact of Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* in terms of race was to reinforce negative stereotypes and fear among white audiences.

The use of anti-black stereotype in pre-civil-rights-era cinema was not limited to the fear-induced myths invoked by the likes of Griffith. One could often find in the cinema of the period that followed Griffith the condescending stereotype similar to that of the syndicated-comic-strip cartoons mentioned earlier in this chapter. A typical instance of such condescension could be seen in the career of Lincoln "Stepin Fetchit" Perry. Woll and Miller describe Perry's career.

Often seen solely as the personification of the obsequious, bumbling Uncle Tom, Fetchit, in Peter Noble's words, seemingly perpetuated the "popular myth that the American Negro was a happy, laughing dancing imbecile, with permanently rolling eyes and widespread empty grin" – a charge echoed by critics thereafter and one Perry eventually contested in a law suit.¹⁶³

A similar trajectory could be seen in the career of popular radio and television comedian Jack Benny's African-American sidekick, Eddie "Rochester" Anderson. In their text on the television series *I Spy*, Marc Cushman and Linda J. LaRosa comment on Anderson's career as reinforcing the "grinning idiot" stereotype of African Americans.

Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, a supporting player on *The Jack Benny Show*, seen on CBS [television] from 1950 to 1964 [and broadcast on radio previously. . . ,] the chauffeur and manservant to "Mister Benny," with a bullfrog voice and bug-eyed expression,

was primarily used for set-up lines for classic Jack Benny responses. More often played to be the buffoon, Rochester was not viewed kindly by civil rights and [b]lack rights groups.¹⁶⁴

More egregious, however, than the legacy of either Perry or Anderson was the insistence on the part of CBS to bring the radio comedy series *Amos 'n' Andy* to television. According to Woll and Miller,

The Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) launched *The Amos 'n' Andy Show* television series in 1951, amid much publicity and furor over the use of black actors (two whites having played the major characters in the radio broadcasts) and the minstrel stereotypes the show perpetuated. The producers, who worried about white audiences becoming discomfited by black actors, eliminated all possible black-white interaction by setting the show in an all-black environment and coached the black actors to assume stereotypical postures of conniving “coons” and other vulgar caricatures borrowed from the blackface minstrel tradition. Such policies may have satisfied some white viewers, but they outraged black critics and many liberal white ones as well.¹⁶⁵

The NAACP would demand successfully that CBS take the show off the air, complaining rightfully that *Amos 'n' Andy* portrayed African Americans as “inferior, lazy, dumb, and dishonest.”¹⁶⁶

An interesting case can be found in the pre-civil-rights era that would seem to combine aspects of fear inducement *and* condescension. Alan J. Spector exposes difficulty with the fare animation giant Walt Disney offered with respect to non-white characters. Spector pays particularly close attention to the “black crow” sequence in Walt Disney’s *Dumbo* (1941).

[. . .]It is true that the crows are not shown murdering anyone, or tap dancing, or eating watermelon, but the stereotype of wisecracking [b]lack men standing around on street corners does play into the popular negative stereotype that [b]lack men (presumably unemployed?), in contrast to [w]hite men, spend an inordinate amount of time standing around on street corners doing nothing constructive.¹⁶⁷

In this “black crow” sequence, a white audience member would see not only the condescending stereotypes of wisecracking, laziness and shiftlessness among Disney’s crows. Griffith’s images of African Americans manipulated through fear directly. Here, fear could be seen as engendered in a condescending and comic mode through the presence of unemployed African Americans, presumably rife for economically-based upheaval.

Perhaps a subset of negativity and condescension toward African Americans is the issue of reinforcement of social hierarchies based on race. Rather than focusing on supposed character flaws inherent among African Americans, this issue of reinforcement of social hierarchies deals with power differentials apparent in black/white interaction. Already, we have discussed the reinforcement of unbalanced power differentials as the legacy of the careers of Lincoln “Stepin Fetchit” Perry and Eddie “Rochester” Anderson. In Chapter II, the more general issue of white privilege was examined. Here, we present two examples of how Hollywood was complicit in maintaining black performers as, almost by definition, servile to their white cohorts.

The first such example, Alfred Hitchcock’s *Lifeboat* (1944), presents, at least at first glance, as glaring a situation of unbalanced power differentials as one could imagine. In this film, Woll and Miller describe “[. . .] a black cook (Canada Lee) [who is expected to share] rations and suffering with the survivors of a torpedoed vessel. [. . . Nevertheless, Lee’s] black [character] alone did not vote in group decisions and served in a ‘janitorial position’ on the boat.”¹⁶⁸ Even in the face of life-threatening peril, Hitchcock’s white characters, at least initially, lacked sufficient humanity to treat the Lee character with dignity. Yet there is another side of this story. The website www.canadalee.org presents a glowing defense of Lee as a pioneer in resistance to Hollywood racism and stereotypes. With specific respect to *Lifeboat*, the website argues that

[a]gainst great odds and opposition, [Lee] was successful in bringing dignity to the role of the stevedore, Charlie, in Alfred Hitchcock's 1944 film, *Lifeboat*. This role was one of the first in Hollywood for a black character that departed from the stereotypical casting of the era. In fact, the role of Charlie, in *Lifeboat*, was originally written stereotypically but Lee refused to portray it that way. Not only did he change the role but Lee's reinvented character became the moral center of the film.¹⁶⁹

Yet despite any attempt on Lee's part to portray the servile stevedore character with dignity, the power differential between black and white could be seen as remaining unbalanced.

The second example presents a more complex situation of racial power differentials. In contrast to Griffith's model of race depiction in *The Birth of a Nation*, David O. Selznick wanted the production of *Gone With the Wind* (1939) to serve as a model of enlightened racial awareness. Woll and Miller write,

Selznick wanted blacks to "come out decidedly on the right side of the ledger" in his story, and he raised the importance of Mammy's role in the narrative by making her one of the principals. In recruiting seasoned professional blacks for the key parts and treating them with respect on the set, including listening to their suggestions for improvements in the film, Selznick was acknowledging the importance of black involvement in a major movie production.¹⁷⁰

Selznick would experience mixed results in his efforts to make *Gone With the Wind* a showcase example of racial tolerance. Of particular importance are the roles of Hattie McDaniel as the mammy and Butterfly McQueen as "Prissy" (the latter of "birthin' no babies" fame). Each of these depictions of African-American enslavement resonates with implications of black/white power differentials. McQueen eventually would repudiate her involvement in *Gone With the Wind* as a "slur on black character."¹⁷¹ McDaniel, on the other hand, would derive dignity despite the subservience of her role and the power differential between her and her fictionalized white overlords. Woll and Miller describe McDaniel's involvement in the film, writing,

Hattie McDaniel [. . .] undercut the traditional mammy stereotype by looking white folks directly in the eye, by passing on the wisdom of their actions (often with only a remark or an expression to make the point), and by exuding a personal inner strength superior to almost every white character [. . .]¹⁷²

McDaniel's performance, therefore, offers similar resonance as Canada Lee's performance in *Lifeboat* – a mixed bag of dignity and servility. Nevertheless, despite any nobility in McDaniel's portrayal of the "mammy," Woll and Miller admit to the possibility that even McDaniel's heroic effort served as fodder for legitimate criticism on racial grounds. They continue,

When McDaniel received an Oscar for her supporting role and accepted it with grace, she inevitably diverted attention from the film's weaknesses in racial portraiture and came to symbolize new opportunities for black to play serious, integral roles in major Hollywood films. Black critics are divided on the film for those reasons.¹⁷³

Woll and Miller are not alone in their mixed blessing of *Gone with the Wind*. Online film critic Cicely A. Richard as well finds similar plusses and minuses regarding the film, especially as concerns black/white power differentials.

[. . .] Many feel that the movie glamorizes many stereotypes, including the happy, fat slave and the simpleton. [. . .] What people who criticize [Hattie McDaniel's] role fail to recognize is her strength and how she doesn't take any of Scarlett's nonsense.

However, some concerns about race in the movie are valid. While Mammy portrays a character of strength and common sense, the other memorable African-American character [that of Butterfly McQueen] does seem to fit the negative profile of the simpleton[. . .]¹⁷⁴

Despite any conscious attempt on Selznick's part to grant dignity to any African American involved in the making of *Gone With the Wind*, it would not be unreasonable to assume that any audience in the post-World War II civil rights era would find difficulty with the portrayal of blacks, especially as concerns racial power differentials, in this film. A member of such an

audience would be liable to cringe at the assumption made on the part of heroine Scarlett O'Hara that beating the Prissy character was in anyway anything but an act of gross cruelty.

Concerning our third variable, cooperative efforts between the races in the post-World War II civil rights era in the mass media – like the cooperation we would see in the Bailey *Dolly!* – sought to address previous wrongs concerning negative/exotic stereotyping and unbalanced power differentials. Through much of the 1950s, glacial improvement could be seen concerning the treatment of African Americans by the Hollywood film industry in these areas. Part of this glacial improvement would be the creation of the “perfect Negro” prototype as embodied in particular by the persona of actor Sidney Poitier, whose career Woll and Miller describe.

More than anyone else, Poitier defined the new images of blacks in Hollywood film who attacked racism by indirection and compassion. Poitier established the pattern as early as 1950 in *No Way Out*, a film also remarkable for its attempt to depict black middle class family life, when he played a black doctor who tries to save the life of a white bigot who shot him. In various roles Poitier befriended whites and improved their world by his presence.¹⁷⁵

Poitier's “perfect Negro” screen persona – a character type that sanitized the image of the black man for white approval -- displayed its share of negatives as well. According to Woll and Miller,

[. . . S]creen hero [. . . Sidney] Poitier succeeded by being an asexual, non-threatening one. His manner disarmed whites and affirmed the liberal belief in integration. In all these performances, as Warren Dworkin has noted, Poitier interacted with whites “in areas of consciousness, not sex.”¹⁷⁶

Poitier was well aware of the criticism he received concerning his “perfect Negro” screen image. Miller and Woll's describe of Poitier's defense of his own career.

Poitier defended himself from charges of cozying up to whites by asserting that his roles served black interests, in that they suggested the possibility of meaningful black-white interaction and racial integration. He added that the absence of other blacks and of black

roles in film showed how little the industry would tolerate anyway. At least he was working. He also marked progress by being selected to star in a movie in which race was not a factor at all (*The Bedford Incident* (1965)).¹⁷⁷

This issue of race not being a factor in a black actor's performance is begged by the career of Sidney Poitier. There are, of course, two sides to this discussion. On the one hand, one must consider the idea that if one does not take into account the race of the performer, one ignores the larger issues of recalcitrant racism that continue to confront African Americans. On the other, one must consider both the political efficacy *and* the economic fairness of forcing a black performer, especially one trying to enter the mainstream in the still highly race-restricted environment of the Hollywood film-making industry that followed World War II, to turn down non-race-based roles in favor of what the more practical minded might consider some obscure political ideal. Woll and Miller deal with the latter interpretation implicitly in describing black reaction to Poitier's career.

Black critics who once viewed Poitier's success as a milestone were unconvinced. They tagged Poitier as a "showcase nigger." In 1970 [New York Times] film critic Vincent Canby added that Poitier's milestone had become a millstone because Poitier's blackness was "invisible."¹⁷⁸

In a contrasting article in the New York Times, this time in a Sunday magazine article, journalist Brent Staples adds further evidence to this "showcase nigger" label thrust upon Poitier.

The attack on Poitier began in earnest in 1967, when he starred in three hit movies during the same year. While *To Sir With Love*, *In the Heat of the Night* and *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?* made him the biggest box-office star in the country, Poitier came under ferocious fire. White critics savaged his work as superficial. African-American critics like the playwright Clifford Mason, writing in The New York Times, branded him "a showcase nigger" who coddled white racists instead of punching them in the face. All at once, black radicalism begat the questionable blessing of the black exploitation films with pimps, prostitutes and tough guys yelling 'Get Whitey.' Poitier was suddenly reviled as a Stepin Fetchit in a gray flannel suit.¹⁷⁹

This negative description of the career of Sidney Poitier resonates with possible criticism of the Bailey *Dolly!* Instead of “Stepin Fetchit in a gray flannel suit,” a detractor might consider the Bailey *Dolly!* as Aunt Jemima in ostrich feathers. It is the distinct and unqualified argument of this study that such a comparison is unfair. As already argued, the Bailey *Dolly!* served as a celebration for the strides made by the 1960s civil rights movement, and reflected reasonable interests on the part of African Americans to attain social parity with the American mainstream.

Racial progress in the area of popular American media has been slow in coming, yet steady. There would seem no question that the characters presented in the Bailey *Dolly!*, despite any reasonably socially acceptable character flaws, are a far cry from the hideous stereotypes one saw in other areas of the American media, especially those dating back to the turn of the twentieth century. The concurrent risk for those involved in the Bailey *Dolly!*, however, is the accusation of “showcase nigger.” Such an accusation creates a “damned if you do, damned if you don’t” situation, which would seem unfair.

Television and Race – Expanded Opportunities

Much like film, the nascent medium of television had its issues during its post-war infancy with respect to racial cooperation. For every positive contribution like a “Nat King Cole Show,” there was a condescending stereotype such as the aforementioned Hattie McDaniel in the 1952-53 series *Beulah*.¹⁸⁰ On the plus side, Woll and Miller point to the cooperative contributions of variety-show hosts like Ed Sullivan and Steve Allen in their efforts to feature black entertainers, writing

Influential variety show hosts who featured black entertainers, especially Ed Sullivan of *Toast of the Town* and Steve Allen of the

Tonight show, responded to criticism from the prejudiced by stating unequivocally that television needed and benefited from black performers. Allen and Sullivan, at least, consciously sought to undermine racism by bringing black personalities (and in Allen's case, civil rights issues as well) to their national audiences.¹⁸¹

The issue of creative control comes to the fore here. Television hosts like Sullivan and Allen would seem to have had significant direct creative control over their choice of guest performers. In addition, the two mega-hosts were possessed of sufficient clout that the networks (CBS and NBC respectively) did not dare fight them.

Woll and Miller point to improvements in the portrayal of African Americans in early television. Yet Kelefa Saneh complains of how history, black history in particular, has ignored the contribution of African Americans to popular television forms. Concerning the failure of television situation comedy to appear on the black cultural radar screen, Saneh writes

[. . .] Since when was television a black thing?

Since the beginning, it turns out. But you'd be forgiven for not knowing. When it comes time to compile the canon of African[-]American culture, sitcoms [as an example of popular entertainment] never make the cut. While even the most obscure Harlem Renaissance poetasters get dusted off and re-examined, black television stars from Eddie "Rochester" Anderson to Queen Latifah, from Redd Foxx to Jamie Foxx, languish in pop-culture oblivion.¹⁸²

Thus, there would seem to be unresolved issues between any black cultural hegemony and the importance of popular entertainment. Saneh's complaint of ignorance of popular forms here will parallel failures on the part of serious musical theatre scholars to recognize the importance of the *Bailey Dolly!* which we will see in Chapter VI.

As Saneh and Woll and Miller might concur, however, the civil rights era would usher in new efforts at racial cooperation in television. The period immediately following World War II, the era of *Beulah* and *Amos 'n' Andy*, soon gave way to the era surrounding the burgeoning civil

rights movement, and by the 1960s, television often found itself playing a game that combined both revolution and catch-up. The now famous “first interracial kiss” between Nichelle Nichols and William Shatner on *Star Trek*¹⁸³ is perhaps the most notorious example of such change in racial attitudes on the part of the television industry.¹⁸⁴

Closer to the heart of the matter with respect to a fuller sense of interracial cooperation, however, was the 1965 NBC spy drama, *I Spy*. *I Spy* producer Sheldon Leonard “wanted this series to be the first on television to star a white actor with a black partner.”¹⁸⁵ Cushman and LaRosa describe the tense atmosphere at NBC as it ventured into uncharted waters, writing, “[. . . T]hese two men, who would live in a world of espionage, would be seen on television traveling together, sharing hotel rooms, sharing bathrooms, and sharing drinking fountains. And the black spy, like the white guy, would carry a gun.”¹⁸⁶ Given the realities of race relations going into the venture, this certainly was an ennobling enterprise – two international spies, one black, one white, both on equal social footing. The problem, of course, was selling local affiliates, especially in the American South, on this then revolutionary idea. “How many NBC stations in Georgia, Alabama, the Carolinas, and even Florida,” write Cushman and LaRosa, “would refuse to clear this show about two men of different color, deal equally, judged only by the content of their character?”¹⁸⁷

Interracial cooperation was nothing new to white *I Spy* star Robert Culp. Culp boasted a long and enduring friendship with Sammy Davis, Jr., a performer who was among the greatest icons of the civil rights era as an example of how well the cooperative ethic of integration purportedly worked. Cushman and LaRosa tell of the incident in which Culp and Davis met for the first time on a Chicago tarmac. At the time (1957), Culp was involved as a performer in the CBS Texas-based law enforcement series, *Trackdown* (coincidentally directed by iconic film director Sam Peckinpaw). Cushman and LaRosa quote Culp in saying

[. . .] We had a layover in Chicago to get another plane. [. . .] There was this [b]lack guy, nattily dressed, walking back and forth in front of us – just the three of us, going to L.A. I said to my wife, ‘I think that’s Sammy Davis Jr. [. . .]’ All of a sudden, he whirled around and said, ‘I know you, I know who you are’ – and immediately launched into a description, word for word, scene for scene, line for fucking line, of *Trackdown*. He even imitated my walk. So we were like instant best friends.¹⁸⁸

Cushman and LaRosa report further, “Davis would remain a close friend [of Culp’s . . .] helping the sensitive actor to understand the passion of the civil rights movement.”¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, Davis and Culp’s friendship and mutual aid society would continue, with Davis dubbing Culp’s singing voice for a television performance¹⁹⁰ and promoting Culp as a television script writer to “movers and shakers” like Carl Reiner of *The Dick Van Dyke Show* producing fame.¹⁹¹ In describing how this Sammy Davis, Jr./Carl Reiner connection led to *I Spy*. Cushman and LaRosa describe Culp’s surprise at Sheldon Leonard’s suggested change for Culp’s original *I Spy* idea. Again, Cushman and LaRosa quote Culp directly, writing

When Sheldon said “One of ‘em is [white and one of them is b]lack,” it went off in my head like a depth-charge, and I thought, “Jesus Christ, no one’s ever done that.” And I started to go back in history, and it had never happened in the world, it had never happened before in theatre. It had never happened. Period.

“You’re right,” I said to him. “Your idea *is* better.”¹⁹²

When racial disharmony is introduced directly into an equation such as script material for the potentially volatile *I Spy*, the quality of cooperation between the races might become strained. Cushman and LaRosa provide a relevant example of the introduction of racial difficulty into the *I Spy* race-neutral universe and how it upset Cosby and Culp. The incident in question results from Cosby and Culp’s evolving ease, through the early days of *I Spy* production, at fashioning dialog to fit the breezy, informal tone of the series. Cushman and LaRosa describe the scene in question, writing

After [the villain] Danny [, played by Martin Landau,] flips Scott [played by Cosby] a coin and says, “Here you go, boy, I’ll put my shoes in the hall for you,” Kelly [played by Culp] whispers to Scott, “We could disconnect every bone in his body.”

Both of these lines are in are in the script. Scott’s reply to Kelly is not. He was supposed to say the bland, “Tell me about it.” Cosby, however, gave the line a right cross: “No. Work before pleasure.”

According to Culp, it was this kind of script that provoked him and Cosby to join together in a united front against ever having to deal with dialogue like Danny’s racist remark again.¹⁹³

This single incident demonstrates two important points concerning the ethic of cooperation.

First, we notice that both Cosby and Culp were “united” in their unwillingness to deal with derogatory racial remarks in what was otherwise an effort based on mutual understanding among the races. Though perhaps closer to real-life, the introduction of such racist ugliness adds unnecessary strain to what partners in this effort see as a noble cause. Second, Cosby and Culp enjoyed a good measure of success in their partnership. In turn, and buoyed by Cosby’s Emmy win during the first year of *I Spy*, this level of easy cooperation between Cosby and Culp provided strong evidence in favor of the support of the cooperative ethic between the races. Equality between the races could be seen as thriving on the *I Spy* set.

A word of caution is necessary. *I Spy* might serve as positive a model for attempts at cooperation among the races, much like the Bailey *Dolly!* Yet we saw in previous chapters that any number of issues, often involving white privilege and hegemony, can interfere with even the most perfectly conceived efforts at racial reconciliation. For the moment, let us leave the legacy of one of the clear successes of the post-World War II civil-rights era unscathed.

Comedy and Social Mobility

In exploring early-twentieth-century popular entertainment genres, we have discovered a number of difficulties facing African Americans in the struggle for adult recognition. After discovering a dearth of opportunity for African Americans to control their destiny in the creative and economic end of the business, we encounter numerous obstacles to fair treatment for African Americans in popular media. Despite the positive presence of George Herriman and *Krazy Kat*, we find numerous examples of racial condescension in popular cartoon strips. In film, we find raging stereotyping from *Birth of a Nation* through *Lifeboat*. In television, the youngest of these media, we find stereotyping giving way, in the era following World War II, to slow, deliberate improvement in race relations.

The legacy of popular American entertainment with respect to marginalized populations in the era preceding the post-World-War-II civil-rights movement has offered the reader a glimpse into the crying need for reform. The Bailey *Dolly!*, to some extent, was designed by its creators to supply a certain measure of such reform. But the Bailey *Dolly!*, being a light romantic comedy, might be seen as a frivolous attempt at attempting racial reform. This begs the question of how to proceed with such reform and which genre better serves the purpose – tragedy or comedy. Earlier, we saw how light comedy of the “rags to riches” genre works nicely in order to promote the mainstreaming of marginalized populations. If successful as wholeheartedly intended, members of such marginalized population ultimately become members of the mainstream. The issue becomes to which genre we can turn in order for marginalized populations to live on the other side of a metaphoric Jordan River, to enjoy the rewards of a successful struggle against marginalization. We have considered the pre-transformational issues involved in the “rags to riches” comedy and its effect on mainstreaming the marginalized. Yet a

moment might be taken to say a kind word in favor of tragedy. From as far back as Shakespeare and *Othello* at least, tragedy has been a useful tool in measuring the pain involved in marginalization. However, if the objective is to stop the perpetuation of pain, then perhaps pure tragedy is not the genre of choice for the marginalized population attempting to get past grievances of no-longer-relevant regimes.

Enter, once again, comedy. In the essay “The Meanings of Comedy,” Wylie Sypher compares the function of comedy to the function of tragedy. “At its most triumphant moments comic art frees us from peril without destroying our ideals without mustering the heavy artillery of the puritan.”¹⁹⁴ It is this reference to “heavy artillery” that is essential here. Both Booker’s “rags to riches” scenario as applied to the marginalized *and* standard Aristotelian tragedy would seem supremely conscious of marginalization. This consciousness could be seen as a “heavy artillery,” to be used to browbeat the audience with cruelty of mistreatment. However, there comes a point in the maturing of the marginalized at which such browbeating becomes counter-productive and self-limiting. Sypher’s point that comedy not only avoids this “heavy duty” treatment but that it also is capable of maintaining the dignity of the protagonist goes to the heart of ending marginalization. There is no automatic denial of past pain in comedy. Rather, there is the envisioning of future possibilities. Citing the work of Henri Bergson, Sypher expands on this idea in comparing the spiritual ethos of tragedy versus comedy.

A colony of insects is a “closed” order, alert for danger, attack, defense. It is a society with Spartan efficiency and ability to survive. The members of a closed society care nothing for humanity but live untroubled by dreams or doubts. The open society has a different morality because it is sensitive to the fringe of intuition, “vague and evanescent,” that envelops every clear idea. Those living in an open society are self-aware, responsive to nuance, the not-wholly formulated. The open society gives play to individuality, true selfhood. [. . .]¹⁹⁵

The comparison cannot be clearer. Tragedy offers a fixed view of the social order. Booker's "rags to riches" scenario offers a moment of transition. Comedy of the most domestic and bourgeois in nature, in turn, may offer the kind of flexibility – "openness" – needed to envision the marginalized as part of the mainstream.

Comedy can often reinforce the existing social order. Yet Sypher would seem to argue that in effect, comedy is better for social mobility and an open social order. This would seem to be the kind of reform for which the Bailey *Dolly!* aimed. The success of the Bailey *Dolly!* thus would seem to depend on a point of view that says that light domestic comedy can act as a liberating influence.

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored aesthetic and mass media aspects of the marginalization of African Americans in the years leading up to the post-World War II civil-rights movement. Beginning with Murphree's concept of "poor theatre," we determined that a less-than-masterpiece effort can be possessed of social and political significance via Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital. Such a conceptualization informs the Bailey *Dolly!* In this production, we have source material that, while less than a masterpiece, serves its purpose in displaying the bourgeois venue that African Americans had been denied in previous generations. As we saw in this and previous chapters, gaining access to this venue was fraught with negative aspects that accompanied the positive ones. While breaking a color barrier on access to bourgeois entrée might seem like a noble enterprise, the other side of the coin involved significant, perhaps soul-damaging, compromise with the white hegemony.

We then explored the idea of light domestic comedy as cross-cultural with specifically African connections, in contrast with the idea that the only true representation of African-American culture is street reality. This idea of the sole legitimacy of street realism was then contrasted with black performance of previously white-only material. A further comparison to the efficacy of light domestic comedy as a means of liberation was seen in the legacy of musical theatre with respect to marginalized populations. Analysis followed dealing with the state of race and popular media – cartoon strips, cinema, and television. In each of these analyses, we saw situations that were horrific, especially when compared with the benign nature of the Bailey *Dolly!*

We concluded this chapter with a discussion of the possibly superior nature of comedy, as compared to tragedy, in dealing with social mobility for marginalized populations. As a result of this discussion, we concluded that while tragedy is appropriate to discuss the pain of marginalization, and while some comedy reinforced existing social structures, comedy in general seemed more suited to envision what life beyond the social barrier would look like.

Throughout this chapter, we saw how bourgeois entrée and light romantic comedy connect. Not only is this connection apparent in light of the kind of “people’s” aesthetic envisioned by Mukerji and Schudson. It comes to play in Sypher’s analysis of comedy as better equipped to envision correcting marginalization. In the end, such analysis casts a positive light on the import of the Bailey *Dolly!*

Endnotes

¹²¹ . . . including myself. I presented some of the material which appears in this chapter, focusing on romantic comedy as entrée to bourgeois nicety.

¹²² Murphree, Patrick D. *The Pleasures of Mediocrity; or, Why We Should Study Poor Plays*. Natchitoches, Louisiana: Unpublished manuscript, 2008, 1

¹²³ Murphree, 1

¹²⁴ Murphree, 2.

¹²⁵ Murphree, 4

¹²⁶ Murphree, 3

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- ¹²⁷ Bentley, Eric. "Broadway Today" in *The Sewanee Review*, Volume 54, Number 2, April-June 1946, 314-316, 314
- ¹²⁸ Mukerji, Chandra and Michael Schudson. "Popular Culture" in *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 12, (1986), 47-66. Palo Alto, California: Annual Reviews, 1986, p 47
- ¹²⁹ Barnett, Lisa A. and Michael Patrick Allen. "Social Class, Cultural Repertoires, and Popular Culture: The Case of Film" in *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Mar., 2000), 145-163, 146
- ¹³⁰ Elam and Krasner, 13
- ¹³¹ http://www.bookrags.com/quotes/Crash_%282004_film%29 (accessed July 11, 2010)
- ¹³² Bowser, 21
- ¹³³ Wade, Richard, "The Black and Immigrant Experience in Urban America" in Diggins, John Patrick (ed.). *The Liberal Persuasion: Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and the challenge of the American past*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997, 193-194
- ¹³⁴ Bullins, 289.
- ¹³⁵ Onigri, 25-26
- ¹³⁶ *Clara's Ole Man* in Bullins, 35
- ¹³⁷ Schechner, Richard. "Race Free, Gender Free, Body-Type Free, Age Free Casting" in *The Drama Review*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Spring, 1989), 4-12, 4
- ¹³⁸ Schechner, 6
- ¹³⁹ Schechner, 7
- ¹⁴⁰ Schechner, 7
- ¹⁴¹ Kolin, Philip C. "Williams in Ebony: Black and Multi-Racial Productions of a Streetcar Named Desire" in *Black American Literature Forum*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (The Black Church and the Black Theatre) (Spring, 1991), 147-181. St. Louis, Missouri: St. Louis University, 1991, p 147
- ¹⁴² Kolin, 148
- ¹⁴³ Kerr, David. *African Popular Theatre: From pre-colonial times to present day*. London: James Currey, 1995, 4-5
- ¹⁴⁴ Barber, Karin, John Collins, and Alain Ricard. *West African Popular Theatre*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1997, 7
- ¹⁴⁵ Barber, 7.
- ¹⁴⁶ Barber, 7
- ¹⁴⁷ Booker, Christopher. *The Seven Basic Plots*. London: Continuum, 2004, 51.
- ¹⁴⁸ Booker, 51-52.
- ¹⁴⁹ Vinberg, Steve. *High Comedy in American Movies: Class and humor from the 1920s to the Present*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005, 2.
- ¹⁵⁰ McLean, Scott. "Minority Representation and Portrayal in Modern Newsprint Cartoons" in Kamalipour, Yahya A. and Theresa Carilli (eds.), *Cultural Diversity in the U.S. Media*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1998, 25
- ¹⁵¹ McLean, 25
- ¹⁵² McLean, 25
- ¹⁵³ Woll, Allen L. and Randall M. Miller. *Ethnic and Racial Images in American Film and Television: Historical essays and bibliography*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987, 45
- ¹⁵⁴ McLean, 23
- ¹⁵⁵ Burger, Arthur Asa quoted in McLean, 24
- ¹⁵⁶ Burger quoted in McLean, 24-25
- ¹⁵⁷ McLean, 25
- ¹⁵⁸ Please see Furie, Sidney J., *Lady Sings the Blues*. Hollywood, California: Paramount Pictures, 1972, the film biography of singer Billie Holiday, for numerous examples of mistreatment of black entertainment talent during the period between the world wars.
- ¹⁵⁹ Woll and Miller, 41
- ¹⁶⁰ Woll and Miller, 41-42
- ¹⁶¹ Woll and Miller, 41-42
- ¹⁶² Woll and Miller, 41
- ¹⁶³ Woll and Miller, 48 Woll and Miller modify this description by offering some defense of Perry's career, writing, "[. . .] During the 1930s at least, Fetchit, particularly in his roles with Will Rogers, as in *Steamboat 'Round the Bend*

(1935), came across as both sassy and servile, incisive and dim-witted.” Here, Woll and Miller point to a theme that would play itself out over the issue of race in pre-civil-rights era media, that of the stereotype possessed of a soupcon of redemption.

¹⁶⁴ Cushman, Marc and Linda J. LaRosa. *I Spy: A history and episode guide to the groundbreaking television series*. Jefferson, North Carolina: MacFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers, 2007, 19. Woll and Miller (69) make similar reference to the career of Eddie Anderson, who was also featured in such “race” films as Vincente Minelli’s *Cabin in the Sky* (1943) and appeared in supporting roles in such major Hollywood films as *Showboat*, *Jezebel* (1938) and *Gone With the Wind* (1939). The online African American Registry reports, “The humor and energy between Jack Benny and Eddie Anderson led to the development of a 20-year collaboration that delighted radio, television, and film audiences. The relationship between Anderson and Benny, for all of its sarcasm, wit and camaraderie, was typical of the ‘Uncle Tomism’ of the era (Anderson’s trademark line to Benny became ‘What’s that, Boss?’), yet Blacks not only appreciated the comedy, but were also pleased that the character was played by a black actor instead of a white actor attempting to imitate black expression.”

(<http://www.aaregistry.com/detail.php3?id=360>, (accessed September 19, 2007).) Anderson would make a final appearance with Jack Benny in a television comedy special in the early 1970s shortly before Benny’s death in 1974. In this comedy special, Anderson was recast, not as Benny’s valet but as Benny’s neighbor. Still referring to his co-star as “Mr. Benny,” the easy comedy between the two did *not* suffer in role translation.

¹⁶⁵ Woll and Miller, 71

¹⁶⁶ Woll and Miller, 71

¹⁶⁷ Spector, Alan J. “Disney Does Diversity: The Social Context of Racial-Ethnic Imagery” in Kamalipour, Yahya A. and Theresa Carilli (eds.), *Cultural Diversity in the U.S. Media*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1998, 44

¹⁶⁸ Woll and Miller, 54

¹⁶⁹ From “A Portrait of Canada Lee” in <http://www.canadalee.org/portrait.htm> (accessed August 2, 2010)

¹⁷⁰ Woll and Miller, 51

¹⁷¹ Woll and Miller, 51

¹⁷² Woll and Miller, 51

¹⁷³ Woll and Miller, 52

¹⁷⁴ Richard, Cicely A. *Gone With the Wind’s Depiction of Race and Gender*. http://classic-film-dramas.suite101.com/article.cfm/tara_revisited (accessed August 2, 2010)

¹⁷⁵ Woll and Miller, 58

¹⁷⁶ Woll and Miller, 58

¹⁷⁷ Woll and Miller, 58

¹⁷⁸ Woll and Miller, 58

¹⁷⁹ Staples, Brent. “Sidney Poitier’s Demons.” <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/04/16/magazine/sidney-poitier-s-demons.html> (accessed August 2, 2010)

¹⁸⁰ In *Beulah*, Hattie McDaniel (later replaced by Lillian Randolph) played a black maid who could “solve the problems that her white employers could not figure out.” For more information, please see <http://www.aaregistry.com/detail.php?id=2922> (accessed February 7, 2010).

¹⁸¹ Woll and Miller, 69. The February 25, 2010, *Sacramento Bee* review of the Ed Sullivan biography, *Right Here on Our Stage Tonight*, confirms Sullivan’s commitment to civil rights, both on his weekly variety program on television and in his newspaper column. Please see <http://www.amazon.com/Right-Here-Our-Stage-Tonight/dp/0520258673> (accessed August 2, 2010).

¹⁸² Saneh, Kelefa. “Black in the Box: In defense of African American television” in *Transition*, Issue 88 (Volume 10, Number 4), 2001, 38-64, 42. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/poetaster> (accessed January 15, 2011) defines “poetaster” as “an inferior poet; a writer of indifferent verse.”

¹⁸³ Please see <http://www.nndb.com/people/712/000023643/> (accessed February 7, 2010) for more information.

¹⁸⁴ www.startrek.com reports, “At the end of *Star Trek*’s first season, Nichelle was thinking seriously of leaving the show, but a chance and moving meeting with Martin Luther King changed her mind. He told her she couldn’t give up...she was a vital role model for young black women in America. Needless to say, Nichelle stayed with the show and has appeared in first six *Star Trek* movies. She also provided the voice for Lt. Uhura on the *Star Trek* animated series in 1974-75.” See http://www.startrek.com/database_article/nicholsnichelle (accessed September 17, 2010). Another interesting aside exists concerning the Nichols/Shatner kiss. According to David Bianculli in his text on the controversial *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*, Nichols and Shatner were *not* the first interracial couple to share physical contact on national network television. Bianculli writes, “It became infamous for the uproar it

caused, and fought, when [Petula] Clark reached out and held [Harry] Belafonte's arm during a taping of one of their duets [for a CBS special]. It was her own composition, an anti-war song called 'On the Path of Glory,' they were singing, but it wasn't the message that incited a controversy ---it was that a white woman had reached out and touched a black man on national television. The sponsor of the special was Chrysler, and a Chrysler executive present at the taping objected to the "Inter-racial touching" and demanded another take, without the physical contact, be used instead. Clark refused, destroyed all other videotaped takes of the duet, and demanded the segment be broadcast intact or the entire special scrubbed. It was televised intact, after much national press attention about the backstage battle, and received high ratings and wide acclaim. It sounds absurd, but this was the first time a man and a woman of different races had shared any physical contact on national TV. The famous inter-racial kiss on Star Trek wouldn't occur until that fall." Please see Bianculli, David. *Dangerously Funny: The uncensored story of The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*. New York: Touchstone (a division of Simon and Schuster, Inc.), 2009, 180.

¹⁸⁵ Cushman, Marc and Linda J. LaRosa. *I Spy: A history and episode guide to the groundbreaking television series*. Jefferson, North Carolina: MacFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers, 2007, 3

¹⁸⁶ Cushman and LaRosa, 3

¹⁸⁷ Cushman and LaRosa, 3

¹⁸⁸ Cushman and LaRosa, 13

¹⁸⁹ Cushman and LaRosa, 13

¹⁹⁰ Cushman and LaRosa, 15

¹⁹¹ Cushman and LaRosa, 16

¹⁹² Cushman and LaRosa, 19

¹⁹³ Cushman and LaRosa, 59

¹⁹⁴ Sypher, Wylie. "The Meanings of Comedy" in *Comedy*, Wylie Sypher, ed. (Doubleday & Company, 1956), 193-258. Reproduced in Corrigan, Robert W. *Comedy: Meaning and Form*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1981, 46.

¹⁹⁵ Sypher, 47

CHAPTER IV – BLACKS, BROADWAY, AND MINSTRELSY

Chapter Introduction

The possible mistrust of any black/white collaboration in the performing arts, an issue with which we dealt in earlier chapters, must be seen as a critical issue to any analysis of the social, political, and aesthetic import of the Bailey *Dolly!* In commercial American musical theatre, such an investigation can be focused on one grossly embarrassing, highly hurtful legacy in the annals of the history of American entertainment in general and musical theatre in particular: *minstrelsy*. In Chapter I, we dealt with this genre as part of Bowser's discussion of the vertical enforcement of racist culture. In Chapter III, we dealt with minstrelsy as part of the conspiracy to prevent full African-American participation in popular entertainment forms. As we begin an exploration of the intersection of musical theatre and race, we return to minstrelsy as a defining moment not only for American race relations but specifically in the creation and maintenance of commercial American musical theatre as a genre. The sad reality is that much of what would become a great American art form, commercial musical theatre, found its sources in nineteenth-century minstrelsy. This one facet, minstrelsy, overwhelms any discussion of the history of race and musical theatre. It thus benefits any exploration of race and musical theatre in the twentieth century to view this exploration in terms of a timeline in which attempts are made to dis-entrench minstrelsy as a defining aesthetic of the musical theatre genre. As we shall see, though some of these attempts to dis-entrench minstrelsy in musical theatre showed success, others are ill-conceived.

The discussion here of minstrelsy and the genesis of commercial American musical theatre seeks to set an historical frame for the arrival of the Bailey *Dolly!* in 1967. Minstrelsy

informed commercial American musical theatre in a number of respects. On the one hand, minstrelsy was responsible for degrading stereotypes of African Americans that would bleed into the larger culture. On the other, minstrelsy provided an early venue for African American performers. Such participation by black performers would give way to more Afro-positive portrayals on the Broadway stage. Progress for such participation was glacial. However, such progress allows us to make at least a tentative case in defense of commercial American musical theatre with respect to positive racial inclusion. While it is possessed of a racist element of minstrelsy in its history, recent trends in the history of the genre of commercial American musical theatre have displayed evidence that would in some way exonerate the genre and allow for expressions of equality, justice, and full adult citizenship for the African American. It is specifically in this lattermost regard, the promotion of the ideal of full adult citizenship for the African American, that the Bailey *Dolly!* might be seen as a shining example.

The Legacy of Minstrelsy

Musical theatre historian Richard Kislán documents the connection of minstrelsy to later forms of musical theatre. “Minstrelsy was the first form of American stage entertainment,” writes Kislán, “to commission popular music specifically for the stage. The format of the minstrel show inspired the later development of other types of musicals, namely vaudeville, burlesque, and revue.”¹⁹⁶ Kislán stresses the native (or at least white colonial usurper) aspect of minstrelsy and its connection to future forms of musical theatre, writing, “Minstrelsy planted American seeds in American soil for the first time in musical theater history. What grew was strong, if not pretty – the hardy stock on which later generations of theatrical artists would graft the colorful hybrids that bloomed late into the twentieth century.”¹⁹⁷ Such a connection between

minstrelsy and later forms begs the question of whether it is even possible for any form or individual piece of commercial American musical theatre to shake off its connections to the racist legacy of minstrelsy.

Kislan comments on the racist stereotypes of minstrelsy, writing

[. . .] Minstrelsy evolved into a dominant force in the popular culture of the nation only because it fashioned a romantic and sentimental recreation of a plantation experience that never existed. The music, songs, dances, and comic chatter reflected the public's idealized and stereotyped version of an exotic world floating in a lighthearted atmosphere of plaintive melodies and spontaneous dances. Since the truth would only provoke anxiety, danger, and war, the stereotypes persisted.¹⁹⁸

John Bush Jones concurs, focusing on a northern take on minstrelsy. The activism of abolitionists in the North during the period preceding the Civil War may have left the impression that “the North was a liberal and welcoming environment for blacks.” Nevertheless, Jones writes,

In truth most Northerners considered the abolitionists ‘radicals’ and the ‘great majority of Northerners were in favor of slavery and distrustful of blacks, or at best apathetic to both’ [. . .] During this time the minstrel show helped calm fearful Northern audiences by presenting ‘no threatening images of Negroes as harmless curiosities,’ and, in so doing, it created and solidified a number of demeaning comic stereotypes.¹⁹⁹

In this period, the minstrel show remained popular on the New York stage. Thus, minstrelsy would seem to have been intended at least as much for northern audiences as southern audiences. In addition, commercial American musical theatre found its roots in the north. A connection between minstrelsy and the early roots of commercial American musical theatre is unavoidable.

Jones's focus on northern nineteenth-century attitudes on race reminds us that, as with attempts to integrate the North with respect to fair housing – the Levittown example from Chapter I comes to mind – northern audiences showed no greater race liberalism than southern

audiences. Furthermore, both Kislán and Jones point out the central cruelty of minstrelsy: the promotion of a demeaning fantasy based on a vision of African-American life that was connected inexorably with the oppression of southern agrarian life, all in the service of maintaining white privilege and hegemony.

Jones points out the special ugliness of the performance of the minstrel trope. The negative stereotypes promoted in minstrelsy defined perhaps a century of the portrayal of the African American in popular theatre. After describing the physical presence of such an African-American stereotype as having “an outsized, gaping mouth, usually smiling, thick lips, gleaming white teeth, bug eyes, and wooly hair” as well as “huge feet” and “a gangly, shuffling gait,” Jones notes that this stereotypical African American was

[. . .] ever ready to break into song and dance. The Southern plantation “darky” was slow, stupid, superstitious, and gullible, although hardworking for his white “massa’,” whom he loved with unqualified devotion and loyalty; also, the plantation “coon” could work all day and still sing and dance all night. The Northern urban black dandy was an ostentatiously flashy dresser, a fast-talking con-artist out to dupe his slow-witted Southern brothers, a womanizer, and a gambler with a pair of dice in one pocket and a dangerous straight-edge razor in the other.²⁰⁰

In Chapter I, Bowser mentions of the “completeness” of slavery as a means of oppression. Such “completeness” – there was no need to negotiate financially with human chattel – made it easy enough to maintain control over underclass blacks. With economic oppression so firmly in place, the lingering problem for the white hegemony lay in maintaining economic class barriers against bourgeois entrée by African Americans. Thus, if the underclass African American bore a heavy burden based on the stereotypes Jones has described, a special, unenviable place was reserved in minstrelsy for the “uppity” African American. “Before the Civil War,” Jones writes, “minstrelsy’s depictions of Northern free blacks in particular ‘served not only as ego-boosting

scapegoats for whites but also as confirmation that Negroes could not play a constructive role in a free society and did not ‘belong’ in the North.”²⁰¹

The introduction of black performers into minstrelsy later in the nineteenth century only seemed to exacerbate this racially ugly situation. Jones describes how just before the Civil War, “blackface minstrelsy ceased to be an exclusively white phenomenon,” writing,

[. . . E]xclusively African American troupes flourished alongside existing white ones, ultimately numbering about 120 such companies. [. . .] At first, only the end men of all-black troupes regularly blacked up with burnt cork “as a comic mask”, but later it was not unusual to see entire casts of black men in blackface, their stage personae grotesque caricatures of their true racial identity.²⁰²

Knapp offers a similar discussion of the ugliness of minstrelsy, again with specific reference to the pervasive use of blackface. Knapp writes,

Perhaps the most difficult dimension of this heritage as it manifests itself in musicals is the tradition of blackface minstrelsy, which has stained the history of musical theater in America with the seemingly indelible imprint of burned cork, grotesquely painted smiles, and whitely protruding eyes.²⁰³

Certainly minstrelsy promoted a vision of racism, a vision that white Americans of the late nineteenth century accepted with little question. This vision of racism would seem inexorably tied to the creation of commercial American musical theatre, the promotion of ugly stereotypes against African Americans, and the maintenance of white-over-black power structures. However, when one delves into the needs minstrelsy served for white America – maintenance of hegemony over and assuaging fear of rebellion from African Americans – one finds oddly mixed messages. For example, Knapp explores the structure of minstrelsy, “with its personae as rigidly established and predictable in behavior as any from the tradition of *commedia dell’arte*”²⁰⁴ and finds opportunity for rebellion on the part of the African American involved in the form.

Through its carnivalesque comedy of inversion, [minstrelsy] also gave [African Americans] or their stand-ins a potentially subversive voice, through which figures of authority and established order could be ridiculed and undermined with impunity. Under the protection of a scurrilous, primitivist persona, and in the guise of humor at that persona's expense, an actor could do or say – or sing – virtually anything.²⁰⁵

Barbara Webb makes a similar argument as to the cultural legitimacy of nineteenth century African American entertainment based on the plantation fantasy. Webb gives fair voice to those who would criticize such entertainment on racist grounds, expressing understanding of contemporary horror at such performance. However, Webb also expresses a viewpoint that connects such performance to a genuine cultural experience for the African American. She writes,

[. . . W]e should read such [performance] as more than examples of how white fantasy and minstrel precedents limited and deformed black performance of the period. We should now also consider how performers mobilized themselves within these commercial and historical constraints to create potential touchstones for African American identification and empowerment.²⁰⁶

Both Knapp and Webb step out on a limb in attempting to find cultural affirmation in popular nineteenth-century entertainment featuring plantation stereotypes of the African Americans. Yet both authors find a common bond in seeing the possibility of subversion in such performance. In Chapter VI, we will see a number of mass-media critics who raise the specter of minstrelsy in their reviews of the Bailey *Dolly!* These critics, as might be expected, find fault in this comparison – no one wanted to compare the Bailey company to the ugliness of minstrelsy. None of these mass-media critics consider the possibility raised by Knapp and Webb that such comparison to minstrelsy is possessed of a possible subversive element.

Nevertheless, minstrelsy proved a legacy that commercial American musical theatre had to overcome. The twentieth century would usher in an era in which this painful legacy would

give forth to significant reinterpretation. The through-line of such re-interpretation would lead to the Bailey *Dolly!* and its re-envisioning of the role of race on the Broadway stage.

Slow Progress Following Minstrelsy

One can read into the commentary provided by the likes of Kislán and Jones that the era of minstrelsy created a painful foundation for the treatment of African Americans in commercial American musical theatre by which anything that followed would be compared. Given the all-black nature of the Bailey *Dolly!*, such comparison is especially germane. In fact, the Bailey *Dolly!* might be imagined as an endpoint, perhaps a near-endpoint – successful or otherwise – of an effort on the part of commercial American musical theatre to rid itself of the racist legacy of minstrelsy. It thus behooves this study to engage in a chronological examination of commercial American musical theatre and its history in the early-to-middle part of the twentieth century and its awkward relationship with minstrelsy. This investigation will concern itself with a number of key issues, including the overt racism of minstrelsy, the use of minstrelsy as a means to maintain the white hegemony and prevent full adult citizenship for African Americans, conspiracy on the part of other marginalized populations – especially Jews – to encourage the stereotypes of minstrelsy, and, in particular, attempts to direct the aesthetics and performance practices of the Broadway musical *away* from such stereotypes.

We start with the era that immediately followed minstrelsy, beginning in the 1920s, which offered stark, often contradictory examples of African-American inclusion in commercial musical theatre. There remained significant instances of nuanced yet uncomplimentary references to race in commercial musical theatre productions of this era. Knapp, for example,

refers to “a later encore of [the song] ‘Anything Goes’ [from the eponymous musical play of 1934,] suppressed in revivals, [that] concludes with the lines:

When ladies fair who seek affection
Prefer coons of dark complexion as Romeos,
Anything goes.”²⁰⁷

On the legacy of minstrelsy with respect to white perceptions of black sexuality, Knapp comments that black people, particularly black men, are “assumed [by whites to possess] high levels of sexual prowess and rhythmic musicality – a combination that would prove alluring enough in its turn to be taken over by whites at different stages of its evolution.”²⁰⁸ The “anything” that “goes” in the cited Cole Porter lyric is thus at once redolent of the perceived danger of inter-racial sexual encounter. At the same time, such interaction is presented as fashionable. In either case, such encounters remain the continued plaything of blasé whites seeking entertainment on the cheap at the expense of collective African-American dignity. This cheap entertainment would have to be considered as the remnant of the racial stereotypes created during minstrelsy. Like this alternate lyric to “Anything Goes,” other theatrical songwriting of the era following minstrelsy often presented a similar coy lack of consideration for African-American dignity. A prime example of quaint treatment of plantation-era linguistic patterns – one such method of denying blacks dignity – would be the Gershwin brothers’ “I Got Rhythm” from *Girl Crazy* (1930). Knapp points to the use of such lyrics in this song as “Ole man trouble” and the title’s “I got” as “verbal conceits just this side of dialect.”²⁰⁹

In this era just following the heyday of minstrelsy, inclusion by white composers of African-American-informed creative material showed some progress towards full inclusion. Nevertheless, such inclusion would prove at least somewhat problematic. Even more problematic was the issue of white performers attempting to appear as African Americans.

Jews, Blackface, and Overt Racism

A more egregious calumny against African-American dignity in this period directly following minstrelsy would be the continued use of blackface by white entertainers. One entertainer, a Jew, took particular advantage of this racist form of entertainment – Al Jolson. In both film and on the New York stage, Jolson prospered at the expense of African-American dignity. In discussing Jolson’s career, Knapp describes the extent to which such performance was “taken for granted” in its heyday, writing

The long tradition of blackface minstrelsy has since [the early twentieth century] been so thoroughly “edited out” of American culture life that, even given the often unacknowledged racial stereotypes that still persists from the heart of that tradition, blackface, has come to seem particularly repellent, especially in the wake of the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Thus, often what is most shocking to later viewers of *The Jazz Singer* is not the use of blackface itself but the complete absence of any sense that there was something wrong with practice.²¹⁰

The Jolson example begs the comparison of the Jewish situation in commercial American musical theatre with the African-American situation. Specifically, one needs to consider the extent to which black people were prevented from assimilation, especially in comparison to other marginalized groups like the Jews. In this regard, Lewis describes the sort of pact that existed between Jews and blacks in the pre-civil-right era and through much of the actual effort in the 1950s and 1960s to secure civil rights for African Americans. This pact involved an alliance, seemingly natural, between Jews and blacks that arose from mutual self-interest. Lewis writes

It required no special acuity for Jews to comprehend the linkage between quotas and Jim Crow laws, to see that the rapid spread of the Ku Klux Klan out of the South into the Midwest and Southwest was as great a menace to them as to Afro-Americans. [. . .] Randolph’s *Messenger* made a similar point even more bluntly: “Hitting the Jew is helping the Negro. Why? Negroes have large

numbers and small money: Jews have small numbers and large money.”²¹¹

Sugrue augments Lewis’s argument of common interest among Jews and blacks here, especially in the post-World War II era, especially in New York City. In describing the effort on the part of advocacy groups like the American Jewish Congress and the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai Brith that worked in favor of African-American-focused civil rights legislation, Sugrue writes,

Like other religious groups, Jewish organizations embraced the rhetoric of brotherhood, but they also mobilized out of self-interest. Discrimination by “creed” and “national origin” affected large numbers of Jews, secular and religious alike, particularly in the professions and the upper echelons of corporate America. [. . .] Calls for the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of “race, creed, color, or national origin” became a civil rights mantra.²¹²

In this pre-civil-rights era moment described by Lewis and Sugrue, a mutually beneficial environment promoting the interests of both blacks and Jews would seem to have been created. If the “Negro” was hurt, the Jew was hurt and vice versa. Similarly, that which *helped* the “Negro” also helped the Jew.

Despite this façade of comfortable relations between Jews and blacks and optimism for an eventual solution to racial discrimination faced by African Americans as described by Sugrue during this period following the second world war, trouble seethed beneath the surface – a brewing resentment of Jewish success and assimilation harbored by black people who felt left behind. West describes a three-tiered theoretical description of the nature of this resentment. First, West points to the idea that mistrust among blacks for Jews is a more generalized form of mistrust for all people who share white privilege. “Jewish complicity in American racism – even though it is less extensive than the complicity of other white Americans – reinforces black perceptions,” writes West, “that Jews are identical to any other group benefitting from white-skin privileges in racist America.”²¹³

West continues by exploring the “higher standard” to which blacks hold the similarly oppressed Jewish people.

[African Americans hold] Jews to a moral standard different from that extended to other white ethnic groups, principally owing to the ugly history of anti-Semitism in the world, especially in Europe and the Middle East. Such double standards assume that Jews and blacks are “natural” allies, since both groups have suffered chronic degradation and oppression at the hands of racial and ethnic majorities. So, when Jewish neo-conservatism gains a high profile at a time when black people are more and more vulnerable, the charge of “betrayal” surfaces among black folk who feel let down. Such utterances resonate strongly in a black Protestant culture that has inherited many stock Christian anti-Semitic narratives of Jews as Christ-killers.²¹⁴

If, as described earlier by Lewis, Jews should be allowed to take advantage of gains made by the African American civil rights movement, it would stand to reason that blacks should benefit from Jewish economic advances. As such benefit for African Americans would fail to happen, natural resentments would arise, whether these resentments have any basis in fairness or not.

West completes his discussion by synthesizing the “higher standard” explanation with economic and social realities. The blanket explanation of Jews as possessed of sufficient white privilege also plays a part in this portion of West’s theory. West writes

The remarkable upward mobility of American Jews – rooted chiefly in a history and culture that places a premium on higher education and self-organization – easily lends itself to myths of Jewish unity and homogeneity that have gained currency among other groups, especially among relatively unorganized groups like black Americans. The high visibility of Jews in the upper reaches of the academy, journalism, the entertainment industry, and the professions [. . .] is viewed less as a result of hard work and success fairly won, and more as a matter of favoritism and nepotism among Jews.²¹⁵

In West’s description of black resentment of Jewish success, there would seem to exist a potentially unfair element, that of accusations of “favoritism and nepotism.” Whether real or imagined, such unfair accusations would cloud any collaborative effort on the part of blacks and

Jews in the civil rights era. In contrast and with specific concern to the Bailey *Dolly!*, it is interesting to note the lack of difficulty experienced by the black cast at the hands of a creative team that included Jews such as producer David Merrick and composer/lyricist Jerry Herman.

Both Jews and African Americans endured treatment as members of populations that had failed to meet standards of mainstream behavior to the point of being treated as “other worldly.” In taking on this “hothouse flower” issue – that Jews, like their black counterparts, had been treated as exotics – Harley Erdman provides the main basis for a positive comparison of Jewish and black fortunes on the Broadway stage.

By performing the Jew as a species of oriental exotic, Booth was both creating and reflecting one of the dominant ways in which Jewish immigrants, particularly Eastern Europe, were written about in the late nineteenth century. Journalists were attracted by the alien and eastern culture of this new American group and by the “strange and peculiar fascination” that their customs exerted.²¹⁶

By extension, Erdman thus argues that both Jews and blacks suffered as a result of this quasi-positive marginalization. Such relegation to the role of exotic prevented a true description of either the black or Jewish experience.

Yet this would seem to be the extent to which the comparison could be stretched. Quoting Ellen Schiff’s 1982 study of stage Jews, *From Stereotype to Metaphor*, Donald Elgar Whittaker III locates an essential difference between the performance of Jewish ethnicity and the performance of black ethnicity. The former is often a matter of choice. The latter, except in the case of a light-skinned African American like the previously referenced Homer Plessy of Supreme-Court fame, is not something the African American can choose to acknowledge or not. Whittaker writes

Schiff quite rightly points out that the first questions one must ask when examining Jewish characters are both “Who is a Jew” and “What is a Jew?” Adopting her methodology for this study, a Jew in a musical is “somebody who says he is”. Even then there is a

profusion of different character types and signifiers to analyze. Schiff continues her questions by posing a corollary to “What is a Jew?:” “What does the character gain/lose by being Jewish?”²¹⁷

Implicit in this “gain/loss” equation for the Jew is a shadow concept – that of the black performer or character having no choice in the matter of gain or loss from being black. For the Jew, according to Whittaker via Schiff, ethnicity often can be used at will. For the African American, such a choice is not available. Whittaker goes on to cite Andrea Most in promoting this idea of the musical theatre performer to choose (or not) to perform one’s Jewish identity, writing

Andrea Most suggests that this lack of Jewish characters, particularly in early musicals, came from a desire to assimilate. “Unlike race, ethnicity was presented as a set of transient qualities that was nonthreatening because it could easily be performed away. As long as the characters could learn to speak, dress, and sing or dance in the American style, they were fully accepted into the stage or screen community.” Although overtly Jewish characters were rare on the early musical stage, [. . . a]s of this writing, there is a long line of Jewish characters in American musicals.²¹⁸

As discussed in an earlier section of this study, despite inroads, no such “long line” of African American prominence, and few African-American performers with the prominence of Whittaker’s list of Al Jolson through Ted Lewis existed in the annals of commercial American musical theatre. Such exclusion perhaps gives reasonable substance to West’s three-part theory on African-American resentment of Jews from above, especially the “higher standard” model to which blacks might have held the similarly situated Jews. This begs the question of why Jews were able to “pass” as part of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant mainstream and found success on Broadway, while African Americans did not except in the context of minstrelsy.

The issues of physical appearance and reinvention of social sense of self arise in any discussion comparing the black and Jewish situation. Erdman discusses the use of appearance as subjugation in a Jewish context.

To clean oneself up, to reform one's image into something more naturalized and palatable, can be a sign of empowerment but also an action taken under duress. To take a step toward invisibility, to adjust one's body to suit the neutrality of the melting pot appearances, is not necessarily an act of liberation. Performing oneself as a Jew-without-a-beard is, after all, the requisite first step toward performing oneself as no-Jew-at-all. Indeed, this new type of Jewish body signaled the beginning of an era where ethnic visibility in general and Jewish visibility in particular were no longer desirable.²¹⁹

Erdman would seem to remind the observer of the performative nature of race and ethnicity, i.e., that where performing Judaism is a matter of choice and self-invention, performing blackness is substantially less so.

Thus far, we have dealt with the subtleties of the comparisons and differences between the Jewish experience in commercial American musical theatre and the similar black experience. More ugly comparisons and contrast came to light when Jews in the musical theatre engaged in explicit subjugation of African Americans. A particularly ugly example of such behavior comes to mind instantaneously – the legacy of musical theatre legend Irving Berlin's *This is the Army* (1942).

This is the Army had its first incarnation during World War I as *Yip, Yip, Yaphank*, where “Yaphank” was a reference to a military base in Long Island, New York. At the outset of World War II, Berlin decided to revive the *Yaphank* effort, re-entitling it *This is the Army* and retrofitting it to the realities of World War II. At first glance, Berlin's effort seemed supportive of the rights and aspirations of African Americans. Berlin would insist that the *This is the Army* unit would be “the only integrated company in uniform.”²²⁰ Such action on Berlin's part was born of Berlin's experiences from World War I. National Archives historian Laurence Bergreen writes

[Berlin] believed the armed forces was the great leveler in American society. In his youth, he had seen the Great War reduce

barriers separating Jewish, German, Irish, and Italian ethnic groups in the United States. Yet blacks had been excluded from this quiet revolution; even in *Yip! Yip! Yaphank*, the black numbers had been performed by whites in blackface in the manner of a minstrel show.²²¹

This passage displays Berlin's perhaps naïve belief that the integration of white ethnics into the mainstream of American society was the equivalent of integrating African Americans.

Ezra Stone, the former child actor of *Henry Aldridge* radio-serial fame, was a young adult at the time of the World War II. Berlin saw leadership qualities in Stone and hired him to direct *This is the Army* on Broadway. A controversy arose when Berlin attempted to place a blackface minstrel number in the production. Stone objected, citing how dated and racist such a number would look to World-War-II era audiences. But Berlin would not hear of such an objection.

After considerable discussion, Stone adopted another approach to convince Berlin to skip the minstrel segment: "How can we have 110 guys in blackface and then get them *out* of blackface for the rest of the show?" Berlin hesitated. Stone's argument gave him a way of backing down while saving face.²²²

Thus, Berlin would concede to Stone's practical objection over the use of blackface for the stage production. However, Berlin's role in attempting to promote minstrelsy in *This is the Army* in the mid-twentieth century cast a pall on what was otherwise an effort to promote racial harmony among American troops and reflected a generalized insensitivity on the part of Irving Berlin to issues of racial injustice. Such insensitivity connects Berlin and, by extension, Jews involved in the creation of commercial American musical theatre to the subjugation of African Americans.

Earlier in his life, Irving Berlin, the formerly poor immigrant Russian Jew, had married the Catholic heiress Ellin Mackay in a move that provoked controversy and difficulty with Mackay's father, who objected to the wedding.²²³ Using West's "higher standard" rubric and Berlin's own direct experience at marginalization by his in-laws over his ethnic background, one might have hoped that Berlin himself would have developed a greater sense of social justice

surrounding such issues. This was not to be the case. An incident with Ezra Stone in which Berlin complained about “too many Jews”²²⁴ in the *This is the Army* company only heightens the perception that Berlin might have separated the world into “white people and everyone else,” and gave undue deference to the former.

Continuing on this thread of potential black mistreatment at the hands of Jewish Americans, a disturbing and complex example of Jewish “leapfrogging” over black interests in commercial American musical theatre came with the production of *Cabaret*, virtually contemporary with the Bailey *Dolly!* in 1967. In contrast to the possible failure of the Bailey *Dolly!* to portray a moment of genuine black oppression, *Cabaret* presented a genuine situation of Jewish oppression located at the heart of the epic Jewish tragedy, the ascent to power of Nazis in Third-Reich Germany. Whittaker writes,

Cabaret has traditionally caused discomfort in its audiences. I would propose that a great deal of this discomfort comes from the various times audiences are directly or indirectly implicated by the onstage actions. [. . . W]hen [audiences] are essentially invited to participate in acknowledging their antisemitism through various mechanisms present in the musical, it becomes a profoundly unsettling experience.²²⁵

Presumably, Whittaker includes Jews themselves in the collective “audience” of *Cabaret*. Thus *Cabaret* becomes not only a testament to the suffering of the Jews, but an opportunity for Jewish audiences to engage in a purgative experience at the theatre. Although the production had resonance with the contemporaneous civil rights struggle, the Bailey *Dolly!*, again contemporary to *Cabaret*, offered black audiences no such similar opportunity. This lack of opportunity reasonably could be seen as yet another example of the higher hurdle African Americans face in entry to the mainstream, especially as compared to Jews.

The fate of one particular song in the score of *Cabaret* might have demonstrated the limited extent to which even the comparatively privileged Jews, as compared to blacks, were

allowed to explore the reality of their oppression. The song, “If You Could See Her Through My Eyes,” portrayed Joel Gray’s “Emcee” character dancing with a gorilla in a tu-tu. The gorilla, presumably, was a stand in for the despised Jew. Whittaker writes,

“If You Could See Her Through My Eyes” [was] almost certainly the most problematic song for many audience members [. . .] Unfortunately for the creative team, audiences misinterpreted the song, reacting to it as if it were meant to be sympathetic to the Nazis. They received one letter from a rabbi who stated that “the graves of six million Jews were pleading for us not to do this.”²²⁶

In the original 1967 production of *Cabaret*, the objectionable line in the song, “If you could see her through my eyes/She wouldn’t look Jewish at all” was changed to “. . . She isn’t a *meezkite* at all.” “*Meezkite*” referred to the Yiddish word for “ugly child” used by the Herr Schultz character earlier in the play as part of a parable-in-song that sought ethnic tolerance. In making this substitution, composer and lyricist John Kander and Fred Ebb de-natured a song that was intended to point out the subtlety and cruelty of Nazi-era hatred of the Jews. Like the Bailey *Dolly!* perhaps, this substitution showed the extent to which Broadway audiences were prepared to deal with the realities and difficulties of ethnicity in the mid-1960s. (The lyric, with the original “Jewish” reference, would be restored in both the 1972 Bob-Fosse film version and the 1990s revival of *Cabaret*.)

Jews in blackface and the racism of a Broadway idol of the likes of Irving Berlin demonstrated how tenuous the alliance was between African and Jewish Americans in the arena of commercial American musical theatre. Yet as we will see later in this study as concerns the Bailey *Dolly!*, an alliance between black and Jew could work to everyone’s advantage.

Show Boat – Race Liberalism in the Post-Minstrelsy Era

The era that followed minstrelsy, nevertheless and despite a throwback like Jolson and difficulties demonstrated thus far between African and Jewish Americans, provided significant efforts at reform of racial attitudes in commercial American musical theatre. Perhaps the most significant example of reform/throwback was librettist Oscar Hammerstein II and composer Jerome Kern's *Show Boat* (1927), perhaps the seminal example of white creators of musical theatre using black performers to express their thoughts on race. *My Fair Lady* librettist Alan Jay Lerner comments on the timelessness of Hammerstein and Kern's effort by comparing *Show Boat* to other musical theatre productions of the 1920s, arguing that "[w]ith all the fresh, innovative and remarkable music that emerged from the musical comedies of the 1920's, there was one tragedy. The books that accompanied those great scores were so unsubstantial-with exception of [*Show Boat*] – that they are almost impossible to revive."²²⁷ Lerner's comments echo the reverence with which *Show Boat* is held in the musical theatre community. Yet even this ground-breaking production, especially in its Hollywood film version, would not be immune to past racist performance styles. Knapp writes,

The 1936 film offers yet another instance of Magnolia's "crossing over" into what she seems to regard as black performing styles, when she becomes part of the show following Julie's dismissal (because state laws forbade racial integration on stage). [. . .] Her [. . .] song – "Gallivantin' Aroun'," which is not in the stage version of *Show Boat* – is a clowning, eye-rolling, verbally unpolished minstrel number, excruciating to watch. [. . . T]he point of showing us the blackface number is to highlight the fact that this was acceptable whereas racially mixed performances [as performed by Steve and his mulatto wife Julie in the context of the *Show Boat* story line] were not.²²⁸

Despite this possibility of throwback, *Show Boat* represented an early attempt by top-of-the-line white creators of musical theatre in the post-minstrelsy era of the 1920s to deal with interracial

issues in a way that sought, with the best of intentions, *not* to attempt to demean the African American. In this capacity, *Show Boat* would usher in an era that lasted through and perhaps slightly past the *Bailey Dolly!* and beyond of top-of-the-line white creative teams writing shows with African-American content that sought to undo the legacy of minstrelsy. Jones speaks of the small revolution in race relations that *Show Boat* attempted to introduce, writing,

Oscar Hammerstein [II] and Jerome Kern challenged white audiences by writing a mixed-cast musical in which African American performers played three-dimensional, sympathetic characters. This “breaking of the rules,” along with its other singular features of form and themes, made *Show Boat* (12/27/27) the one musical of the 1920’s that qualifies as serious entertainment – entertainment with a mission. [. . .]²²⁹

The multiple story lines of *Show Boat* spare no intensity in presenting the reality of white oppression of African Americans, never minimizing the lack of kindness on the part of whites against blacks nor the difficulty of Jim-Crow era life for African Americans.²³⁰ McMillin discusses the clever way in which Hammerstein and Kern use the score to provide contrast between the lives of black and white people in the late nineteenth century in stories surrounding a Mississippi River show boat, paying particularly close attention to the opening “Cotton Blossom” number. For the white chorus, “Cotton Blossom” represents the name of the showboat coming to town. For the black chorus, “cotton blossom” represents the heavy burden of agrarian labor. McMillin writes,

By putting these two choruses together and giving them the same melody, the musical pretends that the racial difference can be overcome in the spirit of exuberant singing, but in fact the lyrics that are sung concern two very different kinds of “cotton blossom,” and the kind the white people sing about depends on the work that goes into the kind the black people sing about.²³¹

Knapp concurs with Jones on the significance of this opening number and its treatment of the black/white divide, writing, “The opening sequence lays out the contrast between the hard-

working blacks and the fantasy offered by the approaching showboat in fairly stark terms. Thus, the banjo underlay for the opening ‘colored chorus’ reminds us that we are not here far removed from the slave culture of the plantation [. . .]”²³²

Much of the racial stress *Show Boat* surrounds the story of Julie, the aforementioned fair-skinned mixed-race show-boat performer married to white performer Steve. Early in the play, Julie and Magnolia, the daughter of the owner/manager of the show boat, are in the kitchen with Queenie, a black servant. Julie sings “Can’t Help Lovin’ Dat Man of Mine,” a song Queenie²³³ recognizes as having its origin among the folkways of black people. This cues both the characters of the play *and* the audience that Julie’s race status will be an important issue sooner or later. In describing the significance of the song as a bridge builder between black and white culture, Knapp once again points to the more overtly racist overtones of the 1936 film version of the performance of this song, writing,

Although the song [“Can’t Help Lovin’ Dat Man of Mine”] is far from convincing as what it supposedly is – a song passed down from generation to generation, known only to blacks – it is made to stand emblematically for what African Americans offer Euro-American culture [. . .] In the 1936 film version, Magnolia (Irene Dunne) joins in with the blacks swaying to the music in the full-chorus follow-up, dancing a “shimmy” with rolling eyes-with an effect almost as embarrassing to watch as blackface [. . .]²³⁴

Knapp grants particular significance to the resolution of the racial situation in Magnolia’s audition scene in Act Two. Unknown to Magnolia, Julie has left a performance venue in Chicago owing to what Jones calls Julie’s evolution into a tragic shadow of her former self, “considerably older and sadly worn. . . wearing too much make-up, and her hair. . . dyed red, periodically taking ‘a drink from a pint flask she keeps in her handbag.’”²³⁵ Julie hasn’t seen Magnolia since the difficulties Julie had surrounding her racial status on the showboat many years earlier. Yet Julie remains in the performance venue, in tears as she watches her protégé

Magnolia audition as her replacement. In this instance, Knapp finds a parallel between the story of Julie and Magnolia and the larger story of American race relations, writing,

[. . . D]espite the extended representations of the plight of American blacks in *Show Boat*, the show's dramatic focus remains resolutely on its white population, whose problems are at each turn placed in the foreground. Thus, the context in which there seems to be no solution to America's race problem is already a closed shop, for this is Magnolia's story, not Julie's; while Magnolia may or may not be fully aware of Julie's presence in the shadows of her life, Julie, watching from the shadows, is always and necessarily aware of Magnolia.²³⁶

Thus, in spite of its unsparing treatment of Jim-Crow-era racism, *Show Boat* remains a story told from a white point of view. The white person can "make believe" (as the eponymous song from *Show Boat* might imply) that there is no problem among the black population. Yet the black population is not afforded the same courtesy.

Show Boat offers an important lesson in the possible limitations of white creative talent writing musical theatre with black-focused content. These limitations prove especially important in the context of the legacy of minstrelsy and the history of white mis-representation of black interests in popular American entertainment. Furthermore, as we shall see in Chapter VI, this situation of white shows written for black performers intersects directly with problems faced the Bailey *Dolly!* in its critical reception.

All-black Musical Theatre in the Post-minstrelsy Era

This era that followed minstrelsy, starting in the 1920s, also provided more frequent venues for black creative talent in musical theatre. Woll connects the economic realities for African-American performers in the era of minstrelsy to the evolution of early-twentieth-century musical theatre for and by African Americans. Beginning with a description with early

integration of all-white minstrel shows that led to “real and original” all-black minstrel shows in the late nineteenth century, Woll describes the conundrum faced by black performers in minstrelsy, writing

Saddled with the stage conventions of minstrelsy, black entertainers had to wear the same baggy pants, oversized shoes, and occasionally even the burnt cork that whites wore. The minstrel show trained generations of black performers – W.C. Handy, Bert Williams, and Bessie Smith, to name a few – for theatrical and musical careers, but it also forced them to perpetuate the genre’s derogatory stereotypes of black life.²³⁷

While this inclusion of black performing talent in the minstrel show afforded expanded employment opportunities for black entertainers, these entertainers were forced to maintain demeaning stereotypes.

A similar fate during this post-minstrelsy time-frame would inform the flurry of activity on the part of African-American creators of musical theatre. Such creative effort by African Americans for African Americans in this era offered some relief to the cruelty of minstrelsy. Yet differences in approach on the part of black creative talent would arise. Woll discusses two contrasting philosophies behind the explosion of black creativity in musical theatre in the early twentieth century, citing the dichotomy between black musical entertainment creators Will Marion Cook and Bob Cole. In parallel with then-contemporary discussions of the role of the African American in the arts, Cook and Cole offered polar opposite approaches. Woll writes,

Cole believed that blacks should strive for excellence in artistic creation and must compete on an equal basis with whites. His musicals therefore had to rival those of white composers and lyricists, and thus demonstrate that the Negro was capable of matching whites in all realms of cultural production. Cook, however, felt that “Negroes should eschew white patterns [. . . and] should [be] developing artistic endeavors that reflected the soul of black people.”²³⁸

Woll amplifies Cook's situation anecdotally, retelling the story of Cook's assimilationist mother's reaction to Cook's rejection of white aesthetic norms.

Will [Cook]'s mother listened from the kitchen and then walked into the parlor with tears in her eyes. She said to her son, "Oh, Will! Will! I've sent you all over the world to study and become a great musician, and you return such a nigger!" She disapproved, since "she thought that a Negro composer should write just like a white man."²³⁹

Cook and Cole's difference of outlook – Cook's Afro-centrism versus Cole's Euro-centrism – resulted in two competing *fin de siècle* efforts at musical theatre written by African Americans to be performed by African Americans: Cook's *Clorindy, or the Origin of the Cakewalk* (1897) and Cole's *A Trip to Coontown* (1898).²⁴⁰ Jones further credits Cole, along with Paul William Dunbar, with the creation of *In Dahomey* (1903), which Jones cites as "first full-length book musical written and performed entirely by African Americans to play a major Broadway house [. . .]"²⁴¹ Both Woll and Jones write further on the life and work of Cook and Cole, a legacy that would last well into the period that preceded World War I. If nothing else, black creative talent was active in this period.

Reaction to *In Dahomey* would include a spirited discussion of the role of black writers of musical theatre in promoting harmful racial stereotypes. Jones refers to Woll in this discussion, writing

Not long after *In Dahomey* closed, Albert Ross, a black business professor at a Midwestern university, wrote [*In Dahomey* performers] Walker and Williams, "complaining that they 'held the old plantation Negro, the ludicrous darky, and the scheming grafter up to entertain people'" In their reply [. . .] Walker and Williams [. . . pointed] out that black entertainers were "entirely dependent on white audiences and critics for their livelihood, . . . [they] had to keep in mind the expectations of those audiences." [. . .]²⁴²

Despite their defense of the use of African-American stereotypes in *In Dahomey*, Walker and Williams would appear in another Cook production, *Abyssinia* (1906), that presented African

Americans in a more positive light. Woll concurs in this interpretation of *Abyssinia*, arguing that “[t]he view of Africa [in *Abyssinia*] does not seem terribly dated even at the present time.”²⁴³ Yet Jones writes of criticism of such presentation of positive black characterizations.

[. . . N]oble as the enterprise was, its realistic and dignified depiction of Africans and American blacks was bound to come under attack from other quarters – and it did. The lone negative review of *Abyssinia* criticized Walker and Williams precisely for abandoning the familiar stereotypes and creating “a white man’s show acted by colored men, whereas to be entirely successful it should have been a colored men’s acted by themselves”²⁴⁴

In discussing *Abyssinia*, Woll implicitly dismisses this same negative review of the play, writing, “If [during the era following the heyday of minstrelsy] a black musical abandoned the stereotypes that survived from the minstrel era, it was often criticized for lacking the genre’s standard conventions (as defined by white critics).”²⁴⁵

Perhaps the most positive and successful effort at a musical written by African Americans for African Americans in this post-minstrelsy era was composer Eubie Blake and librettist Noble Sissle’s *Shuffle Along* (1921). Not the least of the accomplishments of this production was the ending of seating restrictions in New York theatre venues. Previously, black audiences in New York were restricted to balcony seating. The financial success of *Shuffle Along* led to eventual change in such segregated seating policy. For “[w]ith each succeeding black show produced during the 1920’s [after *Shuffle Along*],” writes Woll, “seating restrictions gradually disappeared. James Weldon Johnson was finally able to write in 1930: ‘At the present time the sight of colored people in the orchestras of Broadway theatres in not regarded a cause for immediate action or utter astonishment.’”²⁴⁶

Indeed, *Shuffle Along* offered both significant financial success and a rare opportunity for Blake and Sissle as African American creative talent. Jones writes,

The pioneering *Shuffle Along* (5/23/21) was [. . .] the most influential show both written and performed by blacks in the early decades of the twentieth century. And, with its run of 504 performances, it was also the most successful. Black shows created as well as played by blacks have been few. In fact, since the late 1920's, with only occasional exceptions, most musicals and revues tailored for African American performers have been written by whites. [. . .]²⁴⁷

Woll concurs with Jones, offering a connection between the success of *Shuffle Along* and the emerging Harlem Renaissance, writing, “*Shuffle Along* also legitimized the black musical. It proved to producers and theatre managers that audiences [presumably including white people] would pay to see black talent on Broadway. As a result, *Shuffle Along* spawned a series of imitators, and black musicals became a Broadway staple.”²⁴⁸ Woll highlights the importance of *Shuffle Along* by describing the exodus of Langston Hughes, who came to New York City from his native Kansas, at least in part in order to see the production.

Both Jones and Woll offer doubts about *Shuffle Along* and the advancement of African American interests, especially with its unfortunate use of stereotypes from minstrelsy. Jones writes, “[. . . *Shuffle Along* presented] lingering influences of minstrel shows, even those written and performed by blacks. The only significant differences were that by the 1920's most male performers no longer wore blackface [. . .] and women played more leading roles.”²⁴⁹ Woll agrees with Jones, offering further comment on how the success of *Shuffle Along* led to a constraining atmosphere with respect to the creation of black-written musical theatre in the 1920.

[. . . A]s *Shuffle Along* became the model for all black musicals of the 1920's, it also set certain boundaries as well. Any show that followed the characteristics of *Shuffle Along* could usually be assured of favorable reviews or at least a modest audience response. Yet, if a show strayed from what had become the standard formula for the black musical, disastrous reviews became almost inevitable.²⁵⁰

As we have seen with nearly all black interaction with the white hegemony in the venue of popular entertainment, *Shuffle Along* offered both progress *and* regression concerning black aspirations of inclusion.

Despite its all-black cast, the Bailey *Dolly!* did *not* provide an opportunity for African-American creative talent to show its talent. We can see from the examples shown here, from *A Trip to Coontown* to *Shuffle Along*, demonstration of such creative talent was fraught with the positives and negatives we have come to expect concerning black and white interaction in popular entertainment. As we will see in Chapter VII, in addition to broadening horizons for black performing talent, the Bailey *Dolly!* would usher in an era in which black-informed material would emanate from African Americans themselves.

Euro-informed Classics with Black Casts

Creativity on the part of African-American composers and librettists in the period immediately following the heyday of minstrelsy provides a treasure trove of data with respect to black and white interaction in commercial American musical theatre. Of equal importance was the involvement of black performers in non-black created ventures, an issue of particular importance in the analysis of the Bailey *Dolly!* Of particular interest in this regard would be what would become a battle of competing attempts to adapt Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* for black performers. Both versions played on Broadway during in 1939. The first (by three weeks), *The Swing Mikado*, resulted from the efforts of Hallie Flanagan's Federal Theatre Project, an arm of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal. Woll comments on how this production attracted the attention of Eleanor Roosevelt, much in the way that the Bailey *Dolly!* attracted the attention of the Johnsons in the 1960s.

Eleanor Roosevelt attended the opening night of [*The*] *Swing Mikado*, a relatively unusual outing for her since her husband had been elected president. However, in the aftermath of her criticizing the DAR's ban on Marian Anderson's performance in Constitution Hall in Washington the previous spring, she made a concerted effort to attend [. . .] all-black shows during [her] New York visit. [. . .]²⁵¹

Woll compares FTP's *The Swing Mikado* to *The Hot Mikado*, an effort produced privately on Broadway by Mike Todd. In most of this comparison, the Todd version comes out on top. Woll describes how conservative the musical talent behind the FTP was, only "swinging" five musical numbers. This failure to engage in wholesale re-interpretation left the critic from *The New York Times* cold. According to Woll, this critic "felt that the show came alive only when the Mikado [. . .] 'burst out into a cakewalk' and the three little maids from school 'strutted what they had learned there.'"²⁵² In comparison, Woll declares that "Todd's *Hot Mikado* swung more than the earlier show had dared."²⁵³ Woll compares reaction on the part of the Broadway critics' establishment to the wealth of riches offered by the competing *Mikados*. The answer would lie in the show-business economics that drove both productions.

Critics reviewed both *Mikados* and gave the nod to the "hot" version. Clearly, the presence of Bill Robinson and a cast of talented Broadway veterans tilted the balance toward the private-sector *Mikado*. Todd and company could employ Broadway's best, but FTP rules stipulated that their productions had to use primarily unemployed actors. Since the FTP could not cast the ideal person for each role, characterizations were often shaped by the available players. In Illinois many of the available black artists had appeared in straight versions of *The Mikado*, so the show moved toward a more formal structure. Todd's version, however, faced no such restraints, and it featured top talent in a more swinging version.²⁵⁴

Woll affords room for a dissent by Alain Locke,²⁵⁵ who felt that the organic creative effort offered by FTP trumped the more polished, more commercial effort that Mike Todd enforced on the *Hot* version. In general, as with the Bailey *Dolly!*, the issue of black performers involved in productions of material previously reserved only for whites comes to the fore. At once such a

situation expands possibilities for black performers, both in terms of employment *and* in terms of potential entrée to bourgeois nicety. On the other hand, the issue of encouraging such black performers to adapt to white cultural norms is problematic.

Perhaps the most noteworthy difficulty in attempting to adapt *The Mikado* to a black situation could be found in the racial disparity the original already presented in the original play itself between Europeans and Asians. Knapp comments on this disparity, writing

Are we right nevertheless to feel discomfort with *The Mikado*? Of course we are, especially in America, where it resonates all too readily with our own heritage of blackface minstrelsy, with which it overlaps historically – and to which, surely not coincidentally, *The Mikado* [. . .] directly alludes, when “the nigger serenader, and the others of his race” show up on Ko-Ko’s “little list” [. . . H]owever invested *The Mikado* is in forging a bond between English and Japanese cultures, and however well this might register with audiences [. . .], the basic strategy of the show sets in sharp relief the cultural background of late-nineteenth-century England, saturated as it was with a smug superiority acquired through a long history of imperialist/colonialist behavior, represented by *The Mikado*, taken in itself, might be grossly insulting.²⁵⁶

Yet despite any misgivings on the *Hot* and *Swing Mikados*, success begged imitation. Numerous attempts to recreate the success of the *Hot* and *Swing Mikados* with other European-informed classics would be attempted in subsequent seasons. Jones describes a particularly unfortunate attempt to adapt Shakespeare to this “swing” notion.

Swingin’ the Dream (11/29/39) tried to “swing” Shakespeare[‘s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*] the way the *Swing* and *Hot Mikados* had successfully “swung” Gilbert and Sullivan. But even with Jimmy Van Heusen’s score, Benny Goodman’s sextet as the pit band, and a cast including Louis Armstrong as Bottom, Butterfly McQueen as Puck, and “Moms” Mabley as Quince, *Dream* turned into a thirteen-performance nightmare.²⁵⁷

So in some quarters, it was with a sigh of relief that Oscar Hammerstein II would arrive on the scene with the comparatively unadulterated *Carmen Jones* (1943). Bizet’s music of

European operatic style would not be “swung” in *Carmen Jones*. Rather, Hammerstein would “black-ify” the proceedings by changing the situation to the American south and rewriting lyrics to make the characters sound more African-American. The problem with such a traditional approach to the music of Bizet’s original *Carmen* was that it begged comparison with the attempt by composer George Gershwin (with librettist DuBose Heyward) a few years previously to “elevate” black culture by attempting to raise such culture to the level of opera in *Porgy and Bess*. Woll refers to the play as a “white usurpation.”²⁵⁸ In a similar vein, Knapp discusses the conundrums surrounding the attempt by Gershwin and Heyward with *Porgy and Bess* to rectify black culture against Euro-centric aesthetics. “Despite this powerful device [. . .] of aligning the music of the opera precisely to the discourse of its blacks,” writes Knapp, “*Porgy and Bess* is at bottom a story told *by* whites and *for* whites.”²⁵⁹ Despite the potential for such negative comparison to *Porgy and Bess*, *Carmen Jones* proved able to conquer the apparent divide between African-American and European culture, and was a walloping success with the New York critical establishment. Woll describes Broadway the positive critical reaction in the daily newspapers to *Carmen Jones*, writing,

[. . .] Howard Barnes of the New York *Herald Tribune* led the chorus to raves: “It is magnificently performed and ably sung by an all-colored cast, and it has been staged with cunning and splendor. *Carmen Jones* is something more than a major theatrical event. It opens infinite and challenging horizons for the fusion of the two art forms [opera and musical comedy].”²⁶⁰

Woll points out even greater accolades for critical reaction to the use of Bizet’s operatic music, unadulterated, for *Carmen Jones*.

Even the music critics, who had savaged *Porgy and Bess* with faint praise, could hardly restrain their enthusiasm for the Hammerstein show. Olin Downes, who had disliked the Gershwin work, found *Carmen Jones* “audacious and original,” though he objected to “too much white man’s training in it all.” he preferred shows that

featured “a Negro performance in the natural creative way of that race of born actors and singers.”²⁶¹

In describing the popularity of the production throughout the United States, Woll describes a resurrection of the segregated seating controversy discussed earlier in this chapter concerning *Shuffle Along*, writing

When the touring company traveled from St. Louis to Kansas City, it was greeted by pickets. The issue was that black patrons were segregated while black artists were being permitted onstage. Louisville hoped to avoid any problems by announcing in advance that there would be no segregated seating. It was soon discovered that all blacks were being seated in a separate section. As a result, the show was greeted by protests on opening night there as well.²⁶²

Productions such as *Carmen Jones* and the various swing-ified versions of Gilbert and Sullivan’s *The Mikado* predated the *Bailey Dolly!* by a generation. Like the *Bailey Dolly!*, these production offered material that allowed the black performer to shine, if only in a Euro-centric milieu. What would seem different about the *Bailey Dolly!*, in addition to its unqualified commercial success, was its connection to the civil rights ethos as well as its use of very successful contemporary material. *Carmen Jones* and the competing *Mikados* could not boast these attributes to anywhere near the extent of the *Bailey Dolly!*

Progress Against Stereotypes -- Taking Race Seriously

In the post-minstrelsy period, productions such as *Shuffle Along*, the dueling *Mikados*, and *Carmen Jones* would prosper. Yet the penumbra of minstrelsy would remain at large in this period, and it was inevitable that conflict would arise in the commercial venue over what seemed to have become dated stereotypes. Such conflict came to the fore in 1946 over the production of *St. Louis Woman* (which, coincidentally, offered Pearl Bailey’s Broadway debut). *St. Louis Woman* would offer what was likely the first incident in which a black cast working with white

creative personnel would protest stereotypical character depictions. The score for this musical play was composed by Harold Arlen. Lerner comments on Arlen's credentials as a composer for a black-infused musical, writing, "Arlen was (and is) the master of the blues – 'Stormy Weather' and 'Blues in the Night' being among his most famous – and became a frequent contributor to the revues at the Cotton Club in Harlem. Legend has it that he was the only white composer the black musical fraternity regarded as one of their own."²⁶³ So it was particularly surprising when, as Woll describes, African American performers took issue with the production, writing

For the first time in recent memory, members of the cast stopped the rehearsals to protest the offensive stereotypes in the show. Generally, black actors hesitated to complain publicly about these concerns. Alain Locke suggested that because of a "precarious employment situation . . . [they accept] before the public the yoke of the Broadway stereotypes." Here, however, several cast members objected to the bawdy character and loose morals of the female leads. [. . .]²⁶⁴

That *St. Louis Woman* would be singled out for its racial stereotyping was even more unusual in that, in addition to the enlistment of white southerner Johnny Mercer's talents as lyricist, the creative team of the play included "reliance on black [book] writers. Arna Bontemps adapted his 1931 novel *God Sends Sunday* with the assistance of Countee Cullen [. . .]"²⁶⁵

Perhaps it was the philosophical upheaval felt throughout American society surrounding the end of World War II that allowed the black performers of *St. Louis Woman* sufficient latitude to complain about racial stereotypes. As mentioned previously in this study, the shared national philosophy against mistreatment on the basis of race and ethnicity that fueled World War II also gave rise to more ambitious desires of freedom and equality among African Americans. Such ambitions were recognized, flaws and all, in the commercial American musical theatre that followed World War II. These ambitions would resonate particularly in such musical productions as *Finian's Rainbow* (1947), a comic take on racism, and *Lost in the Stars* (1949), a

serious take on apartheid in South Africa. Where *Finian's Rainbow* might have conformed to white audience comfort levels, *Lost in the Stars* provided a decidedly pointed indictment of racism. Lerner describes the less-than-stellar commercial fate of this attempt on the part of the Broadway stage to deal seriously with racism. He begins by commenting on the production's auspicious creative pedigree, writing,

[. . .] *Lost in the Stars* [1949] [. . . was] adapted by Maxwell Anderson from Alan Paton's stunning novel of racial strife in South Africa, *Cry, the Beloved Country*. Its deeply moving score was by Kurt Weill [. . . R]eviews, with the occasional qualification, were appropriately enthusiastic and the morning after it opened it seemed as though *Lost in the Stars* had conquered the resistance to the serious musical.²⁶⁶

Ultimately, *Lost in the Stars* would prove too great a threat to white comfort levels. After a November 1949 opening, the show would close in early summer. In this failure, one could see a reticence on the part of audiences to accept a musical that refused to treat racism lightly.

Less threatening than *Lost in the Stars* was Rodgers and Hammerstein's (along with Joshua Logan, who directed and shared book writing credit with Hammerstein) *South Pacific* (also 1949). *South Pacific* devoted more effort to the joys and frivolities of World War II military personnel than the significantly more serious *Lost in the Stars*. Nevertheless, Jones defends the treatment of race in *South Pacific*, writing, "In the 1,925-performance, Pulitzer Prize-winning *South Pacific* [. . .], issues of prejudice and tolerance for the first time became the actual drive-mechanism of character conflicts in both the primary and secondary plot of a Rodgers and Hammerstein musical."²⁶⁷ The play used native islanders as metaphoric stand-ins for African Americans to tell these two race-related stories: the primary conflict between nurse Nellie Forbush, the "rube" from Little Rock who could not accept her French plantation-owner lover Emile DeBeque had fathered children with native women, and the secondary story of Princeton-educated Philadelphia-mainline-raised Lieutenant Joe Cable, who had fallen in love

with Liat, the daughter of local island wheeler-dealer Bloody Mary. Jones discusses the racial aspect of the relationship between Nellie and Emile as portrayed in the James Michener novel upon which the musical was based. Jones places great significance in Nellie's reaction to discovering that Emile had fathered children with a number of native women, one of whom, a Polynesian, she describes as a "nigger." Jones writes, "[. . . Nellie] can't escape being an American [s]outherner whose racial bias is directed specifically against blacks, with whom she equates Polynesians."²⁶⁸

Jones acknowledges that the conflict between Nellie and Emile is resolved with little fanfare because the racism involved is "once removed"²⁶⁹ – i.e., neither the audience nor Nellie ever see Emile interact with his island women in the timeframe of the play itself. Here, with the race-based story line for Nellie and Emile, white audience comfort levels are not particularly challenged. In contrast, this sense of "once removed" racial interaction is not the case with Cable, whose courtship of Liat is encouraged by the non-white Bloody Mary herself. It thus makes sense that it is Cable who comes to the most germane conclusion of the play: "You've got to be taught to hate and fear . . ."²⁷⁰ Kislan describes how the structure of the song "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught" enhanced the power of its statement.

Oscar Hammerstein II used end rhyme in "You've Got to Be [Carefully] Taught" (*South Pacific*) to focus attention on three words that make the point of the song: *afraid*, *made*, and *shade*. It is a technique he employed much earlier to end the "Soliloquy" for Billy Bigelow that climaxes Act I of *Carousel*, where the rhyme scheme focuses attention on the words *buy*, *try*, and *die*. Each word is critical to the character's motivation, *try* describes the action forthcoming, and *die* foreshadows the climax of the plot.²⁷¹

But not only did this song provide dramatic tension to the proceedings through its content and, as Kislan described, its structure. It would redefine the race debate among middle-brow audiences,

rebutting Nellie's argument within the play that such racism represented the natural order with which one could not tamper. Jones quotes Richard Rodgers' personal take on the song, writing,

Oscar and I felt it was needed in a particular spot for a Princeton-educated young WASP who, despite his background and upbringing, had fallen in love with a[n island] girl. It was perfectly in keeping with the character and situation that, having once lost his heart, he would express his feelings about the superficiality of racial barriers.²⁷²

Jones emphasizes that "Carefully Taught" "was not intended as a 'message' song" by Rogers.

Nevertheless, Jones buffers this assessment saying that the song "stands out as the most explicit statement of Hammerstein's concern about learned biases in the entire Rodgers and Hammerstein canon."²⁷³ Whether the intent was there or not, the message of racism defined as a learned trait was a powerful, radical thought in its timeframe. The website "democraticunderground.com" describes the controversy with which the song was met.

South Pacific received scrutiny for its commentary regarding relationships between different races and ethnic groups. In particular, "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught" was subject to widespread criticism, judged by some to be too controversial or downright inappropriate for the musical stage. Sung by the character Lieutenant Cable, the song is preceded by a lyric saying racism is "not born in you! It happens after you're born..."²⁷⁴

Furthermore, a "controversy within the controversy" exists on the dramatic technique of having Joe Cable killed in action. Jones writes,

Cable's death seems to be an attempt to placate potential ticket-buyers of the "I don't care if they live next door, but they're not going to marry my daughter" mindset, who otherwise might have stayed away in droves. How much Hammerstein dared and how soundly he dramatized his advocacy as integral to the musical is impressive, but it's also unfortunate that the integrity of his vision was compromised for the sake of commercial success.²⁷⁵

So like the Bailey *Dolly!*, baby and giant steps expanding the race-focused horizons of middle-brow audiences were met in Rogers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific* with at least a small amount of equivocation.

The 1950s – Blacks as Exotics, Blacks as “Street Real”

The 1950s would serve as the final stage of the Broadway musical before we reach the era directly surrounding the Bailey *Dolly!* In this decade, efforts to promote the interests of African Americans on Broadway, both as a community and as far as employment of black performers was concerned, would seem to have backslid. It would be stretching the point to include Rodgers and Hammerstein's efforts at multi-culturalism of the period – *The King and I* (1951) and *Flower Drum Song* (1958) – in this discussion as these productions would bear little imprint on the American race debate. Neither would *My Fair Lady* (1956), Lerner and Loewe's musical depiction of British class warfare. Rather, the presence of anything resembling the interests of African Americans in commercial American musical theatre in the 1950s would be limited to portrayal of blacks as exotics, or to obscure if artful failure.

Two musical plays of the former variety – blacks as exotics – come to the fore in this discussion, both with music by Harold Arlen, the composer of the previously discussed *St. Louis Woman*. The first, *House of Flowers* (1954), featured the lyric- and book-writing talent of novelist Truman Capote and a performance by Pearl Bailey. Woll describes the unfortunate circumstances of this production, writing

But *House of Flowers* received only modest reviews. Capote's libretto took the critical heat – many found that it failed to capture a true West Indian spirit. The show closed after only 165 performances. There was a 1968 Off-Broadway revival of the show, but it did not last long.²⁷⁶

The other Arlen race-infused effort in the 1950s, *Jamaica* (1957), featured a bravura performance by Lena Horne in “a sprightly tale of Jamaican-American relations”²⁷⁷ which lasted on Broadway a year and a half. In this production, Arlen would be reunited with his lyricist partner from the film version of *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), E.Y. Harburg. Harburg was the lyricist and co-book-writer of the aforementioned *Finian’s Rainbow*; on *Jamaica*, Harburg would be reunited in book-writing duties with his partner from *Finian*, Fred Saidy. After describing positive critical reaction on the part of New York’s journalistic establishment to Horne’s performance and the weakness of Harburg and Saidy’s book, Woll writes of racial controversy surrounding *Jamaica*.

There may be various reactions to the racial aspects of the show. Although most northern urbanites aren’t likely to be concerned (most New Yorkers probably could care less), there may be raised eyebrows and perhaps increased blood pressure among Dixiecrats because of the love scenes between Horne and [the Mexican-born Ricardo] Montalban [. . .]²⁷⁸

In comparison to these commercial efforts of Harold Arlen in the 1950s concerning black representation on Broadway lies the stark contrast of Langston Hughes’ *Simply Heavenly* (1957). With music by David Martin, the libretto Langston Hughes wrote for *Simply Heavenly* offered a more realistic view of African American life than Arlen’s “blacks as exotics” efforts discussed above. Woll discusses Hughes’s concern for black representation in commercial entertainment in the post-World War II era, writing

Although he had originally lauded the postwar democratic boom in the theatre, [Hughes] began to take a much more caustic look in his columns for the Chicago Defender. By 1953, his earlier opinions resurfaced: “White Americans control commercial entertainment for *white* Americans. There will be no complete revelation of Negro talent in entertainment in American until some areas of it are controlled completely by Negroes providing entertainment for their own racial group first, and only incidentally for others who wish to enjoy it.”²⁷⁹

With philosophy in hand, Hughes set out to reform the nature of popular American entertainment singlehandedly. Woll describes the evolution of the main character of *Simply Heavenly*, Jesse Simple, known to the denizens of Paddy's bar in Harlem simply as "Simple," from a series of newspaper columns to a theatrical event.

Simple and company had their origins in the *Chicago Defender* in 1942. Hughes initially used them as "a mouthpiece for the negativism prevalent among many ordinary Harlemites toward the war effort—a 'this is a white folk's war' feeling-based on discrimination in the Armed Forces and the most Hitler-like insult of all to colored peoples, the segregated blood banks the white folks had set up." As time passed, Simple mellowed and extended his barroom conversations beyond issues concerning racism and war. Simple finally was immortalized in book form in 1950, when Simon and Schuster published *Simple Speaks His Mind*, and later in *Simple Takes a Wife* (1953), *Simple Strikes a Claim* followed shortly afterward.²⁸⁰

After a false run with a set of producers who wanted *Simply Heavenly* as a musical, Hughes's collaboration with new producers emerged officially as a "comedy with music."²⁸¹ The evolution of Simple from printed word to stage continued with a successful run of the play version on the upper west side of Manhattan in a small off-Broadway house. Fire code violations in the small theatre caused the company to have to change venue, as the play would attempt to strike gold on Broadway. Woll describes journalistic critical reaction to the arrival of *Simply Heavenly* on the Great White Way (pun intended), noting inaccuracy on the part of theatre critics in reporting the history of black involvement in commercial American musical theatre as well as white audiences' inability to deal with an idiom that celebrated the African American experience.²⁸² Woll offers a sample of dialogue from the play that might be seen a typical of what these critics found so bewildering. When another character dismisses domestic Miss Mamie as a "stereotype," she replies,

Why, it's getting so colored folks can't do nothing no more without some other Negro calling you a stereotype. Stereotype, hah! If you like a little gin, you're a stereotype. You got to drink Scotch. If you wear a red dress, you're a stereotypes. You got wear beige or chartreuse. Lord have mercy, honey, do-don 't like no black-eyed peas and rice! Then you're down-home Negro for true – which I is – and proud of it! I didn't come here to Harlem to get away from my people. I come here because there's more of 'em. I loves my race. I loves my people. Stereotype!²⁸³

At the heart of Miss Mamie's rebuttal of her characterization as a "stereotype" lies the essence of Hughes's effort to reconsider popular entertainment in African-American terms. Miss Mamie was not about making white people comfortable. She was about challenging their assumptions on race.²⁸⁴

In this era following World War II, Broadway was beginning to catch up with the concerns of African Americans. As with other areas of American cultural life, such "catch-up" would be fitful. The heart of the civil rights era would follow. In this civil rights era, the mainstream of commercial American musical theatre would offer new explorations into the issue of race. Such explorations would provide a through-line that would see the advent of the Bailey *Dolly!*

Change in the Civil-Rights Era

In this chapter, we have seen an evolution in the field of musical theatre from the cruelties of minstrelsy to attempts in the era that followed at reform, with some efforts more successful than others. A strong line of demarcation, a line that would reflect racial upheaval in America, would happen around 1960 with respect to the trajectory of race and commercial American musical theatre. A number of musicals produced on Broadway from 1960 to the Bailey *Dolly!* opening in November, 1967, reflect a change in paradigm that would for the first

time deal, in varying degrees, with the civil rights movement that surrounded these productions historically. These musicals are *Kwamina* (1961), *No Strings* (1962), *Golden Boy* (1964), *The Roar of the Greasepaint, the Smell of the Crowd* (1965), *The Zulu and the Zayda* (1965), and *Hallelujah, Baby!* (1967). Each of these musical plays, using a variety of methods, reflects changes in the portrayal of both continental Africans and African Americans in terms of eschewing the negative stereotypes of minstrelsy. In addition, these musicals explore new horizons in social hierarchy and power differential as well as cooperation among the races. These would also be among the last Broadway musicals with black content to be created by experienced and renowned creative personnel.

Let us deal first with the two musical plays from this era that take place on the African continent. The score for this first show, *Kwamina*, was created by the virtuous Richard Adler, who had, in tandem with partner Jerry Ross, had composed and written lyrics for two highly successful musicals from the 1950s, *The Pajama Game* (1954) and *Damn Yankees* (1955). With Ross' premature death and at composer-lyricist Cole Porter's urging, Adler struck out on his own with *Kwamina* to write both lyrics *and* music. The score is reminiscent of the music composer Bert Kaempfert would later compose as part of his popular "African sound" series, with definite strains of joyful major chords in the style of African folk melodies, coupled with the decidedly western influence of brass and strings.²⁸⁵ Adler would write "[. . . i]n his memoirs [of the use of] a five-tone scale for the score's "a Bantuesque approach"²⁸⁶, giving evidence to the desire on Adler's part to be faithful as a composer *Kwamina's* African derivation.

Dealing directly with "African-African" (as opposed to various incarnations of African-American) culture was a novel idea at the time of the creation of *Kwamina*. Thus, a short discussion of the genesis of the idea to create such an African-African musical is in order. In the CD liner notes for *Kwamina*, David Foil describes the genesis of its Africa-centered story line for

Kwamina, starting with a chance meeting in 1956 between Adler and Democratic presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson.²⁸⁷ Stevenson had recently returned from a fact-finding voyage to Africa, which became the topic of cocktail-party conversation. The CD liner notes recall the gist of Adler's reaction to the conversation with Stevenson, quoting Adler as saying at a later date, "You have to remember [. . .] that five years ago [before the opening of *Kwamina* on Broadway,] most Americans still thought of Africa as just a land of safaris and wild beasts."²⁸⁸ Adler and book writer Robert Alan Aurthur would proceed to write a musical play that sought to contrast this "land of safaris and wild beasts" with encroaching Euro-centered modernism – what Stevenson would describe in another cocktail conversation with Adler as the difference between the modern city of Stanleyville in what was then the Belgian Congo with brush country "where human sacrifice [was] still practiced."²⁸⁹ Book writer Aurthur added his own connection to the African continent, having been a classmate of Ghanaian President Kwame Nkruma at the University of Pennsylvania in the 1940s. Foil writes, "Aurthur remembered how militant Nkrumah had been in college about leading his people away from their old-fashioned beliefs; in the years since, Nkrumah had found change to be slow and arduous, and the people resistant."²⁹⁰ Both Adler and Aurthur would come to the project of writing *Kwamina* with various stories of natives from both Africa and the Americas going to Euro-American locales for professional training, only to come home to tradition-borne resistance at home. This "resistance to change" theme would be important to the story told by *Kwamina*. Rodgers and Hammerstein had dealt with this theme both in *The King and I* and *Flower Drum Song*. Adler and Ross would expand on Rodgers and Hammerstein, attempting to create a more genuinely ethnic experience surrounding the exploration of this universal theme.

Despite all good intentions and the quality of a creative team that included, among others, Agnes de Mille as choreographer, *Kwamina* opened to mediocre reviews. Foil writes,

The New York critics were politely indifferent. Richard Watts Jr. asked, in the first line of his review in the *New York Post*, why the show wasn't more powerful. In the *New York Herald-Tribune*, Walter Kerr called *Kwamina* "its own worst advertisement" because the old African ways [. . .] are so much more interesting than all the Western angst that grips the leading characters. [. . . T]he tone of all the reviews indicated only one thing - *Kwamina*, for all its ambition and intermittent quality, didn't work.²⁹¹

Kwamina would close after 32 performances.

In commenting on the show, Jones paid particularly close attention to the interracial relationship between the white Eve and the black *Kwamina*. Jones, writes, "The show neither condemned nor condoned the openly portrayed interracial love affair except to express that the time and place of the musical's setting were not conducive to its survival."²⁹² As we have seen often in the intersection of race and commercial American musical theatre, *Kwamina* thus served to introduce the idea of interracial pairing *without* pushing beyond the comfort level of a bourgeois audience. As an all-black production, the Bailey *Dolly!* did not have to deal directly with this issue.

As with *Kwamina*'s composer/lyricist Richard Adler and his sudden loss of composing partner Jerry Ross, *No Strings* would find composer Richard Rodgers striking out on his own as lyricist after having lost his longtime librettist partner, Oscar Hammerstein II, just after the completion of *The Sound of Music* (1959). With book by Samuel Taylor, *No Strings* would take place in a vaguely racially neutral venue – the fast-paced whirl of Paris fashion – tainted directly with neither European-imperialist nor American-segregationist concepts of race. Again as with *Kwamina*, we have a plot-line that revolves around a failed inter-racial love affair, this time between successful African-American fashion model Barbara and expatriate white-American writer David. As compared to *Kwamina*, however, the race issue is underplayed in favor of more innate personality differences between the responsible Barbara and the drifter David. In

one of the few direct references to race, David waxes rhapsodic on the virtues of his native Maine, a place where he knows Barbara will not fit in because of her race. In response, Barbara waxes equally rhapsodic on the virtues of her home neighborhood in New York City “north of Central Park,”²⁹³ an oblique reference to Harlem. In his discussion of *No Strings*, Jones would seem to allude to the idea that for a black woman from Harlem like Barbara to return to “lily-white Maine”²⁹⁴ would be impossible both in terms of race and comparative sophistication. Barbara’s Paris fashions might overwhelm the denizens of local Saturday night dances in Taylor and Rodgers’ homespun-yet-all-white vision of Maine (not dissimilar to the Maine of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Carousel*). Jones would seem to commiserate with Taylor and Rodgers in their refusal to sledgehammer the race issue, writing, “Almost without a word spoken and without judging the love affair itself, Taylor and Rodgers criticize social contexts that render such relationships [as those between Barbara and David] impossible.”²⁹⁵ Once again, we see the recurring theme of the treatment of race on Broadway in which the creators of new material tread gingerly on the racial sensibilities of white bourgeois audiences, neither pushing the limits too far nor completely ignoring underlying issues.

As compared to *Kwamina* and *No Strings*, the musical adaptation of Clifford Odets’s 1937 play *Golden Boy*, featuring a star performance by Sammy Davis, Jr., set out specifically to adapt itself to an African-American milieu – Harlem of the early 1960s. Odets himself had been involved originally in the adaptation, which saw its difficulties. However, as Woll reports, “Odets died in the midst of this turmoil, and a former student, William Gibson, the author of *Two for the Seesaw* (1958), was brought in to save the libretto.”²⁹⁶ The result of Gibson’s takeover was to rescue the plot from Odets’s flirtations with other scenarios – for example, portraying the lead character Joe as a musician or medical student²⁹⁷ – and return the proceedings to the venue of professional boxing, as in the original 1937 non-musical play. In addition to the difficulties

surrounding the writing of the book, Woll reports further difficulties with directing personnel.²⁹⁸ Peter Coe, who had directed *Oliver!* (1963) both in London and New York, was the first choice. Coe found, as he himself suspected before taking the job, that he lacked sufficient familiarity with the realities of Harlem in the 1960s. Coe would be replaced by film director Arthur Penn, of *The Miracle Worker* (1962) and *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) fame. The score, with lyrics by Lee Adams and music by Charles Strouse, both of recent *Bye Bye Birdie* (1960) renown,²⁹⁹ was no more or less infused with any sense of the African or African-American presence than Adams and Strouse's score for *Birdie*. Rather, the score seemed like standard big-band fare, popular in the early 1960s on Broadway. In terms of performance, this score would have worked as well for Sammy Davis Jr.'s fellow "rat-packers" Dean Martin and Frank Sinatra as it did for Davis himself, who specialized in such music for the pop-singing portion of his career. So Strouse's choice to go with a big-band sound might have had more to do with the star for whom he had to compose than with any plot or character consideration.

Golden Boy would seem to distinguish itself as the most "ghetto-real" of the musical plays on Broadway during this early civil rights era. Despite Charles Strouse's not-terribly-African-sounding score, lyricist Lee Adams pulled no punches in dealing with race. Three particular examples come to the fore. First, in "Don't Forget 127th Street," Davis and company deal directly with the Harlem roots of Joe, the fighter character that Davis portrays. The song makes reference to the grittier aspects of life in Harlem, including the "soothing tones of Malcolm X" and "evictions in the snow."³⁰⁰ Where Strouse's big-band style music might offer a level of comfort to the member of the bourgeois audience, Adams's satiric lyric prevents such an audience member from complete ignorance of ghetto reality. Next, when Davis's character must deal with obliquely racist treatment by fight promoters, he sings "Colorful." Once again, rather than using a sledge-hammer approach, Adams has written a coy lyric in which Davis declares

that black “suits him best” because it is so “chic” and fashionable.³⁰¹ The message Davis encodes here is one of “don’t tread on me” in terms of his pride in being black. Though his message is subtle, it is more direct than the more unabashedly humorous “Don’t Forget 127th Street.” Finally, in “No More” towards the end of the proceedings, Davis and his black comrades declare no further willingness to “bow down” and be “slave” to white mistreatment. As compared to the rest of the score, here Strouse breaks out in a more African-American sound, complete with gospel chorus.³⁰² In total, the score, especially in its lyrics, offers an arc of dealing with racism that moves from satirical to serious over the proceedings of the play.

In addition to the score’s ability to deal with race, the book that William Gibson finally wrought after Odets’s demise pulled no punches on race as well. When the Davis character is confronted by a fight promoter who wants Joe to take his opponent out during an upcoming bout, the promoter tells Joe, “I keep my deal, nigger; you keep yours,”³⁰³ thus showing a willingness on Gibson’s part not to pull punches in terms of strong language. Another such incident occurs when Joe and his white girlfriend part company. Joe sees his father interacting with Lorna, the white girlfriend, and says, “Papa, a man your age, ain’t you ashamed messin’ around with ‘ofay’ chicks?”³⁰⁴ Furthermore, the Gibson book spares no punches in its tragic ending, in which Joe has killed his boxing opponent, then ends up dying himself in a car crash.

Despite difficulties in the creative process, this musical version of *Golden Boy* would see a “triumphant 1964 opening.”³⁰⁵ The show would run a very respectable 568 performances, perhaps fueled by Sammy Davis Jr.’s star power. The marketing *Golden Boy* included what would seem to have been a daring concept – a logo in which we see the back view of the head and shoulders of a blonde white woman being embraced in the arms and hands of a black man. Woll comments on this reference to the interracial romance between Joe and Lorna, writing, “Shortly after [the] premiere [of *Golden Boy*] the *New York Times* asked, ‘Are Inter-racial Stage

Romances on the Rise?,' and responded that 'a trend could be in the making.'"³⁰⁶ Woll would furthermore seem to concur in the observation that *Golden Boy* was unsparing in its willingness to deal with gritty ghetto reality, writing,

Unlike earlier black shows written by whites, *Golden Boy* attempted to address issues that had been avoided. Joe's brother, a union organizer in the play, was converted into a civil rights leader. Wellington, rather than ignoring his origins, makes a trip to Harlem – yes, the word was actually uttered onstage – to visit his old friends.³⁰⁷

This last discussion of Harlem on Woll's part is a clear reference to Adams's satiric lyric from "Don't Forget 127th Street."

Anthony Newley and Leslie Bricusse's *The Roar of the Greasepaint – The Smell of the Crowd* illuminates any discussion of race and class and the Broadway musical on two counts. First, it provides an additional example of bourgeois nicety as a physical place, like Eliza's "room somewhere" and Joe and Liat's "special island" as discussed in Chapter III. Second, it presents a moment in the intersection of musical theatre and race relations in the civil rights era that is both awkward and illuminating.

A brief plot synopsis is in order. Sir and Cocky (dressed similarly to and vaguely reminiscent of the tramps Vladimir and Estragon in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*) engage in a game, the board for which is painted on the floor of the set. In this game, Cocky, a member of the under-class, attempts to get ahead. Unfortunately for Cocky's sake, Sir keeps finding ways to impede Cocky's progress. For Cocky, getting to the end of the game board represents a more clinical, more abstract version of Eliza's warm room and Joe and Liat's "special island." On his route to attempted bourgeoisie, Cocky finds himself constantly set back as Sir randomly changes the rules. At the end of Act One, Cocky sings the song "Who Can I Turn To" which the reader may recall from the top-40 version as recorded by Tony Bennett in the mid-1960s. For top-40

purposes, Bennett recorded the song as a ballad of lost love. Cocky's motivation is more serious. In the context of the plot of *Greasepaint*, Cocky (played by Newley himself in the Broadway production transplanted by *Dolly!* producer David Merrick from London) sings the song as a prayer to an unfeeling deity. Thus the lyric phrase "Who can I turn to/When nobody needs me" takes on a deeper, more spiritual aura given the plot complications of *Greasepaint*.

It is interesting to note that like Newley and Bricusse's other Broadway musical success, *Stop the World – I Want to Get Off* (1962), the score for *Greasepaint* was a virtual hit machine, producing any number of Top 40 recordings. One of the hit songs from *Greasepaint* that remains in the cannon of popular music to this day is "Feeling Good," a song that is instantly recognizable from the lyric, "Birds flying high, you know how I feel." In the liner notes for the *Greasepaint* CD, Bill Rosenfield describes the circumstances under which the song is sung, writing, "Enter now The Negro [. . .] who wants to play the game. Cocky, finding someone even more downtrodden than himself, becomes as overbearing as Sir. The Negro pours out the sadness and heartbreak of his frustration in *Feeling Good*."³⁰⁸ In addition to dealing with "heartbreak" and "frustration," "Feeling Good" also offers unrelenting optimism, both to the listener in general and to Cocky in particular, in its recurring lyric, "It's a new dawn, it's a new day, it's a new life . . ." We acknowledge wholeheartedly that this use of the word "Negro" to describe the character who sings "Feeling Good" in *Greasepaint* can only be described as quaint, with the proviso that in the mid-1960s, "Negro" was often the word of choice used to describe African Americans in polite company before "black" became "beautiful." But this use of a character defined by her/his race introduces a new idea into the race equation of commercial American musical theatre – the idea that the African American (or perhaps continental African, as *Greasepaint* is of British origin) is, by definition, downtrodden and in need of salvation, perhaps even pity. One could defend Newley and Bricusse's use of this "Negro" character in the

context of a desire on these authors parts to connect with the burgeoning American civil rights movement of the 1960s. In an otherwise well-focused book, *Greasepaint* would seem to fail contemporary audiences in its failure to deal with contemporary ideas on race. Thus, Newley and Bricusse's attempt to inject a positive racial impetus sadly falls flat and begs repair.³⁰⁹

The vinyl LP liner notes describe perhaps the most curious of these civil-rights era Broadway musicals, *The Zulu and the Zayda*, as a “play with music about two remarkably undiscouraged people living under very discouraging circumstances.”³¹⁰ Like *Kwamina*, *Zulu* takes place in then-contemporary Africa. The “two remarkably undiscouraged people” are the old Jewish Zayda (the Yiddish word for “grandfather”)³¹¹ and his hired native-African companion Paulus. The story of this unlikely pair takes place in the aforementioned “very discouraging circumstances,” the unrelenting world of mid-1960s South African *apartheid*. Harry Grossman, a Jew originally from London (where Zayda settled after fleeing czarist Russia), attempts to run the family hardware store and raise his family in upper-middle-class circumstances despite the near constant interruptions supplied by the pesky antics of Zayda, his father. Taking the advice of one of his servant's, Grossman hires the servant's brother, Paulus, to act as Zayda's “grandfather sitter.” Zayda and Paulus soon find themselves getting in trouble, violating stringent *apartheid* laws when Zayda follows Paulus on his day off to visit Paulus' native friends and relations.

Perhaps the most innovative component of this production is the fact that neither Zayda nor Paulus speaks English. Though each can put together a vague pidgin for basic communication, neither has full command of English; Paulus speaks in his native African tongue while Zayda communicates almost exclusively in Yiddish. Thus, these disparate characters explain each other's cultures by attempting to translate each other's language. Of particular interest in this production is a moment in which Paulus has had a dream concerning his late

father. In response, Zayda introduces Paulus to the Jewish practice of lighting a *yahrtzeit* candle to memorialize the dead.

The Zulu and the Zayda would enjoy a modest run of 179 performances. Though unsparing in its attention to the cruelty of *apartheid*, the focus of the play was not specifically tied to black/white race relations. Rather, *Zulu* served as a fine example of interaction among colliding cultures. To its credit, in portraying the power differential between Paulus and the Grossmans, it is clear that the Grossmans are at a great advantage in *Zulu*. In fact, Harry Grossman ends up attempting to fire Paulus when Paulus and Zayda get in trouble with the authorities. Nevertheless, any connection between *Zulu* and American racial issues is at best tenuous, and limited to the specifics of South African *apartheid*.

Woll calls *Hallelujah, Baby!* “the last major white-written musical [concerning African Americans] in the 1960s,”³¹² thus making it perhaps the most ambitious of the six civil-rights-era musical plays we are exploring. The show’s creative pedigree could not have been more “A-list:” book by Arthur Laurents (*West Side Story* (1957), *Gypsy* (1959)), music by Jule Styne (*The Bells Are Ringing* (1956), *Gypsy*, *Funny Girl* (1964)), and lyrics by Betty Comden and Adolph Green (*On The Town* (1944), *Wonderful Town* (1953), *The Bells Are Ringing*). With the exception of composer Jule Styne, each of these creative personnel had worked with composer Leonard Bernstein (*On The Town*, *Wonderful Town*, *West Side Story*) in his Broadway incarnation. In addition, Styne, Laurents, and *Hallelujah, Baby!* director Burt Shevelove (with a book-writing credit from the George Abbott-directed *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1962)) had collaborated with Stephen Sondheim, who was lyricist for *West Side Story* and *Gypsy* in addition to his composer/lyricist duties for *Forum*. (*Dolly!* producer David Merrick originally had been scheduled to produce *Hallelujah, Baby!* Merrick bowed out after script disagreements with Laurents.³¹³) Yet despite the quality of its pedigree and its success at

the 1967-68 Tony Awards where it won awards for Best Musical, Best Actress in a musical (Leslie Uggams), Best Supporting Actress in a Musical (Lillian Hayman), and Best Composer and Lyricist (Jule Styne, Betty Comden, Adolph Green), *Hallelujah, Baby!* was problematic. In the liner notes for the CD recording, Ken Mandelbaum writes,

The 1967 Broadway musical *Hallelujah, Baby!* boasted an extremely distinguished creative team, introduced an acclaimed new star to Broadway and won the Tony Award for Best Musical. But it also became a target of controversy, failed to return its investment and had received almost no revivals. *Hallelujah, Baby!* demonstrates the perils of attempting to create a musical comedy about serious, even inflammatory issues.³¹⁴

Even more telling is Mandelbaum's quote of lyricist Betty Comden on the subject how difficult it was for a white creative team to write a musical play with black themes. Comden is quoted as saying,

It was the high tide of integration, the mid-sixties, a good feeling between the races. . . . We never thought of ourselves as white people writing about black people. . . . But then the militant movement started. . . . Suddenly it was not a happy time between the races. We were looked on as quite suspect and it was sort of uncomfortable.³¹⁵

Comden's comment goes to the core of the difficulty that would now be involved with blacks and whites collaborating on any artistic endeavor in the wake of the civil rights movement. No matter how benign the intent, white people writing about black people would be seen as suspect. A significant part of the problem of the problem of intent could be seen in the casting of Leslie Uggams as Georgina, the lead character. The role originally had been envisioned for Lena Horne. When the "adorable"³¹⁶ Uggams was cast as Georgina, the character had to be ratcheted down in terms of harshness in order to match the new star's temperament. Thus, any possible militancy in the proceedings was short-circuited at the outset by the casting choice. Despite Uggams's lack of harshness, reviewers and Tony Award voters rallied behind Uggams, whose

reception Mandelbaum describes as like “[. . .] no other new star had been since Barbra Streisand in [. . .] *Funny Girl* three years earlier.”³¹⁷

Like *Golden Boy*, the plotline of *Hallelujah, Baby!* lies squarely in the milieu of African America. In a series of short vignettes, the cast of *Hallelujah, Baby!* recalls the history of African-American attempts to cross barriers to African-American success in the American entertainment industry, with the overriding novelty that the characters never changed in age throughout the proceedings. These vignettes include scenes in which Georgina plays a) a maid in a mixed-cast civil-war-era play during the turn of the nineteenth/twentieth century, when blacks were not permitted to appear on stage with whites, b) a member of the “Congo Cuties” chorus line in the 1920s, and c) a witch in a pastiche based on the Federal Theatre Project’s “Voodoo *Macbeth*.” Throughout the play, black players would comment on the nature of interacting with white creative personnel. Very telling is Uggams’s solo number entitled “Being Good (Isn’t Good Enough),” a testament to the difficulties a black performer faced in the early twentieth century. In this instance, *Hallelujah, Baby!* would seem to have distinguished itself, in comparison to previous efforts discussed in this chapter, by attempting to deal directly with the endemic racism involved in the creation of popular entertainment, commercial American musical theatre in particular.

Critical reaction to *Hallelujah, Baby!* included praise for Uggams and her fellow players, coupled with awkwardness over Laurents, Styne, Comden, and Green’s seemingly mis-timed creative product. Woll points to the *New York Times*’s Walter Kerr, who felt that “[. . .] in general [. . .] the evening [was] sheer embarrassment: ‘The musical that . . . [has] been put together with the best intentions in the world is a course in Civics One when everyone else in the world has already got to Civics Six.’” Woll embellishes the point, writing that “[i]n a follow-up review, Kerr added that ‘we sense the belatedness, the abstraction, the irrelevance to Now.’”³¹⁸

Woll acknowledges one defender of the proceedings, African-American diplomat Ralph Bunche, who wrote in a letter to the *New York Times* that he felt the production dealt with the issue of race “forthrightly, and, here and there, by Broadway’s standards, even a bit daringly.”³¹⁹

These six African-infused productions that immediately preceded the Bailey *Dolly!* demonstrate a desire on the part of commercial American musical theatre to deal with issues of importance to African Americans in a way that at least ventures beyond the stereotypes imposed by the legacy of minstrelsy. Of these, *Golden Boy* was perhaps the most successful in dealing directly with the reality of African-American life in the civil-rights era, with *Greasepaint* and its quaint use of the “Negro” character the least successful. Nevertheless, each of these six efforts flow effortlessly into what will be the flashpoint of race and the Broadway musical – the “all Negro” production of *Hello, Dolly!* featuring Pearl Bailey and Cab Calloway.

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, we traced the legacy of minstrelsy from its heyday in the nineteenth century to its lingering effects on more recent musical theatre efforts. Such lingering effects would plague any effort at cooperation between black and white interests in musical theatre, and cast a pall on the cooperative ethos of the Bailey *Dolly!* For commercial American musical theatre, much of the twentieth century would be spent in a game of “catch-up” with these lingering effects of musical theatre.

Many successful cooperative efforts between blacks and whites in musical theatre would include the involvement of Jewish Americans. In this chapter, we explored the role of blackface and the intersection of Jews and African Americans in musical theatre in the mid-twentieth century. Often ugly, as with Jolson and blackface as well as Irving Berlin and *This is the Army*,

the Bailey *Dolly!* in contrast would provide an opportunity for Jews and African Americans to interact in a mutually beneficial environment.

The venue of black performance in white musical-theatre venues gave rise to discussions of black performance in white-created material such as *Show Boat* and all-black versions of such classics as Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* and Oscar Hammerstein II's all-black adaptation of Bizet's *Carmen* into *Carmen Jones*. The Bailey *Dolly!* found itself at the intersection of these two aesthetic concepts – at once a non-revival like *Show Boat*, yet as well an all-black envisioning, like *Carmen Jones*, of a piece that to date had been performed only by white casts. Again, in addition to its huge commercial success, we will see that the Bailey *Dolly!* served to synthesize many aspects of black performance in commercial American musical theatre from previous epochs.

In the era immediately following World War II yet preceding the heyday of the civil rights movement, we discovered a combination of “blacks as exotics” material intermixed with the street reality of Langston Hughes' *Simply Heavenly*. The Bailey *Dolly!* would eschew either extreme. Rather, the Bailey *Dolly!* attempted to carve out a more mainstream niche for African American performers. As we shall see in Chapter VII, to a great extent, the Bailey *Dolly!* would in fact serve as a flashpoint for the creation of such a niche.

We concluded with a discussion of efforts in commercial American musical theatre to deal with issues of race in the early civil-rights era, the era that immediately preceded the Bailey *Dolly!* Musical theatre productions in this era displayed a more direct and focused discussion of race than productions from previous epochs, thus serving as a harbinger for the Bailey *Dolly!*, and its redefinition of race and performance on Broadway, that would follow.

Endnotes

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- ²⁰⁰ Jones, 30
- ²⁰¹ Jones, 30
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- ²⁰³ Knapp, Raymond. *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press New Jersey, 2005, 10
- ²⁰⁴ Knapp (National), 10
- ²⁰⁵ Knapp (National), 10. In the same section, Knapp points out the cruel pleasure white audiences derived from seeing African Americans as "biologically inferior."
- ²⁰⁶ Webb, Barbara. "Authentic Possibilities: Plantation Performance of the 1890s" in *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (Mar., 2004), 63-82. Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004, 65
- ²⁰⁷ Knapp, Raymond: *The American Musical and The Performance of Personal Identity*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006, 97
- ²⁰⁸ Knapp (National), 52
- ²⁰⁹ Knapp (National), 82
- ²¹⁰ Knapp (Personal), 66. This use of blackface compares with alarming parallel to the aforementioned minstrel number in the film version of Irving Berlin's *This is the Army*. Knapp (Personal, 387) also describes other significant instances of whites in Hollywood film performing in blackface: "Hollywood films continued for some years to indulge a taste for blackface, which was in fact a trademark of some stars, such as Al Jolson and Eddie Cantor; the latter, for example, appeared on Broadway doing a blackface medley as late as 1941 (*Banjo Eyes*) and continued to appear in blackface roles throughout the 1940s (e.g., in *If You Knew Susie*, 1948). More mainstream stars appearing in blackface during this period included Fred Astaire (*Swing Time*, 1936), Irene Dunne (*Show Boat*, 1936), Judy Garland alone (*Everybody Sing*, 1938) and with Mickey Rooney (*Babes in Arms*, 1939, and *Babes on Broadway*, 1941), Bing Crosby and Marjorie Reynolds (*Holiday Inn*, 1942), and Betty Grable (*The Dolly Sisters*, 1945)."
- ²¹¹ Lewis, 103
- ²¹² Sugrue, 113
- ²¹³ West, 76
- ²¹⁴ West, 76-77
- ²¹⁵ West, 77
- ²¹⁶ Erdman, Harley *Staging the Jew: The Performance Of An American Ethnicity*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997
- ²¹⁷ Whittaker, Donald Elgar III. *Subversive Aspects of American Musical Theatre*. Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Unpublished dissertation manuscript, 2002, 87.
- ²¹⁸ Whittaker, 89.
- ²¹⁹ Erdman, Harley *Staging the Jew: The Performance Of An American Ethnicity*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997, 145.
- ²²⁰ Bergreen, Laurence, "Irving Berlin: *This is the Army*" in *Prologue Magazine* (a publication of the National Archives), Summer 1996, Vol. 28, No. 2, <http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1996/summer/irving-berlin-1.html> (accessed May 11, 2010).
- ²²¹ Bergreen.
- ²²² Bergreen. When the film version of *This is the Army* was made in 1943, the stage limitation of changing in real-time from blackface to no-blackface no longer posed a practical problem. A minstrel number, "Mandy," was featured in the Warner Brother's film version of *This is the Army*. In the film, veteran hoofer George Murphy, who would be elected as a Republican U.S. senator from California in the 1960s, played handsome G.I. Ronald Reagan's

father. The Murphy character encouraged his son to engage in a “good, old-fashioned minstrel number” as part of the Army show he (Reagan) was staging. The film version was directed by Michael Curtiz, who the previous year had directed *Casablanca*, a testament to World-War-II-era anti-Nazi sympathies.

²²³ <http://www.answers.com/topic/irving-berlin>, (accessed May 11, 2010).

²²⁴ Bergreen

²²⁵ Whittaker, 115.

²²⁶ Whittaker, 124.

²²⁷ Lerner, Alan J. *The Musical Theatre: A celebration*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1986, 114

²²⁸ Knapp (National), 192-193

²²⁹ Jones, 73

²³⁰ Knapp (National, 186) comments on the social and political realities of the time as related to *Show Boat*, writing, “Post-Civil War life along the Mississippi River vividly demonstrated the dismal legacy of American slavery to anyone who cared to see it, especially in the early 1880s, when the first act of *Show Boat* takes place. The Hayes-Tilden Compromise of 1877 effectively ended reconstruction and paved the way for the gradual erosion of the rights blacks just begun to acquire during the decade immediately following the end of the Civil War. Within a few years, new legislation the sought to grant increasing rights and privileges to blacks in *Show Boat* (‘Niggers al work on de Mississippi, / Niggers all work while de white men play’) resonates with another important literary accounting of this period: when Mark Twain returned to the river in 1882 to research *Life on the Mississippi*, he was confronted with the spectacle of large numbers of poor, hard-working blacks, which provided the impetus for him to complete his own great work on America’s black-white problem, *Huckleberry Finn* (1884), which had been languishing for several years.”

²³¹ McMillin, Scott. *The Musical Drama*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006, 71-72

²³² Knapp (National), 187

²³³ Jones (77) offers an interesting take on the casting of the black servant Queenie on Broadway, noting, “[. . .]n a musical of otherwise scrupulously authentic mixed-race casting, the original Queenie-the female African American character-was played not by a black woman but by white Tess Gardella, a popular blackface entertainer who performed so consistently as ‘Aunt Jemima’ that Ziegfeld’s programs credited Aunt Jemima, not Gardella, as playing Queenie. [Producer Florenz] Ziegfeld was obviously going for some measure of star power rather than racial authenticity.”

²³⁴ Knapp (National), 192

²³⁵ Jones, 75. Jones continues on the significance of Julie’s plight, writing, “In Julie’s story, Hammerstein has embedded three social issues: racial bigotry, spousal desertion, and alcoholism.”

²³⁶ Knapp (National), 194

²³⁷ Woll, Allen. *Black Musical Theatre: From Coontown to Dreamgirls*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Di Capo Press, 1991, 1-2

²³⁸ Woll, 6

²³⁹ Woll, 8

²⁴⁰ Woll, 6

²⁴¹ Jones, 33. See also <http://www.blackpast.org/?q=aah/mitchell-abbie-1884-1960> (accessed July 5, 2010) for an interesting discussion of the life of Abbie Mitchell, one of the performers in *Clorindy*. Mitchell would end up marrying Cook.

²⁴² Jones, 33-34

²⁴³ Woll, 42

²⁴⁴ Jones, 34

²⁴⁵ Woll, 46

²⁴⁶ Woll, 73

²⁴⁷ Jones, 69

²⁴⁸ Woll, 58

²⁴⁹ Jones, 71

²⁵⁰ Woll, 78

²⁵¹ Woll, 179-180

²⁵² Woll, 180

²⁵³ Woll, 180

²⁵⁴ Woll, 180-181

²⁵⁵ Woll, 183. Locke was a writer and philosopher known unofficially as “the father of the Harlem Renaissance.” See also http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alain_LeRoy_Locke (accessed July 6, 2010).

²⁵⁶ Knapp (National), 252

²⁵⁷ Jones, 131

²⁵⁸ Woll, 154

²⁵⁹ Knapp (National), 196-197

²⁶⁰ Woll, 188-189

²⁶¹ Woll, 188-189

²⁶² Woll, 188

²⁶³ Lerner, 120

²⁶⁴ Woll, 200

²⁶⁵ Woll, 197

²⁶⁶ Lerner, 175

²⁶⁷ Jones, 149

²⁶⁸ Jones, 150

²⁶⁹ Jones, 150

²⁷⁰ <http://www.allmusicals.com/lyrics/southpacific/youvegottobecarefullytaught.htm> (accessed July 8, 2010)

²⁷¹ Kislán, 208

²⁷² Jones, 152-153

²⁷³ Jones, 152-153

²⁷⁴ http://www.democraticunderground.com/discuss/duboard.php?az=view_all&address=389x3460082 (accessed July 8, 2010). The website describes the extent of the controversy surrounding the song, citing lawmakers in Georgia who introduced a bill outlawing entertainment that contained “an underlying philosophy inspired by Moscow” during the show’s road-show engagements in the south.

²⁷⁵ Jones, 153

²⁷⁶ Woll, 200-201

²⁷⁷ Woll, 204

²⁷⁸ Woll, 204

²⁷⁹ Woll, 234

²⁸⁰ Woll, 235

²⁸¹ Woll, 235

²⁸² Woll, 235. Concerning the fire code violations that caused the closing of the off-Broadway theatre that housed the original incarnation of *Simply Heavenly*, Woll makes no reference to any possible racism on the part of the New York City Fire Department.

²⁸³ Woll, 236

²⁸⁴ In addition to its challenging material on race, Woll explains that part of the reason for the change in fortune for *Simply Heavenly* from its off-Broadway venue to its Broadway venue was the transformation of the play from an intimate affair in an off-Broadway house to a Broadway production that blew this intimacy out of proportion. A similar comparison might be seen between Jones and Schmidt’s two Nietzschean musical parables. Jones and Schmidt’s *The Fantasticks* (1960) broke records playing in an intimate off-Broadway house, while their *Celebration* (1969), did less-than-banner business playing in a big Broadway house. Thus, not only did *Simply Heavenly* have to deal with racial cluelessness on the part of Broadway critics and white audiences – it would seem to have suffered from lack of appropriate venue given the nature of the material. In any event, this noble attempt of the part of Langston Hughes to reform commercial American musical theatre along race lines, sadly, would fail. *Simply Heavenly*’s Broadway run would last less than six months, running for a total of 62 performances.

²⁸⁵ The reader is encouraged to listen to Kaempfert’s “Afrikaan Beat” on youtube.com at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGmR2dJSDvo> (accessed September 28, 2010). The reader might also know Kaempfert as the composer of the Frank Sinatra hit “Strangers in the Night.” Furthermore, the reader might recognize “Afrikaan Beat” from the soundtrack of the 2002 Alexander Payne film *About Schmidt* featuring a performance by actor Jack Nicholson as a man in late middle-age approaching retirement who is trying to find himself. Despite any original intent on the part of Kaempfert to infuse genuine Africanism into his music, Payne would seem to have been using Kaempfert’s “Afrikaan Beat” to mock the white bourgeoisie. The net effect of the use of Kaempfert’s African-style music here is more “clueless white” than anything even vaguely genuinely African, especially to any listener who has experienced the genesis of popular African-American music from Motown to hip-hop. Please see trailer for *About Schmidt*, which features a small bit of Kaempfert’s “Afrikaan Beat,” at

<http://www.imdb.com/video/screenplay/vi3820224793/> (accessed September 30, 2010). Adler's use of this vaguely native African music, while appropriate to the 1960s time-frame, probably does not stand the test of time.

²⁸⁶ Aurthur, Robert Alan and Richard Adler. *Kwamina* (CD liner notes by David Foil). New York: Angel Records, 1993, 10

²⁸⁷ In a short but relevant aside, we note that Stevenson was one of the last of the Democratic candidates for president who benefited from the tenuous balance of interests between northern labor liberals and the Jim-Crow south. In the 1956 Eisenhower landslide, Stevenson only carried seven southern states: Missouri, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. In 1960, JFK would carry all but Mississippi and Alabama, each of which supported the segregationist candidacy of Harry Byrd of Virginia. In 1964, after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, the south would for the most part support Republican Barry Goldwater, thus beginning the realignment of the major parties along the lines of racial politics.

²⁸⁸ Aurthur and Adler, 7

²⁸⁹ Aurthur and Adler, 7

²⁹⁰ Aurthur and Adler, 9

²⁹¹ Aurthur and Adler, 14

²⁹² Jones, 183

²⁹³ Taylor, Samuel and Richard Rodgers. *No Strings* (CD liner notes by Samuel Taylor). Hollywood, California: Capitol Records, 1962.

²⁹⁴ Jones, 182

²⁹⁵ Jones, 182

²⁹⁶ Woll, 245-246.

²⁹⁷ Woll, 245-246

²⁹⁸ Woll, 245-246

²⁹⁹ Coincidentally, *Bye Bye Birdie* was *Hello, Dolly!* director/choreographer Gower Champion's first big hit on Broadway.

³⁰⁰ Odets, Clifford William Gibson, Charles Strouse, and Lee Adams. *Golden Boy* (CD liner notes). New York: DRG Records Incorporated, 2006, 5

³⁰¹ Odets et al., 5

³⁰² Odets et al., 5

³⁰³ Odets et al. 13

³⁰⁴ Odets et al., 13

³⁰⁵ Odets et al., 6

³⁰⁶ Woll, 246

³⁰⁷ Woll, 246

³⁰⁸ Newley, Anthony and Leslie Bricusse. *The Roar of the Greasepaint – the Smell of the Crowd* (CD liner notes by Bill Rosenfield). New York: BMG Music, 1965, 10

³⁰⁹ In a production this author saw around the turn of the millennium at a community theatre in the south suburbs of Chicago, the character who sang "Feeling Good" was played by a young African-American male dressed in a 1960s-style *dashiki*. The program referred to the character as "the Stranger." It would seem possible that in order to avoid the awkwardness the use of the word "Negro" (or any racial reference) presents to contemporary audiences, one might refer to this character as "the Innocent" or "the Optimist." Rather than being specific to race, it is the "Feeling Good" character's innocent optimism that inspires Cockey, who "asserts himself more and more with Sir" (from liner notes, 10) following the "Feeling Good" scene.

³¹⁰ DaSilva, Howard, Felix Leon, and Harold J. Rome. *The Zulu and the Zayda* (Vinyl LP liner notes by C. Burr). New York: Columbia Masterworks, 1965.

³¹¹ Yiddish for "grandfather."

³¹² Woll, 246

³¹³ Laurents, Arthur, Jule Styne, Betty Comden, and Adolph Green. *Hallelujah, Baby!* (CD liner notes by Ken Mandelbaum) New York: Sony Music Entertainment, Inc., 1967, 6

³¹⁴ Laurents et al., 6

³¹⁵ Laurents et al., 9

³¹⁶ Laurents et al., 9

³¹⁷ Laurents et al., 7

³¹⁸ Woll, 247

³¹⁹ Woll, 247

CHAPTER V – THE PRODUCTION

Chapter Introduction

Thus far, we have discussed social, political, aesthetic, and performance issues surrounding the Bailey *Dolly!*. In this chapter, we deal with the issues surrounding the production itself. As we shall see, issues discussed in previous chapter will detail the interaction among personnel and production activity for the Bailey *Dolly!*

We begin with detailed discussions of the careers of the five primary creative agents and their roles behind the creation of the Bailey *Dolly!* – director/choreographer Gower Champion, with his remarkable ability at creating well-wrought middlebrow entertainment; composer/lyricist Jerry Herman, who demonstrated a similar ability with well-wrought middle-brow entertainment yet whose work as a Broadway composer/lyricist could be connected to the legacy of minstrelsy; performer Pearl Bailey, with her perhaps naïve, Christianity-infused views on race; co-performer Cab Calloway, with his more focused and perhaps more realistic view of the horrors of racism; and producer David Merrick, whose expertise in promotion combined with an off-kilter sense of racial justice allowed him to put the whole effort together. In the investigation that follows, we connect these principals with many of the issues already discussed in this study. These issues include the structures of racism, the maintenance of white privilege, the politics of race, and the role of commercial American musical theatre in any attempt to eradicate its own racism. Of particular importance will be the intersection of social and political importance with the creation of ordinary entertainment, comparable to what Murphree called “poor” plays. In this intersection, we will see a through-line that stresses the issue of bourgeois entrée for African Americans, as described in Chapter I.

We then turn our attention to details surrounding the production itself. Despite the widely held belief among musical-theatre enthusiasts that David Merrick would have difficulty putting an all-black *Hello, Dolly!* together, the production phase of this effort would transpire with only minor conflict. Such conflicts included controversy surrounding the all-black (as opposed to racially mixed) nature of the production, complaints of Pearl Bailey's lack of professionalism, and what is perhaps a tenuous connection between composer/lyricist Jerry Herman and how he portrayed a romanticized American south in his follow-up production to *Dolly!, Mame* (1966) in a milieu that ignored any innate racism. In the last instance, we discuss the effect of Louis Armstrong's hit recording of the title song to *Hello, Dolly!* as well as how Herman's score for *Dolly!* connected to the all-black cast. We conclude with a discussion of the special cast recording the Bailey cast made after opening and a short exploration of the awards Bailey received for her efforts. This material is intended as a preview to the powerhouse reviews the Bailey *Dolly!* would receive after opening. In addition, an attempt is made to provide detail for the production that we will find lacking in other scholarly effort, as well as how these production details worked to achieve the overall goals of representing racial equality in the venue of commercial American musical theatre and to give an analysis of the implicit vision that undergirded this effort

Personnel: Gower Champion

Other than sharing the stage as a dancer and assuming directing duties for *3 for Tonight* (1955)³²⁰, which featured the performing talents of black singer Harry Belafonte, little in the career of *Dolly!* director/choreographer Gower Champion demonstrated readiness for a production that would break ground on race. Champion's career, nevertheless, demonstrates a

near-genius on the director/choreographer's part in dealing with what we have already called "the ordinary." Specifically, the middle-brow fare afforded by Stewart and Herman's *Hello, Dolly!* provided Champion with a seminal career moment. It is this facility with the ordinary that allowed Champion's work on *Dolly!* to shine in all venues, including and especially the Bailey incarnation. Champion had no direct personal involvement in the direction of the Bailey company, having shifted these duties to his assistant, Lucia Victor. However, the product he'd already created and for which he'd won numerous awards, including Tonys for directing and choreography – the original Carol Channing *Dolly!* – proved to be a work of such clarity that adapting it to an all-black cast would prove an easy task.

In understanding Champion's facility with such ordinary fare as *Hello, Dolly!*, it is important to look at his early background in show business. Here, we find a through-line of moments in which his genius with simple entertainment fare would shine. Champion and his then-wife Marge first came to national fame in the 1940s when they attracted the attention of President Harry Truman, who declared the couple to be the picture of all-American wholesomeness.³²¹ However, the Champions dance-duo act came along as such teams were falling out of fashion. Concerning the team's abortive attempt at a film career, the pair fell into the awful coincidence that they appeared in the last films of some formerly great Hollywood film stars. Payne-Carter quotes Marge Champion as saying, "We finished off Esther Williams and Betty Grable,"³²² an indication that the high-point of the great Hollywood film musical was about to pass.

Yet through this portion of his career, Gower Champion would find himself possessed of an uncanny ability to respond to reversals in the cultural landscape like this change in public taste away from the previously popular big Hollywood movie musical. In response to this downturn in his career, Champion would attempt successfully to find a second career in stage

direction and choreography at a time when the Broadway stage was thriving. After choosing to turn down an offer to choreograph *My Fair Lady* in favor of holding out for work that involved directing as well, Champion would score as both director and choreographer with a property originally entitled *Let's Go Steady* and intended by its producers for Fred Astaire to direct. This property would become the enormously successful *Bye Bye Birdie*, the parody of Elvis Presley's entry into the army and its effect on small-town America. *Birdie* would sweep the Tony Awards of 1961, including directing and choreography awards for Champion. *Birdie* would also represent the first in a long line of collaborations with the writer who would end up writing the book for *Hello, Dolly!*, Michael Stewart. For *Birdie*, Champion also collaborated with Lee Adams and Charles Strouse, the lyricist/composer team who would collaborate later on the Sammy Davis, Jr., vehicle *Golden Boy* mentioned in the previous chapter. The year after, Champion and Stewart would collaborate on a musical adaptation of the film *Lili*. This musical, *Carnival!*, would feature a score by composer/lyricist Bob Merrill, who is widely credited for ghost-writing the score to *Hello, Dolly!* in collaboration with Jerry Herman. After abortive attempts at directing non-musical productions, Champion would score again with the mega-hit, *Hello, Dolly!* (original production, 1964). This would be followed by *I Do! I Do!* (1966), a musical adaptation of Jean De Hartog's *The Fourposter* (1951). *I Do! I Do!* featured the performing talents of veterans Robert Preston and Mary Martin. Despite what many considered weak material on the part of writers Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt, Champion's direction, which featured the conceit of the two lead performers changing costumes and make-up to indicate the aging process by using make-up tables in full view of the audience, was widely lauded. Unfortunate to the Champion's career, two of his most auspicious directorial efforts – *Carnival!* and *I Do! I Do!* – would be ignored by the Tony Awards in favor of juggernauts for

How To Succeed in Business Without Really Trying (1962 Tony Award Best Musical) and *Cabaret* (1967 Tony Award Best Musical) respectively.

Both *Carnival!* and *I Do! I Do!* were produced by *Dolly!* producer David Merrick. It is interesting to note that in both these cases, Champion would demonstrate two important attributes concerning the success of the Bailey *Dolly!* First, both these shows enjoyed commercial success, *Carnival!* having run for 719 performances and *I Do! I Do!* having run for 568 performances.³²³ Second, both shows would use light domestic comedy to cater to middlebrow sensibilities. This ability to craft such non-threatening entertainment intended for a bourgeois audience ultimately would serve the Bailey *Dolly!* well.

It is at this point that, despite a willingness to change with the times and experiment with more contemporary directing techniques, Champion's career would fall into decline. Relatively contemporary to the Bailey *Dolly!*, *The Happy Time* (1968), directed and choreographed by Champion and produced by David Merrick, and would lose out at the 1968 Tony Awards to *Hallelujah, Baby!* In *The Happy Time*, Champion would attempt to integrate new technology with an old-fashioned family-infused light comedy, to the detriment of both. The better part of the 1970s would see further artistic and commercial failure on Champion's part: *Prettybelle*, the story of a bi-polar psychiatric patient dealing with her illness that closed in previews in Boston in 1971, *Sugar* (1972), the musical adaptation of the Billy Wilder/I.A.L. Diamond cross-dressing film comedy *Some Like It Hot* (1959) featuring a score by Bob Merrill and Jule Styne (long after their successful collaboration on *Funny Girl* (1964)) and David Merrick as producer, and *Mack & Mabel* (1974), the now cult-status musical that told the story of silent-film-era mogul Mack Sennett and his star Mabel Normand, again with book by Michael Stewart, score by Jerry Herman, and produced by David Merrick (i.e., the entire creative and production team from the original *Hello, Dolly!*). Though *Sugar* ran for a respectable 505 performances, the success of

Sugar would seem to have had little to do with any stellar work on the part of its creative personnel. Rather, as Clive Barnes wrote in his review in the *New York Times*, “[. . . A]lmost everything has been done for this show short of closing it out of town – and if it had closed out of town New York would have been the poorer for not having the very positive treat of seeing Robert Morse playing Robert Morse in drag.”³²⁴ It is noted with prejudice that Barnes was less than impressed with the creative effort behind *Sugar*. Both *Prettybelle* and *Mack & Mabel* were commercial failures.

In this study, we might not be particularly concerned with the detail of Champion's career immediately preceding his death in 1980. However, in addition to his successful efforts from his heyday in the 1960s, the circumstances surrounding Champion's death only added to his legendary status. Particularly important here is the near-mythic story behind the production of the stage version of the movie musical *42nd Street* (stage version 1980, film version 1933), again with Michael Stewart, in collaboration with Mark Bramble, writing book and David Merrick producing. As this show went into production in 1978, after complaining of flu-like symptoms, Champion was “diagnosed as having Waldenstrom's macrogloulemia, a variant of leukemia.”³²⁵ Champion died the day the stage version of *42nd Street* would open to rave reviews. Frank Rich of *The New York Times* wrote that, despite some unevenness, “If anyone wonders why Gower Champion's death is a bitter loss for the American theater, I suggest that he head immediately to the Winter Garden, where ‘42nd Street’ opened last night.”³²⁶ True to his reputation as a manipulator of media output, David Merrick held the news of Champion's death until the curtain fell on the opening performance, to the profound shock of both audience and cast. Payne-Carter describes the dream-like scene at Champion's memorial service, writing

[. . .] Merrick himself [acted] as the master of ceremonies. [. . . Champion's] son Gregg related stories about how his father, so often absent when he was growing up, took care to remain close in

unusual ways. At one point, while on the telephone, he said, his father had asked him to look out the window. He reminded his son that they were looking at the same moon. [. . .] A recording of “Lullaby of Broadway” was played as Merrick stood at the side of the stage, crossing his arms like [42nd *Street* character] Jordan Marsh. When the service was finished, Merrick waved grandly at the audiences, said “Gower thanks you for coming,” and walked upstage into the darkness.³²⁷

Of special interest in the legacy Champion left behind was his effortless facility at turning the ordinary into the extraordinary. This facility would bode well for the ease with which the Bailey *Dolly!* could be adapted to an all-black cast in an environment that didn’t threaten the sensibilities of the white bourgeois theatre patron. During the low points of his career in the 1970s, Champion believed that meatier material, such as that presented in *Prettybelle* and *Mack & Mabel*, would offer him a greater chance at affecting posterity. As we have seen, however, it is the more middle-brow material of shows like *Hello, Dolly!* and 42nd *Street* that empowered Champion’s legacy. For example, in terms of innovation in stage technique, Champion was the master of the cinema-style fade. This technique is used to tremendous advantage in the “Put on Your Sunday Clothes” number from *Hello, Dolly!* in which the action is moved from sleepy backwater Yonkers to the hustle and bustle of 14th Street in New York City via an old fashioned railway locomotive. A video clip of this moment as performed by the Bailey cast is now available on youtube.com. This clip shows how effortlessly Cornelius and Barnaby’s discussion of adventure in New York City flows into a parade/celebration of black bourgeois finery – the eponymous “Sunday clothes” in fine display.³²⁸ Again, as discussed in earlier chapters, such a lush scene was replete, in terms of social and political interpretation, with positive and negative facets based in the advantages and disadvantages of bourgeois entrée for African Americans. Nevertheless, this facility on Champion’s part in creating non-threatening, middle-brow

entertainment would provide a template with which Pearl Bailey, Cab Calloway, and company, could work to create the optimistic racial fantasy of the Bailey *Dolly!*

Personnel: Jerry Herman

Like Gower Champion, *Hello, Dolly!* composer/lyricist Jerry Herman excelled at creating middle-brow entertainment for Broadway audiences. But in comparison to Champion, we will see that Herman's career would intersect more fully with issues of race and ethnicity. After modest success off-Broadway, Herman would have his first opportunity to write the score for a Broadway musical with *Milk and Honey* (1961), a tale of romance and survival in the contemporary state of Israel. Herman biographer Stephen Citron reports that the government of Israel cooperated fully and enthusiastically when Herman and *Milk and Honey* book-writer Don Appell (both Jewish) visited on a fact-finding mission. Citron quotes Herman recalling his experience in Israel with Appell, writing, "The Israeli government people were so thrilled that we weren't going to write a play about Israel-embattled-with-gun-in-hand [. . .] but rather one that might encourage tourism, that they rolled out the red carpet and had a black limousine at our hotel every morning."³²⁹ Though he had difficulty coming up with a musical sound that embodied the culture of a country merely thirteen years old at the time, Herman was gratified when, on the El Al plane ride to Israel, they both came up with the name of Yiddish theatre star Molly Picon simultaneously when discussing casting one of the lead female roles, that of an American Jewish widow on tour in Israel who finds romance with an Israeli.³³⁰ These experiences with *Milk and Honey* demonstrate parallels to the portrayal of race by the Bailey *Dolly!* First to consider is the issue of air-brushing. Rather than deal with the often cruel realities and intricacies of the formation of the modern state of Israel, Herman and Appell would

gloss over such realities in favor of presenting Israel as a venue for light romantic fare. The proceedings in *Milk and Honey* would be no more cynical than a reference to difficulties with the terrain and neighbors of Israel. In an alternate lyric to the title song, a character sings,

The honey's kind of bitter and the milk's a little sour
Did you know the pebble was the state's official flower
What about the tensions, political dissensions, and no one ever mentions
The scenery is barren and torrid and arid and horrid
How about the border when the Syrians attack?
How about the Arab with the rifle in your back?
How about the water? What there is of it is brine
But this lovely land is mine.³³¹

Despite the grain of reality presented here, such reality comes across as more frothy than “street real.” Herman himself admitted that “the show came out a valentine”³³² to the state of Israel. Furthermore, any possible claim to “street reality” concerning the state of Israel here would immediately be countermanded by the lyric that followed this lyric of complaint.

What if the earth is dry and barren,
What if the morning sun is mean to us,
For this is a state of mind we live in –
We want it green so it's green to us,
For when you have wonderful plans for tomorrow,
Somehow even today looks fine.
So what if it's rock and dust and sand,
This lovely land is mine!³³³

Again, Herman the lyricist has returned his audience to a sanitized version of the state of Israel.

Milk and Honey would run for 543 performances, thus providing Herman with his first instance of Broadway success. When Herman got word that David Merrick was planning to produce a musical version of Thornton Wilder's *The Matchmaker* – the effort that would become *Hello, Dolly!* – he made a significant personal effort to contact Merrick to let him know of his interest in writing the score. Herman's reputation from the success of *Milk and Honey* had already caught Merrick's attention. However, such attention would also prove a negative to Herman's cause as Merrick, having only heard Herman's work on *Milk and Honey*, believed

Herman capable only of an ethnic, Israeli-style minor-infused score. Citron describes the scene in Merrick's office, writing

[After having been asked by Merrick if he'd read Thornton Wilder's *The Matchmaker*,] Herman had to admit that he had not, but Merrick's slur, implying that his music might be too Jewish, got his dander up. "With two parent that were schoolteachers, I consider myself to be the most American person that ever was put on this planet," he retorted [to Merrick]. "I don't blame you, Mr. Merrick, after seeing *Milk and Honey*, my Israeli operetta, for thinking I'm a little Jewish kid who can only write this kind of music – but aside from that show all my other work has been as American as apple pie."³³⁴

Impressed with Herman's moxie, Merrick agreed to the kind of deal of which legends were made. Herman would spend the weekend cloistered in his Greenwich Village apartment, promising Merrick four songs by Monday morning for the score of the proposed *Matchmaker* musical adaptation. Three of the four songs Herman wrote that weekend would serve as the spine for Act One of the score for *Hello, Dolly!*³³⁵

The next step in the *Dolly!* process was the hiring of a lead actress. Both Merrick and Herman wanted to hire Ethel Merman, who decided that she wanted to spend some time away from the stage as production plans for *Dolly!* congealed.³³⁶ Instead, after seeing her perform Shaw's *The Millionairess* in summer stock, all parties involved agreed on Carol Channing to play Dolly Levi. Merrick had his reservations, telling Channing, "I don't want that silly grin with all those teeth that go back to your ears."³³⁷ Yet it would be the clown Channing who would discover the depth of the inherent ethnicity behind her stage creation. Citron writes,

As [Channing] saw it, Dolly Gallagher was an Irish woman born on Second Avenue [, the working-class ghetto that housed both the Jews and Irish,] who fell in love with Ephraim Levi. Her years as Mrs. Levi "turned her into a Hadassah lady, and she turned into Ephraim when he died." [Channing] planned to base the slight accent she would give the role on the rhythms of turn-of-the-century New York Irish modified by the Jewishness of Levi.³³⁸

More germane to the process of creating the score and book for *Hello, Dolly!* as the reaction of creators Herman and Stewart to the possibility of casting Carol Channing as Dolly Levi. Payne-Carter describes Herman and Stewart's reaction to this possibility, writing

[Book writer Stewart and composer/lyricist Herman] were incredulous [at the suggestion of Carol Channing]. Channing was not at all what anyone had imagined. Herman, in particular, was devastated. He had written the score [. . .] for the voice of Ethel Merman. Channing's contra-bass was no replacement for Merman's baroque trumpet. As discussions continued, Herman fell into depression.³³⁹

Having seen Channing in the Shaw performance, Herman's reticence gave way to excitement. Herman gladly reworked his score, narrowing and lowering the range to fit Channing's husky voice. Concerning Pearl Bailey and vocal range, it would seem fortuitous that Herman composed the score for a low range. Though perhaps not quite as husky-voiced as Channing, the low range of the score proved ideal for Bailey's range.

Personnel: Pearl Bailey

In contrast to the kinds of envelope-pushing performances of black reality in the 1960s as espoused by advocates of the Black Arts Movement, Pearl Bailey offered a safe black alternative to bourgeois white audiences. And unlike Martin Luther King, Jr., with respect to his break with Lyndon Johnson, discussed earlier in this study, Bailey would never disappoint white audiences seeking such safety. In the introduction to one of her numerous memoirs, Pearl Bailey writes, "All things that seemed ugly have been washed away by the beauty I've found living with humanity, and so some things that I might have written cannot now be told because the picture of these moments has dimmed."³⁴⁰ Not only would this short proviso seem to absolve Bailey of any animosity to anyone who might have done her wrong or vice versa. It would also provide a

glimpse into the Bailey worldview, displaying the great star's stunning ability at attempting to achieve the often unreachable ideal of Christian forgiveness in the arena of race relations.

Concerning the suitability for the groundbreaking role of the first African-American Dolly Levi on Broadway, Pearl Bailey was particularly well prepared for the test in terms of personality and raw performing talent, as well as political and social sensibility. While coming up through the ranks during the era that preceded the civil rights movement of the 1960s, Bailey faced significant difficulty based on her treatment by racist whites. Yet in another of her numerous memoirs, Bailey recalls traveling to a reviled Mississippi, home state of many of the cruelest battles of the civil rights era of the 1960s, well after her nationally renowned triumph in *Hello, Dolly!* Bailey writes,

Once again, I was in the Deep South. I'd been in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, but heavens-to-Betsy, not in Mississippi. No sooner did I land, than I was swept off my feet with love. It was unbelievable. Now what to do? We stopped in the coffee shop. I left the windows down, car unlocked, mink coat inside. It was still there, safe after an hour. How exciting and rare!

I strolled to the end of Capital Street, turned, and saw a lady focusing a camera. I made the front page just walking down a main street in Mississippi. There was a time when blacks running down the streets in Mississippi made the news by just trying to survive. But now they came out of stores, waved from windows. Was it just because I was a celebrity? I choose to hope it was because I am a human being.

Press conference at the State Fair. Without ugliness, people were intelligently interested in issues touching on race and belief. Yes, I was still in Mississippi. People, we touched, we laughed-together. I felt safe.³⁴¹

Bailey's forgiving nature allowed her to appreciate the change that had taken place here in the heart of the deep South concerning the treatment of African Americans. Yet this is not to say that Bailey was completely ignorant of lingering, subtle racism. Bailey describes an incident

similar to Dorothy Parker's matron as discussed in Chapter III. In making observations on the intersection of politics and performance, Bailey writes

A grand lady in politics said to me many years ago, "Oh, my! You're Pearl Bailey. We're having a party at my house and I would ask you to come, but we don't have a piano." I looked at this intelligent lady who sat in a large governmental position, so pompous, looking down her large elegant nose, and answered, "It's very good you don't have a piano, because if you had one, I really wouldn't come."³⁴²

Despite this rare spiked rejoinder on race as described with her "grand lady of politics," Bailey's temperament on issues of race displayed a great deal more equanimity than any such situation might have warranted. In *Pearl Bailey: With a song in her heart*, children's author Keith Brandt (aided with illustrations by Gershom Griffith), discusses Bailey's reactions to the racism she and her white husband, luminary jazz drummer Louis Bellson. Brandt writes

Some people made prejudiced remarks about the marriage [. . .] When one of those remarks appeared in a newspaper, Pearl Bailey was asked how it made her feel. "This was my well-known reply," she later wrote. "There is only one race, the human race. The world, I hope, will never forget that one line, because I meant it."³⁴³

Brandt also takes pleasure in describing Bailey's return to college in her 60s as "the daughter of an evangelical Protestant minister, taking her degree at a Catholic university [with a] special interest was Jewish studies!"³⁴⁴ Here, Brandt would seem to be portraying Bailey's unquestioning embrace of all humanity. This embrace could be seen further in a comically intended quip concerning the once popular all-black singing group, the Ink Spots, in which Bailey commented, "[I] wonder what all the civil-rights groups think of the name ['The Ink Spots,' with its obvious racial reference] now? Should it be 'The Black Spots' – what about the other color inks?"³⁴⁵ Such an apparent embrace of race neutrality on Bailey's part would bode well for her casting in an ostensibly race-neutral all-black production of *Hello, Dolly!*

In another anecdote from Bailey's experiences in show business, let us refer back to the discussion of difficulties surrounding the 1946 production of *St. Louis Woman* in Chapter IV. Bailey describes a funeral scene in which the character June Hawkins, who has killed her lover, raises her hands to the heavens, a gesture the rest of the cast was supposed to imitate. Cast members found this specific gesture an unfair and unnecessary stereotype; Bailey uses the word "Negroid"³⁴⁶ to describe the gesture. According to Bailey's perhaps biased, perhaps self-serving account of the incident, she herself helped the cast negotiate with director Rouben Mamoulian to smooth over hurt feelings over the incident, leading to what Bailey describes as "some new feelings and better relationships."³⁴⁷

There would seem to be two ways to interpret Bailey's perhaps extraordinarily Christian attitudes on the racism and ethnic xenophobia she encountered. One can either view Bailey as a quasi-messianic figure herself, possessed of unbound forgiveness. In contrast, one can view Bailey's attitudes on race as perhaps redolent in naïvete. Such naïvete might give rise to reasonable criticism by those who espouse a more separatist ethic on race relations, like advocates of the Black Arts Movement we have seen elsewhere in this study. However, it cannot be stressed too greatly that Bailey's cooperative ethic on race made her a perfect choice as a groundbreaker concerning the issue of race on the Broadway stage.

The ascendancy of either of these points of view can be perhaps determined in Bailey's prolific, already alluded-to memoirs. Cab Calloway seems to have left posterity the single volume of his memoirs, *Of Minnie the Moocher and Me*.³⁴⁸ In contrast, Pearl Bailey was a prolific memoirist. Intermixed in the various memoirs Bailey prepared were stories from her show-business career, recipes from the kitchens of her star friends, her family, and herself,³⁴⁹ and myriad observations on the human condition, sometimes with reference to race, often not. In reading Bailey's various memoirs, one gets the idea that the great star fashioned herself as post-

racial, perhaps serving as an advance guard for this concept – post-racialism – that would come into vogue in the era that followed the civil rights movement of the 1960s. This attempt on Bailey's part at post-racialism stood in stark contrast to Calloway, whose memoir indicates a near constant race consciousness. The children's story Bailey wrote, *Duey's Tale*, provides a particularly fine example of her racially healing ethos. The "Duey" of whom Bailey writes is a seedling³⁵⁰ who is separated from his mother tree by the wind. In his travels, Duey encounters numerous adventures geared for an audience of children. Duey's first encounter is with Gabby, a log who, like Duey, is far from his home tree. However, Gabby left home of his own volition. "What I'm doing, man," relates Gabby, "is splitting the scene. My folks put me down. Everybody's in my way calling me weird. Man, they just don't dig. So I'm losing those cats, 'cause they can't communicate."³⁵¹ Not only does Gabby's negativity provide Bailey with a great foil. The tone and dialect in which Bailey has Gabby speak places Bailey in an era much different than the mid-1970s when the story was written. Gabby's manner of speaking would seem to be a throwback to 1940s-50s hipster behavior. The portrayal of Gabby provides our first piece of evidence that Bailey might have been a bit of a throwback herself, out of touch with the sense of radicalism overtaking much of the African-American community in America in the civil-rights and post-civil rights eras. (The interaction between Duey and Gabby would continue through Gabby's transformation from a ratty looking log into a fine walking stick.)

Communications scholars Steve Duck and David T. McMahan discuss conflict in society as a matter of opportunity versus destructiveness. In a "conflict as opportunity" society, conflict is seen as "a normal, useful process" and "direct confrontation and conciliation are valued."³⁵² In contrast, in a "conflict as destructive" society, conflict is seen as a "disturbance of the peace" and "ineffective."³⁵³ Bailey would seem to have taken the best of both these concepts. She did not see race as a matter of alienation or destructiveness. In *Duey's Tale*, Bailey portrays Gabby

as someone who was bound in the trap of using his background as an excuse for failure. Here, Duck and McMahan would interpret this as a defense of a “conflict as opportunity” ethic. Gabby would seem to have been unable to see that the difficulties he faced made him stronger. As before, one can view Bailey’s treatment of Gabby as virtuous (as black neo-conservative commentators might aver, as will be discussed later in this study) or naïve. Such plucky optimism or cluelessness, depending on one’s point of view, could be seen in Bailey’s adventures, late in life, as a student majoring in religious studies with a specialization in Judaism at Georgetown University. Bailey retells the story of how members of a black sorority sought her membership, writing

“Join our sorority,” they said, “because we feel alienated [. . .]” I said, “[. . .] Would you have invited me into you sorority if I were not a celebrity?” I asked that because unfortunately many times on campus a few of them had looked down their noses, as I walked along with other [presumably white] classmates.³⁵⁴

To Bailey, these sorority members would seem to have been seeking conflict where it was unnecessary. One can imagine her feeling this way especially when she associated with her fellow student or faculty member regardless of racial background. Thus, we have Bailey eschewing “conflict as opportunity” in this instance, opting instead for a “conflict as destructive” interpretation of the situation. Bailey reserved special disdain for those on the Georgetown campus who promoted conflict for political purposes, writing

Some students have a “built-in hatred” against their fellow students. “It is their right to have their political voices heard,” some say. I agree, but not if it destroys fine minds of the young, without giving them a chance at “loving.” Their right to happiness is being drained. There were several incidents of religious and other bias on campus, particularly over the Arab-Israeli conflict.³⁵⁵

To Bailey, even an issue as complex as the Arab-Israeli conflict served to divide people unnecessarily into rival factions. Rather, Bailey sought conciliation, even in the most difficult of circumstances.³⁵⁶

Bailey's cockeyed optimism included a deep love of country, again offering solace to her bourgeois white audiences. While serving as an ex-officio delegate to the United Nations under the tutelage of then-American U.N. Ambassador Daniel Patrick Moynihan under an appointment by President Gerald Ford, Bailey had difficulty with the anti-American tirades of the Cuban ambassador. A second such incident would happen. Bailey writes

Years later, I had still another encounter with the Cuban delegation. And, again, it began with a paper on the Puerto Rico [independence] issue. I read the U.S. statement of our opinion. The original Cuban speaker then shifted to a young lady who read a scathing reply – adding things about Broadway, commercials, and the like. Everyone in the hall understood it was intended for me. I turned in my seat and almost trembled at the stupidity of what was said.³⁵⁷

Despite the frightening historic treatment of African Americans in the United States, Bailey would remain staunch to her defense of American ideals. This particular incident with the Cuban U.N. delegation demonstrates that Bailey took flack from the political left, this time in the form of the Cuban ambassador to the United Nations, yet was willing to endure any embarrassment or difficulty such flack might incur. This willingness to endure criticism was rewarded by accolades of admiration from Republican luminaries such as Richard Nixon and Ronald and Nancy Reagan.³⁵⁸

By choosing Pearl Bailey to lead an all-black cast of *Hello, Dolly!*, David Merrick found a near-perfect exponent for an ethic of cooperation among the races. Attempting to be post-racial before the concept even existed, Pearl Bailey, both in private life and performance, sought not to exacerbate the racial divide. Rather, through what seemed a sincere sense of Christian

charity and despite any apparent sense of naivete, Bailey would seem to have achieved through her performance as Dolly Levi her heart's desire – a world in which race did not matter.

David Merrick's choice of Pearl Bailey as his black Dolly Levi served to maintain comfort levels among white audience members. It gave such white people space to consider race in an ostensibly non-racial environment.

Personnel: Cab Calloway

The contrast of attitudes on race between the two great black stars of the “all Negro” production of *Hello, Dolly!* not only could not have been more pronounced; this contrast of attitudes also provided a subtext of dramatic tension for the Bailey *Dolly!* For by his own admission, Cab Calloway was “one unrelenting, stubborn black son of a bitch.”³⁵⁹ It is precisely this defiant attitude on Calloway's part that offers two necessary observations on the great jazz star and his connection to the Bailey *Dolly!* First, Calloway's defiance offered a direct, empiric contrast to Bailey's ethic of conciliation. Second, this contrast of both temperaments and attitudes may have served to make the two stars perfect foils for each other onstage, regardless of any racial dimension. Much of the plot and humor of Stewart and Herman's work in *Hello, Dolly!* rests upon the Vandergelder character resisting the coy romantic entreaties of Mrs. Levi with straightforward loathing. Perhaps Calloway and Bailey's opposing world-views contributed to the sense of conflict needed to make Dolly and Horace's bickering believable.

As important as his status as a performer is to this study, Calloway, as an agent of transition in terms of race and show business, demonstrates an even more powerful example of the various issues covered in the early chapters of this study – issues that include enforcement of vertical race/class barriers in general and the mistreatment of black entertainers in the era

preceding the great explosion of civil-rights activism in the 1960s. Even a surface reading of Calloway's biography, *Of Minnie the Moocher and Me*, affords the reader a marvelous opportunity to view the heart and soul of the racism African-American performers faced in the early- and mid-twentieth century. Calloway's experiences, from the troubled youth he would experience despite his family's middle-class status through his ascendancy in the world of show business, would seem to have offered a social-science laboratory in which the Weberian effects of race – where commonality of shared social norms trumps economic status, cited by both Bowser and McDermott -- serves as a separable variable from economics and can be explored. Both Bowser and McDermott point to the phase shift involved in comparing black and white middle classes. Recall that for example, in this phase shift, the black upper class would be comparable to the white upper-middle-class in terms of income, status, and wealth. This phase shift will be important in discussing the life of Cab Calloway, as will Bowser's discussion of the historic black middle class.

Calloway grew up in relatively comfortable circumstances economically, apparently enjoying the advantages Bowser describes as available to the children of the historic black middle class and comparable to what one might expect for the children resulting from the romantic pairings in *Hello, Dolly!* – Irene and Cornelius, Barnaby and Minnie Fay. These advantages, however, would not help Calloway in his life trajectory. Calloway's mother, a school teacher, had hoped that young Cab would study and become an attorney like his biological father and was disappointed when Cab became involved with a group of troublesome youngsters. His parents would send Cab to a school for wayward boys (Calloway called it a "reform school"³⁶⁰). Calloway writes, "Mama was a teacher in the public schools in Baltimore and it was very embarrassing for her to have such a hell-raising son. I spent more days hanging out with the guys around Pimlico racetrack outside Baltimore than I did in school."³⁶¹

Calloway's association with underworld types would continue through the Prohibition era; gangsters who controlled the flow of liquor with nudging approval from bribed local authorities also controlled the entertainment venues in which the young Calloway performed. Calloway describes the whirl of Harlem in the 1930s, writing

Those [Harlem speakeasies like the Cotton Club] were the places where high-society white people came to hear jazz, and where, during most of those years, Negroes weren't allowed in the audience. They were okay on the stage or in the kitchen, but not in the audiences. Well, those white people came uptown to hear the music but they also came to drink.³⁶²

With this Prohibition ethic of high living and white slumming in mind, Lewis describes the milieu in which Calloway began his association with the era of the Harlem Renaissance, describing a "Nigger Heaven" syndrome³⁶³ in which the black elite would commiserate over the negatives of black/white interaction under such questionable circumstance. Lewis discusses how such interaction led to distress among black journalists, writing

When Wallace Thurman's play *Harlem* electrified Broadway, the ambivalent critic for the *Defender* despaired, "If, north of 116th Street, conditions are as disorderly as William Jourdan Rapp and Wallace Thurman paint them, the white man's burden is, if possible, even heavier than it seems." Harlem was its own worst exploiter, it seemed.³⁶⁴

Even more scathing in its commentary over the lack of morality in Harlem in this period, according to Lewis, was the *New York Amsterdam News*, which Lewis quotes

We are without that civic pride that would drive these hells from among us [. . .] We are without the courage which would make it impossible for even *Variety* to from time to time heap ridicule and questionable humor upon us. We are without all the elements that have seen white men dying if necessary for wholesome communities which have meant so much in their onward march to progress. . .³⁶⁵

Bowser makes an important observation concerning intra-African-American class structure during the Jim-Crow era, which we define here as the end of Reconstruction to the end of World

War II. This class structure might serve as a theoretical basis for any discussion of the underworld elements with which Calloway dealt in Harlem. Bowser explains describes an effort to define class among African Americans by W.E.B DuBois in 1898, describing these classes as

Class 1. Free Negroes who most often were mulattoes, had stable families, comfortable incomes, owned a home, and maintained conventional sexual behavior.

Class 2. “Respectable” people, steadily employed working-class people who had stable families, comfortable incomes, and conventional social behavior.

Class 3. The poor, who earned from comfortable to inadequate incomes, had stable to unstable households, and were not part of the “immoral or criminal elements”

Class 4. “Vicious and criminal elements”³⁶⁶

The journalistic sources Lewis quotes would seem to reflect the interests of Classes 1 and 2 with some inclusion of Class 3. Regardless of the economic situation – Calloway himself reports being economically flush during his time in Harlem³⁶⁷ -- it would seem that Calloway had to consort with Class 4 types in his climb to the top of the show-business world.³⁶⁸ Such consorting was not limited to black-only interaction. This class of “vicious and criminal elements” served as the intersection of black and white for which Lewis described the fears writers for the *Defender* and *Amsterdam News* railed against. In contrast, Calloway’s arrival in the cast of the Bailey *Dolly!* (as well as other mainstream musical-theatre performance venues) might be considered yet another hurdle jumped in the effort for the black performer to get past the vertical class structures involved with the enforcement of American racism. With David Merrick, Calloway no longer consorted with the underworld, as might be expected of black performers in the era between the World Wars. Rather, Calloway had now arrived fully in the mainstream, the very bosom of bourgeois nicety.

Calloway was hardly ignorant of this unpleasant combination of high treatment and flush economics with gangster ethics among these “vicious and criminal” types. When the underlying tone of racism and assumed white moral superiority, as described earlier by Lewis, is included to the equation, the situation becomes even less tolerable. Though attuned to these anomalies, Calloway remained philosophical to the realities of the era. In describing the opulence of the Cotton Club, Calloway wrote that the club “[. . .] was supposed to convey the southern feeling. I suppose the idea was to make whites who came to the club feel like they were being catered to and entertained by black slaves.”³⁶⁹ Thus, Calloway pulls no punches in describing the genteel racism involved for an African American performing at the Cotton Club. Nevertheless, Calloway accepted such unpleasant and unreasonable treatment in exchange for the status being a star performer at the Cotton Club afforded him, writing

Some of the proudest Negro musicians in the world played there and adhered to that policy of racial separation. The money was good, the shows were fine, and the audiences and the owners respected us and our music. What else can I say about it? I don’t condone it, but it existed and was in keeping with the values of the day. It couldn’t happen today. It shouldn’t have happened then. It was wrong. But on the other hand, I doubt that jazz would have survived if musicians hadn’t gone along with such racial practices there and elsewhere.³⁷⁰

In his description of his adventures in racial mistreatment during the Jazz Age, Calloway connects himself, perhaps more so than any of the other principals, to the discussion in Chapter I of enforcement of racial class structures. In addition to dealing with the racially discriminatory practices of Harlem during the Jazz Age, Calloway also found himself, perhaps inadvertently, involved in the struggle for open housing as described in Chapter I. If he had been left to his own devices, Calloway would have stayed in his beloved Harlem. Calloway describes the invigorating experience for a black performing artist living in Harlem during the Cotton-Club era, writing

Harlem in the 1930s was the hottest place in the country. All the music and dancing you could want. And all the high-life people were there. It was *the* place for a Negro to be. [. . . N]o matter how poor, you could walk down Seventh Avenue or across 125th Street on a Sunday afternoon after church and check out the women in their fine clothes and the young dudes all decked out in their spats and gloves and tweeds and Homburgs. People knew how to dress, the streets were clean and tree-lined, and there were so few cars that they were no problem.³⁷¹

But for the presence of the many poor African Americans fairly acknowledged by Calloway, this description is very reminiscent of Wiese's description of black suburban existence in contemporary Atlanta discussed in Chapter I. Even more to Calloway's liking and perhaps addressing the issue of quality of ethnic expression, this Harlem of the 1930s that Calloway so loved offered a constant celebration of black culture. In comparison, one might describe Wiese's suburban Atlanta as a celebration of consumerism and more an attempt to imitate white bourgeois culture than any inherent sense of black culture. Where Bailey apparently saw no such particular need, Calloway, in contrast to Bailey and perhaps in a manner comparable to West's complaint of the leadership void that attends black bourgeois aspiration discussed earlier, maintained a strong need to be connected to African-American culture.

To Calloway's consternation, his first wife Betty would insist on building a \$6,000 dream house (a very steep price for a house in the era) in an all-white, upper-middle-class neighborhood. Calloway describes the ordeal, writing, "[. . . A]round 1937, [Betty] got her damned house – in Fieldston, an all-white section of the north Bronx. Not a nigger in sight. The people planted 'Nigger go home' signs on our lawn the day we moved in."³⁷² Calloway found himself an accidental race pioneer in an unhappy marriage which would eventually dissolve. The race pioneering involved here compares to Wiese's Chapter I discussion of the black Philadelphia mother who wanted to avoid such conflict.

Also in Chapter I, we explored Zora Neale Hurston's concept of the "Negrotarian," the white person in the mid-twentieth century who offered support to the cause of black equality, often with ulterior motivation. Calloway would experience a similar situation while touring the American South with his band. This tour was organized by one "Mrs. Knowles,"³⁷³ a white woman from Raleigh who would seem to have been motivated by a desire to integrate the entertainment business *and* to make a tidy profit on the enterprise. Hailing from North Carolina, Mrs. Knowles had arranged financing with a bank in Raleigh to promote the first tour of a black-led big band in the South. Calloway noted the incongruity of this need to integrate jazz venues in the South when considered in historical context, writing, "[. . .]jazz originated in the South. But it was always played there by the small combos hidden away in whore-houses and speakeasies or on the riverboats."³⁷⁴ Calloway laments further that his band had to play dance halls, as black acts were not allowed to perform in concert halls. Instead, Calloway's band would play venues like tobacco warehouses, where blacks and whites were cordoned off from each other as they danced to the music of Calloway and his band. Nevertheless, having just broken the color barrier with his tour of New York jazz venues, Calloway decided to take on this challenge of integrating music venues in the deep South. Calloway was well aware of the dangers he and his band faced in taking on this tour, writing

You have to remember that at this period in the South the Klu Klux Klan was killing and maiming Negroes right and left. Between 1880 and 1920, 2,000 Negroes were lynched, burned, hacked to death, and shot by [. . . members of] racist organizations that were doing everything they could to put the Negro back in "his place," We used to say that if a Negro in Georgia or Carolina or Alabama looked sidewise at a white man, his next move better be to head North, and fast!³⁷⁵

A significant racial incident would occur when the white Mrs. Knowles traveled in the same bus as the band while traveling through Virginia. Calloway describes the scene as racist police personnel had to remove Mrs. Knowles bodily from the bus, writing

Mrs. Knowles was a tough old lady, though. She argued with those cops for ten minutes, but they just wouldn't let the [band's] buses go with her aboard. We had to get to a dance so she finally got off the bus, angry as hell, and nearly in tears, and the cops took her on into Virginia Beach.³⁷⁶

Despite a small difficulty Calloway would experience with Mrs. Knowles concerning whether the band was to be paid before or after playing – Mrs. Knowles would end up paying the band *before* the gig, but in pennies and nickels – Calloway's experience on this tour was for the most part positive. This positive result would lie in contrast to an earlier incident in Opelousas, Louisiana, where the owner of the venue was a white man welcomed Calloway with open arms, but whose son wouldn't “shake hands with no niggers.”³⁷⁷

In contrast to the racism he faced in America, Calloway would wax effusively over his treatment while on tour in Europe. In addition to “rock star” treatment by a nearly completely white fan base,³⁷⁸ Calloway marveled at the quality of the accommodations available to a black man in Europe, especially when compared to the segregated accommodations he and his fellow black performers faced back home. In addition, there were no limits to socialization. Calloway was especially impressed with stories from fellow musician Ed Swayzee, who told Calloway that he could expect Scandinavian women to throw themselves at him simply because he was black. Before his second marriage, Calloway had developed a reputation as a womanizer, so Calloway was further gratified when Swayzee's prediction proved true. Calloway took special pride in the command performance he and his band provided for the Prince of Wales, a fan of Calloway's since his days at the Cotton Club.

Pearl Bailey may have been more beloved by all Americans, black or white, than Cab Calloway. Yet if the life of Pearl Bailey provided an example of Christian charity toward those who would treat her in a racist manner, the life of Calloway provides a contrasting example of how such a great star could deal with such matters in a gentlemanly way without losing sight of the horrors of the situation and without airbrushing white complicity in such matters. Where Bailey might have preached reconciliation in a less-than-critical frame of mind, Calloway's self-described life story would seem to have come from the pages of Chapter I of this study, replete with numerous examples of cruel and unfair treatment based on race. Bailey tried to get past such treatment. Calloway never forgot. While this tension on race issues between Calloway and Bailey may have been invisible to audiences, it would seem to have served as a subtext for their on-stage interaction.

Personnel: David Merrick

Thus far, we have discussed four powerful personalities involved in the creation of the Bailey *Dolly!* -- director/choreographer Gower Champion, lyricist/composer Jerry Herman, star Pearl Bailey, and co-star Cab Calloway. For the most part (with the notable exception of Calloway's resentment of Bailey's sense of professionalism, to be discussed later in this chapter), relations among these artists was business-like and productive, at least. However, the skill-sets attached to these artists was sufficiently diverse that it would require an individual with a rare set of talents to put it all together. This talent set might include show business acumen, advertising moxie, race politics, and sheer *chutzpah* – the combination of which describe, for better or worse, David Merrick, Broadway's "abominable showman."

First and foremost among Merrick's talents was possession of a fiery temperament, at once difficult for those with whom he worked yet necessary to the well-oiled machine that was his production apparatus. We noted earlier that as a relatively young composer and lyricist, Jerry Herman stood in awe of the legendary Merrick while negotiating to write the score for *Hello, Dolly!* Yet despite the faith Merrick showed in Herman at start of the creative process, Herman's unpleasant interactions with Merrick during the period when *Hello, Dolly!* was performing in out-of-town tryouts in Detroit in 1963 would prove more telling to the relationship between Merrick and Herman. After having given Herman every indication that he was satisfied with the score Herman had written, Merrick exploded at the entire creative team when the out-of-town tryout opened to mediocre reviews. In addition to blaming the costumes of a heartbroken Freddie Wittop,³⁷⁹ Merrick blamed Herman and brought in a gaggle of ghost-writers – Bob Merrill, with whom Merrick and Champion had worked on *Carnival!*, and Lee Adams and Charles Strouse, with whom Champion had worked on *Bye Bye Birdie*. This importation of other songwriting talent was humiliating to the young and insecure Herman. In describing the situation, Citron argues that this artistic interference on Merrick's part weakened Herman's otherwise well-wrought score. Citron shows concern for two Merrill/Herman collaborations, "Elegance" and "The Motherhood March," neither of which matched the "gay 90s" style of the rest of the score. Citron writes

A dispassionate look at *Hello, Dolly!* reveals that these stylistic inconsistencies weaken the entire musical and that these two songs are the dullest spots in the score that is otherwise hit tune after hit tune. But Herman was insecure, young, and malleable enough to be cowed by Merrick's interference.³⁸⁰

An argument can be made that "The Motherhood March," despite its possible inconsistency with the style of the rest of Herman's score, serves to enhance the mayhem that ensues when Dolly and Irene Malloy attempt to hide, in fine farcical trap-door style, the hooky-playing Cornelius

and Barnaby from a curious Horace Vandergelder who has just shown up at Irene's hat shop in New York City. More importantly, in "Elegance," the impoverished Cornelius and Barnaby attempt to prove their claim to bourgeois nicety. Thus, "Elegance" speaks to the social issues of the Pearl Bailey version of *Dolly!* and cannot be dismissed. Thus, whether intentionally or merely as a matter of pure luck, Merrick's interference helped the show in this instance in its transition to an all-black milieu. Such interference could not have happened in the absence of Merrick's ability to cow his co-creators. Yet more important is the structural significance of these two songs. The issue of upward social mobility is important to the Bailey *Dolly!*, both in terms of the play itself *and* its meta-theatrical reverberations. In terms of plot and character, Cornelius and Barnaby serve as agents of social entrée. Two of Cornelius and Barnaby's most important moments are stylistically different from the rest of the score. This stylistic difference helps to emphasize the brashness of Cornelius and Barnaby's presence as agents of at least mild social upheaval, and thus serves the purposes of the Bailey *Dolly!* in good stead. One can thus interpret the results of Merrick's interference and Herman's humiliation as an ultimately positive influence on the success of the show.

In his capacity as an advertising prodigy, Merrick biographer Barbara Lee Horn takes special note of Merrick's promotion of his 1950s musical *Fanny* among the jet set in Europe. Horn describes how Merrick gained access to attendees of the wedding of Hollywood film star Grace Kelly and Prince Rainier of Monaco, writing

When Merrick's friend Jim Moran, a press agent and friend of the rich and famous, was invited to the wedding [. . .], Merrick and Moran seized the opportunity to promote *Fanny*. Moran planned to inflate a life-sized rubber representation of Fanny and to release it during the ceremony. When Moran came down with pneumonia, Merrick did not panic but put into action an alternate plan. For the benefit of 1,600 newspaper reporters who covered the wedding [. . .], this skywritten message appeared above the party, "WHEN IN NEW YORK, SEE *FANNY*."³⁸¹

Yet the seminal anecdote concerning Merrick's possession of a sense of pure, undiluted gall dealt with the opening of a Merrick musical that preceded *Dolly! For Subways Are for Sleeping* (1961), Merrick's mistrust of the journalistic critics' establishment let him to have his press agent find ordinary New Yorkers who were namesakes of the real critics for the daily newspapers. Not only did this *Subways* episode show the often ridiculous lengths to which Merrick would go to promote a production. It also offered a glance at Merrick's relatively enlightened, though sometimes off-center, attitudes on race. In their attempt to find a subject to photograph as a substitute for New York Post critic Richard Watts, Jr., Merrick's press minions chose an African American³⁸², to the surprise of numerous advertising personnel among the daily New York City newspapers. This episode showed that Merrick was willing to take audacious chances with race, as he did in the financial gamble involved in producing the Bailey *Dolly!*

This *Subways* episode, however, might serve to cloud Merrick's otherwise meritorious efforts with regard to the improvement of African-American participation in the Broadway theatre. Born to a Jewish family in St. Louis, Merrick would feel firsthand the pain of discrimination, having been excluded by the WASP overlords in St. Louis from participating in theatre production. Once in New York City, in addition to finding grand success as a producer on the Broadway stage, Merrick would go out of his way to include black stage-hands in productions such as his production of the multi-racially cast *Jamaica* (1957, discussed in Chapter IV). According to Merrick biographer Howard Kissel, *Jamaica* would be "the first Broadway show to provide employment for black stagehands,"³⁸³ writing as well

There had been rumblings about the need to integrate Broadway for some time. The stagehands union had in fact adopted a non-discrimination policy when the AFL and CIO had merged a few years earlier, but until *Jamaica*, black stagehands had worked only on Off-Broadway productions.³⁸⁴

Kissel adds that the crew of *Jamaica* would also include Charles Blackwell, an African-American stage manager with whom Merrick had warm relations. “Blackwell was one of the select few of any race,” writes Kissel, “toward whom Merrick always displayed paternal affection.”³⁸⁵ Kissel explores Merrick’s motivations for taking this stand on increased African-American hiring with the stagehands’ union and concludes that Merrick was *not* motivated by pressure from *Jamaica* star Lena Horne, who would not become involved with civil rights until ten years later when her son developed an interest in the movement.

In assessing Merrick’s motivation in fighting for black stagehands on *Jamaica*, Kissel concludes

Merrick’s demand may have been a way of assuaging his guilt for his shabby treatment of the [African-American]performers who had paid their own way down to Philadelphia only to be rejected for chorus roles. Or was it a manifestation of genuine liberalism? Or did it stem from his desire to see how far he could pressure one of Broadway’s tougher unions? Was it all of these things? Whatever his reasons, Merrick won. Local One complied with his demand.³⁸⁶

As we shall see with his success with the Bailey *Dolly!*, Merrick’s motivation with stagehands on *Jamaica* seemed likely borne of substantial capitalist profit motive in tandem with at least a minimal sense of social justice.

As discussed earlier, the majority of the attempts Merrick’s creative cohort, director/choreographer Gower Champion, to push himself beyond an association with middle-brow entertainment forms was greeted with little but embarrassing failure. In contrast, Merrick found significant success in producing higher-brow fare than the musicals for which he gained his greatest legacy.³⁸⁷ Through most of Merrick’s career, he was known not only for his eclectic taste in producing projects, but for the amazing financial success his productions found. In reporting that 11 of 13 Merrick productions in the 1950s made a profit, Horn writes, “If the

Broadway theatre was the Fabulous Invalid, Merrick had the remedy.”³⁸⁸ Thus, if Merrick was possessed of a facility to produce examples of Murphree’s “poor theatre,” he also was adept at handling the more than occasional masterpiece.

Armed with a cavalry of exceptional creators and performers, Merrick, our “abominable showman,” was able to fashion stunning success for the Bailey *Dolly!* His fiery temperament, though annoying to his collaborators, would serve to enhance the creative output of his cohorts, often making their efforts all the better for his interference. Coupled with Merrick’s ability to completely control the creative process was his uncanny sense of advertising bravado, a skill very necessary in the negotiation of the often tricky waters involved in the production of an all-Black *Hello, Dolly!* Having felt the pain of anti-Semitic discrimination in his native St. Louis, Merrick, Merrick was especially well prepared to deal with the issue of race in the venue of commercial American musical theatre in general, and the Bailey *Dolly!* in particular. And while Merrick’s legacy rested heavily with his successes in popular fare – stage musicals such as *Hello, Dolly!* and *42nd Street* in particular, this did not prevent him from achieving acclaim through his efforts as a producer of more profound efforts.

To summarize the contribution of primary creative personnel in the creation of the Bailey *Dolly!*, we have two significant threads to consider. First, we consider this group of artistic personnel as ideal choices, in each of their capacities, to interpret middle-brow light, romantic comedy. Gower Champion’s experience in this regard is especially critical here, having directed and choreographed such light fare as *Bye, Bye, Birdie*, *Carnival*, and *I Do! I Do!* Lucia Victor’s recreation of Champion’s direction and choreography for the Bailey cast thus became a seamless affair. Composer/lyricist Jerry Herman, in tandem with book-writer Michael Stewart, was able to prove to producer David Merrick that, despite his youth, he was capable of creating a score

that complimented the lightly romantic nature of the source material. And Merrick himself brought to the table significant experience at coordinating the others' creative efforts, as well as the ability to promote the effort effectively.

The other significant thread concerning the interaction of the creative team behind the *Bailey Dolly!* was the issue of race. Of particular importance here is the dramatic tension created onstage between the two star performers: Bailey herself, possessed of a sense of Christian reconciliation concerning race relations, and Calloway, who was more cognizant of racial mistreatment. David Merrick's sympathies to issues of race derived from his own mistreatment as a Jew in an early-twentieth-century St. Louis, a venue in which WASP overlords blocked Jewish participation in stage production.

When combined, these two threads led to a circumstance in which a production that demonstrated bourgeois entrée for African Americans could find substantial commercial success.

Race Issues Surrounding the *Bailey Dolly!*

We now begin our focus on issues directly related to the *Bailey Dolly!* production itself.

One conflict surrounding the production dealt directly with race. The all-black nature of the cast of the *Bailey Dolly!* created a conundrum – did this production reflect a segregationist ethic or an advancement of African-American interests? Ragni Lantz at *Ebony* magazine took into account liberal objections to the production, writing

Most [of those objecting to the all-black *Dolly!*] were white liberals who felt this would be a relapse to the all-Negro productions of an earlier, less-enlightened era. Cynics contended that it was just a gimmick to attract people who had already seen the show, and the Women's National Democratic Club voted down a proposal to engage the show because the cast was "segregated."³⁸⁹

Such liberal objections would seem to have reflected the various difficulties in racial hiring practices in earlier twentieth-century commercial American musical theatre that we saw in Chapter IV. By the civil rights era of the mid-1960s, such discriminatory hiring practices had come under great scrutiny. Woll writes that inquiries into racial hiring practices in the Broadway theatre in the years preceding the Bailey *Dolly!* by both Actors Equity and the New York State Human Rights Commission revealed a paucity of non-white involvement as performers on Broadway.³⁹⁰ Furthermore, although most Broadway producers wanted to ignore the situation, “David Merrick stood virtually alone in his revelation of the effects of theatrical prejudice.”³⁹¹ The New York State Human Rights Commission would complete their investigation with a plan to set up affirmative action guidelines at some future date.³⁹² The situation with Actors Equity, however, remained more complicated. Woll offers the defense of the Bailey *Dolly!* production in that it “answered a long-expressed desire of Actors Equity in its demonstration that blacks could portray ‘white’ roles without the slightest harm or distortion occurring to the theatrical property.”³⁹³ In contrast, Woll presents the predicament faced by Frederick O’Neal, the (coincidentally) African-American president of Equity, in the face of such an all-black production, writing

O’Neal contended that the show subverted Equity policy, which was that producers cast “according to ability” and not color. Therefore, the new *Dolly* hardly heralded a new age, but, instead, harked back to the black *Mikados* of 1939. Nevertheless, O’Neal was hesitant to lodge a formal protest with David Merrick. The show did supply jobs for the [presumably black] union members, though it *did* seem contrary to Equity rules.³⁹⁴

Merrick, of course, would proceed with the production despite O’Neal’s objection. Later in this study, we will see that objection to the all-black casting of the Bailey *Dolly!* would become a non-issue in the wake of the euphoria surrounding the arrival of the production. (Specifically,

interviews with Bailey, Calloway, and other cast members provide a perspective on the issue of an all-black versus integrated cast for this production.)

Unprofessional Behavior

Another difficulty faced by the production involved widespread reports of unprofessional behavior on the part of star Pearl Bailey. Such unprofessional behavior may not have had any direct racial implications. However, the conflict over such behavior between principal cast members would seem to have created a layer of dramatic tension between the players. This tension, furthermore, would seem to have enhanced the proceedings aesthetically, thus adding to the success of the production.

As Bailey had for him, Cab Calloway had great respect for his *Dolly!* co-star's performing abilities, calling her "one fantastically talented woman."³⁹⁵ Nevertheless, Calloway harbored resentments against Bailey's seeming ability to feign heart trouble spontaneously, calling her in the same turn "the most unpredictable performer I've ever met."³⁹⁶ Calloway was particularly upset over how Bailey handled the closing of the road tour of the all-black *Dolly!* production. While in Houston, Bailey declared that as Carol Channing had closed the road show of *Dolly!* there, she wanted to do the same. The problem was that producer David Merrick had already sold out the next venue on the tour, Milwaukee. No one believed Bailey would walk until everyone showed up in Milwaukee to a situation in which Merrick had to offer refunds to all ticket holders because the star failed to show up, once again claiming health problems. Merrick would be particularly upset when, according to Calloway, Bailey showed up the Tuesday after a planned Sunday opening in Milwaukee at Shea Stadium for a New York Mets baseball game. The previous evening (Monday), Merrick found Bailey reveling at the legendary

Sardi's restaurant in the New York theatre district. A very upset Merrick would have to absorb \$75,000 in losses. Calloway writes,

During the entire two-year run of the show on Broadway Pearl's understudy did about ninety shows. It pissed me off because, hell, when I make a commitment to an audience I mean it. A professional performer has a contract that's a lot more than what's on paper. We make a deal with the audience: You pay for your ticket and give us your whole attention and we'll give you all our talent and energy. I've always believed that. So Pearl's attitude really steamed me up.³⁹⁷

In fairness to Bailey, professional behavior on the part of cohort performers was a particularly sensitive issue for Calloway, perhaps to the point of over-sensitivity. Calloway had a particular problem with performers he considered undisciplined. Pianist and arranger Benny Payne describes Calloway's difficulties with jazz great Dizzy Gillespie, writing

There was always a state of conflict between Cab and Dizzy. Cab wanted everything orderly and set; Dizzy was wild, and he wanted more improvisation. [. . . Gillespie would] tell all the cats, "Listen, let's liven this music up a little, let's get some bop in this thing, let's cut loose. We shouldn't be held in by these written scores, man." [. . .] Cab was very meticulous about music and he would get mad as hell. "What the hell you tryin' to do with my band!" Cab would holler at Dizzy. Dizzy would just smile, and all Cab could say was "Just play it the way it's written."³⁹⁸

Not only does this anecdote demonstrate Calloway's possible tendency to being overly cautious. It provides an interesting framework for the tension between Calloway's Horace Vandergelder character and Bailey's Dolly Levi character in the all-black *Dolly!* production. As we will see when we compare critical reaction to the production in Chapter VI and the aftermath of the Bailey *Dolly!* in Chapter VII, less tension would exist between Bailey and the co-star of a mid-1970s revival of the all-black *Dolly!*, veteran performer Billy Daniels.

Louis Armstrong, Jerry Herman, and the Implicit Racism of *Mame*

In addition to problems with the segregated nature of the all-black cast and the relative professionalism of Pearl Bailey, a less obvious, more subtle conflict could be seen as having arisen concerning racial implications of the creative contribution of composer/lyricist Jerry Herman. We begin description of this subtler conflict with a discussion of one of the most intriguing aspects of Herman's creation of the score for *Hello, Dolly!* with respect to race – the shadow presence of black jazz great Louis Armstrong, especially as concerned Armstrong's hit recording of the title song, "Hello, Dolly!".³⁹⁹ Herman wrote the title song – a song that once recorded by Armstrong would knock the Beatles out of the #1 spot on the hit parade in 1964 – with the idea of gay-90s opulence in mind. Gower Champion's direction and choreography concurred with this interpretation of the material. In this scene, a small parapet, part of the Harmonia Gardens set at the bottom of the now legendary staircase, allows Dolly to come within inches of the first row the audience, creating a sense of intimacy in such a large number.⁴⁰⁰

Payne-Carter writes

Champion had spent approximately thirty-five hours working on the staging of 'Hello, Dolly!' Members of the company not directly involved with the staging had not been permitted to observe any rehearsals of the number. When it was finished, Champion ran the sequence for the cast. Many of them wept at seeing the number, which was so simple and so emotional.⁴⁰¹

The choreography here was not athletic, in the manner of Bob Fosse or Michael Bennett. Rather, it is well-planned, ending in a very simple kick-line among Dolly and the waiters.⁴⁰²

Importantly, Champion's treatment of the "staircase" scene derives its strength from its precision and is nearly completely lacking in any sense of improvisation.

In contrast, Duck and McMahan cite Ogden and Richards' 1946 definition of "polysemy" as "multiple meanings for the same word," adding that "words, gestures, and symbols can have their meanings altered on different occasions or in circumstances according to the particulars that frame the talk."⁴⁰³ Though speaking in terms of communication theory, Ogden and Richards would seem to strike the heart of improvisation and re-interpretation in their definition of "polysemy." Furthermore, one could argue that Armstrong's Dixieland jazz interpretation of the song "Hello, Dolly!" offers a sense of aesthetic polysemy. Thus, Herman's creation had the flexibility for multiple interpretations, especially, in this case, one that allowed an ethnic interpretation to enter the equation.⁴⁰⁴

The Armstrong jazz interpretation of the song "Hello, Dolly!" came as a significant surprise to all involved. Ultimately, though, the Armstrong recording provided a source of excitement to all the (white) people involved in preparing the original Broadway production of *Hello, Dolly!*, which was enduring the torture of out-of-town try-outs in Detroit. Armstrong's recording may have given the first inkling of how well the material would translate to the all-African-American interpretation Broadway would see in November 1967. In addition, the popularity of Armstrong's recording would cause the company to change the title of the musical play from *Dolly: A Damned Exasperating Woman*⁴⁰⁵ to the ultimate *Hello, Dolly!*⁴⁰⁶ Though tenuous in connection, the success of the Armstrong recording, coupled with the attendant title change of the whole production, might be seen as a harbinger for the success of the all-black Bailey *Dolly!*

Armstrong's injection of race into the Herman's score for *Hello, Dolly!* proved fortuitous for all involved. More important to the subtle conflict as described above, the same could not be said for Armstrong's recording of Herman's title song from Herman's other mid-1960s Broadway hit musical, *Mame* (1966). In adapting Patrick Dennis's paean to his eccentric aunt,

Herman worked with book writers Jerome Lawrence and (the presciently named) Robert E. Lee, who had also written the 1956 non-musical version featuring the *tour-de-force* performance by Rosalind Russell. The new musical effort included the sequence in which Auntie Mame, having lost all her money in the stock market crash of 1928, is wooed by the dashing and wealthy southern gentleman, Beauregard Jackson Pickett Burnside – “Uncle Beau” to young Patrick Dennis. This sequence culminates in a scene on Beau’s plantation in which Mame has won over the hearts of Beau’s very southern family, with the powerfully written and staged title song as the end-of-act-one climax. No person of reason would accuse Herman of any attempt at overt or direct racism in this instance. However, the lyric to the song reads as a more lightly interpreted version of the kind of romantic fantasy in which D. W. Griffith engaged in describing the south in his *The Birth of a Nation* as discussed in Chapter III, including references to making “the south revive again” and bringing “the cakewalk back into style.”⁴⁰⁷ It is difficult to remember whether the scene featured any African-American servants. This detail is not particularly important, however, as the scene focused on (one might pardon the expression) “integrating” Auntie Mame into this romanticized southern milieu. As we saw in earlier chapters of this study – especially in the case of D.W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation* – this romanticized southern milieu often ignored the cruel realities of Jim Crow-style racism.

Louis Armstrong would record the song “Mame” as a follow-up to his colossally successful recording of “Hello, Dolly!” This recording would not achieve the same success as “Dolly,” however. It is interesting to note that Armstrong’s recording of “Mame” did not include many of the potentially racially offensive lyrics, and substituted one offensive possibility with the lyric, “[Y]ou make your Satchmo feel like a king, Ma-ame!/You make the world we’re living in swing, Ma-ame!”⁴⁰⁸ Perhaps the reference to “swing” here serves to “African-ize” the proceedings partially, in a 1930s-40s sense as in *Swing Mikado* as discussed in Chapter IV.

Nevertheless, the comparison of Armstrong's recordings of the title songs for both *Hello, Dolly!* and *Mame* display the possibility that the source material for the former was less racially charged than the latter.

Herman's contribution of an ethnically flexible score certainly allowed the Bailey *Dolly!* a certain level of ease of transition from white to black. However, the potentially offensive lyric from the *Mame* title song might serve to connect Jerry Herman with the kind of racial insensitivity we saw on the part of Cole Porter and Irving Berlin. One might not accuse Herman of the kind of conscious racism as practiced, even at a relatively low level, by Porter and Berlin, or even the more egregious racism of D.W. Griffith. (All evidence points to Herman's support of the Bailey production of his hit play.) It remains a point of interest, however, that a lyricist who could laud the virtues of the cakewalk during the civil-rights era in one instance could see his work successfully transformed by an all-African-American cast.

Let us be clear that we are *not* accusing Herman of active racism. Rather, because of the *Mame* title song lyric romanticizing the Jim-Crow south, Herman showed a small but significant amount of racial insensitivity. To Herman's strong defense, however, we might investigate how well his score for *Hello, Dolly!* served an all-black cast. Let us, therefore, engage in such an investigation in of Herman's score in this cross-racial light – a song-by-song analysis, in which we will see why and how well his score worked for the Bailey cast of *Hello, Dolly!*

i. Act One

1. "I Put My Hand In" – This song allows Dolly Levi to describe herself as a "woman who arranges things." Perfectly suited the Bailey's amiably pushy personality, references to "the Lord above" in the lyric – references to religion on the part of the Dolly Levi character that

appear nowhere else in Herman's lyrics or Bennett's book – receive added metatheatrical dimension when delivered by the personally devout Bailey, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

2. "It Takes a Woman" -- As we will see in later in this chapter, this is the song that gave rise on the part of mass-media critics to the complaint that Calloway had too little to do in this production.

3. "Put on Your Sunday Clothes" – As discussed in earlier in this chapter with reference to the career of Gower Champion, this song was an ideal demonstration of bourgeois entrée for the all-black cast.

4. "Ribbons Down My Back" – In addition to a similar sartorial sense of bourgeois entrée as engendered by "Put on Your Sunday Clothes," this song adds a dollop of bittersweet to the lightly romantic proceedings. Emily Yancy's performance here as milliner Irene Malloy adds an extra portion of tenderness to the proceedings, providing an exquisite portrayal of a woman approaching middle age seeking one more youthful fling, at least in her mind's eye. Completely inappropriate for anything even remotely related to a Black Arts Movement perspective, "Ribbons Down My Back" furthers the notion of bourgeois entrée via the genre of light romantic comedy.

5. "Motherhood March" – Like Bailey's personal sense of religious devotion added a dimension of metatheatrical verisimilitude to "I Put My Hand In," Bailey's personal and genuine sense of patriotism metatheatrically informed the "Motherhood March." That the song pokes fun at maudlin patriotic sentiment makes Bailey's apparent violation of her deeply held patriotic

sentiment an even more amusing moment. In this song, Irene and Dolly are hiding Cornelius and Barnaby as they “play hooky” from Vandergelder’s Yonkers feed and grain emporium.

Cornelius and Barnaby attempt to hide when Vandergelder shows up at Irene’s millinery shop as part of an arranged romance engineered by Dolly. The song serves as the ultimate “trap door” set piece, adding to the frothiness of the lightly romantic nature of the material.

6. “Dancing” – In her efforts to match-make Cornelius and Barnaby, Dolly teaches them how to engage in the fine art of ballroom dancing. Like “Ribbons Down My Back,” “Dancing” added to the sense of light romance in the production.

7. “Before the Parade Passes By” – The ostensible purpose of this number is to allow Dolly Levi the opportunity to inform both herself and the world at large that she is through with being a shut-in widow and wants to pursue romance with Horace Vandergelder, if only to rejoin the living after experiencing the premature loss of her beloved husband Efraim. As delivered by Pearl Bailey surrounded by an all-African-American cast, the song metatheatrically becomes a virtual anthem to then-recent successes enjoyed by the civil rights movement of the 1960s and a rejection of the disappointments experienced by African-Americans in the era that followed World War II. The monologue that precedes the song, in which Dolly speaks to the dead Efraim of wanting to rejoin society, becomes a metaphor for the African-American who has been ignored by the mainstream and wants to “join the party” as enjoyed by those blessed in the bounty that is the American dream.

ii. Act Two

1. “Elegance” – Cornelius and Barnaby are close to penniless, but want to convince Irene and Minnie Fay respectively that they are possessed of the trappings of the *haute bourgeoisie*. To do so, they attempt to convince their dates that walking to the Harmonia Gardens, as compared to paying for a cab or streetcar, is the “elegant” thing to do. This is another example of a song that allows the all-black cast the opportunity to envision bourgeois entrée. In addition, here, we see Cornelius and Barnaby involved in economic-class status envy. That this status envy has nothing whatsoever to do with race amplifies the race-neutrality of the material.

2. “Hello, Dolly!” -- In an immediate post-opening-night review that would appear in *Newsweek*, Jack Kroll offered a quaintly sexist observation and left-handed compliment to Bailey, writing that “Dolly is the highest office to which the American woman can aspire, and Miss Bailey has been elected to it by acclamation.”⁴⁰⁹ The Dolly Levi character’s descent of the stairs at the Harmonia Gardens is the exact moment of the kind of inauguration – perhaps even *coronation* – envisioned by Kroll in his review. Contrary to any possible sarcasm on Kroll’s part, this is a moment that needs to be taken *very* seriously. In this single moment, Pearl Bailey, in the role of Dolly Levi, has at once cemented her own formidable star power (an issue to be discussed at length in later in this chapter) *and* installed Dolly Levi as a metaphoric gold-medal winner in a civil rights Olympiad. The lyrics “It’s so nice to have you back where you belong” and “Dolly will never go away again” become yet another metaphor to the triumphs of the civil rights movement and greater access on the part of African Americans to bourgeois nicety.

3. “It Only Takes a Moment” – This song serves as yet another example of adding a dose of bittersweet and tenderness to the proceedings.
4. “So Long, Dearie” – The show starts with Bailey demonstrating her amiable pushiness. This last song for Dolly Levi – in which Dolly bids temporary farewell to a Horace Vandergelder who is trying to avoid her – brings us back to that point. In addition, this is the number in which Dolly Levi encourages Horace Vandergelder to “snuggle up” to his cash register. “It may be lumpy,” announces a falsely triumphant Dolly, “but it *rings!*” Here, Bailey would seem to have added a level of coy sexiness to the proceedings, especially as compared any of the white Dolly Levis. Where Carol Channing may have been oozing with sarcasm in her delivery of this “cash register” sequence, Bailey turns this material into a “red hot momma” moment as might have been witnessed at the Cotton Club at the height of the Harlem Renaissance, providing yet another example of aesthetic polysemy, as implied by the definition of “polysemy” in Duck and McMahan’s communications text. As we will see in mass-media reviews later in this chapter, such a moment begs the question of how “black” the production has become with the Bailey cast, not to mention the appropriateness of a white drama critic drawing attention to such “blackification.”

At the end of the show, Horace Vandergelder sings a reprise of the title song, in which the lyric “I never knew, Dolly/Without you, Dolly/Life was awf’ly flat/And more than that/Was awf’ly wrong” is introduced. This lyric brings us back to a significant aspect of the importance and success of the Bailey *Dolly!*, i.e., that sentimental romantic comedy can serve as a point of bourgeois entrée for marginalized populations.

Thus, despite his association with lyrics from *Mame* that romanticize the racism of the Jim-Crow south, Jerry Herman's score for *Hello, Dolly!* redeems the composer/lyricist on a number of levels. Not only are many of the songs in the score for *Hello, Dolly!* more than ideally suited for this particular cast. Many of these songs offer meta-theatrical moments that reflect the sense of triumph that often surrounded advances made by African Americans during the heyday of the 1960s civil rights movement.

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, we dealt with how the issues of personnel and production matters related to key challenges or possible problems for this all-black production of *Hello, Dolly!* One such challenge was the production of a light romantic comedy in an environment that at once avoided race on stage while being especially racially informed in a meta-theatrical environment. This seeming dichotomy allowed those involved with production at once the benefit of dealing with previous racial exclusion on the Broadway stage, especially at as glittering a level of recognition as the already successful *Hello, Dolly!* offered. At the same time, those involved with the Bailey *Dolly!* could be seen as glossing over racial issues as they performed onstage.

In addition, our discussion of these personnel and production matters included analysis of attitudes on race reflected in the source material. In this analysis, much of the source material took on new meaning in this all-black environment, highlighting victories of the concurrent civil rights movement. Any difficulty composer/lyricist Jerry Herman may have had concerning the possible glossing over of racial issues in his score for *Mame* would seem to be alleviated, or at least balanced, here in the all-black version of *Hello, Dolly!*

Also of importance here was an analysis of the attitudes on race of the principal black performers. Differences concerning professional behavior between Pearl Bailey and Cab Calloway may not have reflected any racial issue – for example, whether Calloway felt that Bailey’s lack of professionalism reflected negatively on black performers. Nevertheless, tension between the stars would seem to have played itself out in performance, thus adding, rather than subtracting, from the chemistry between the two.

Ultimately, as we will see in the next chapter that deals with reaction to the production, the Bailey *Dolly!* would seem to have succeeded. The replacement of previous white casts with the Bailey crew allowed the production to break records of longevity, indicating commercial success. As we will see in the subsequent chapter on the aftermath of the Bailey *Dolly!*, the first class effort produced by David Merrick would give way to a poorly produced second effort at a Bailey *Dolly!* in the 1970s. Thus, we can credit the original incarnation of the Bailey *Dolly!* as having been successful aesthetically, at least as compared to the 1970s effort. This success will be demonstrated more fully when we see the effusive popular critical reaction the production garnered.

In terms of social and political issues, we will see in the next chapter that one can claim a modicum of success for the Bailey *Dolly!* as a stellar example of the centrist “Great Society” ethos on race relations. But as already discussed, such centrism had its critics on both sides of the political divide. It will remain to be seen, in the discussion of the aftermath of the production in Chapter VII, that the Bailey *Dolly!* would seem to have served as a line of demarcation in the treatment of the interests of racial minorities on the Broadway stage.

Endnotes

³²⁰ Payne-Carter, David. *Gower Champion: Dance and American Musical Theatre*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999, 9. Payne-Carter describes *3 for Tonight* as “[. . . Marge and Gower Champion] teamed with Harry Belafonte and The Voices of Walter Schumann [. . .] The result was not really a concert, not really a

revue [. . .] (but) a succession of acts strung together [. . .] Belafonte offered Caribbean folk songs, the Champions did story ballets, and the voices of Walter Schumann presented their intricate harmonizing.”

³²¹ Payne-Carter, 40

³²² Payne-Carter, 59. Coincidentally, Betty Grable would be one of the former Hollywood film stars that would take over the role of Dolly Levi in *Hello, Dolly!* after Carol Channing but before Pearl Bailey.

³²³ Both statistics courtesy Internet Broadway Data Base (IBDB), <http://ibdb.com> (accessed January 28, 2011).

³²⁴ Barnes, Clive. “Theater: Morse, Roberts Star in ‘Sugar’,” *The New York Times*, April 10, 1972

³²⁵ Payne-Carter, 132

³²⁶ Rich, Frank, “Theater: Musical ‘42nd Street’,” *The New York Times*, August 26, 1980

³²⁷ Payne-Carter, 146

³²⁸ Please see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=84cXRXaCpg> (accessed January 29, 2011).

³²⁹ Citron, Stephen. *Jerry Herman: Poet of the showtune*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2004, 48.

³³⁰ Herman, Jerry (with Marilyn Stasio). *Showtune: A memoir*. New York: Donald I. Fine, 1996, 39

³³¹ Herman, 41

³³² Herman, 41

³³³ Citron, 52

³³⁴ Citron, 4

³³⁵ Herman, 66. In a Hollywood finish to this office scene, once Herman had played his four songs for Merrick, Merrick simply looked at Herman and said, “Kid, the show is yours.”

³³⁶ Herman, 70

³³⁷ Citron, 77

³³⁸ Citron, 77

³³⁹ Payne-Carter, 89

³⁴⁰ Bailey, Pearl. *The Raw Pearl*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1968, Introduction

³⁴¹ Bailey, Pearl. *Hurry Up, America, & Spit*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1976, 50

³⁴² Bailey (*Spit*), 50-51

³⁴³ Brandt, Keith (with illustrations by Gershom Griffith). *Pearl Bailey: With a song in her heart*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Troll Associates, 1993, 40. In addition to discussing Bailey’s mixed-race marriage, Brandt discusses Bailey’s prodigious talent as a performer that developed as a result of participating in musical performance activities as a child at the church at which her father served as preacher.

³⁴⁴ Brandt, 49

³⁴⁵ Bailey (*The Raw Pearl*), 35-36

³⁴⁶ Bailey (*The Raw Pearl*), 66

³⁴⁷ Bailey (*The Raw Pearl*), 66. In describing a similar incident, Bailey relates how on the set of the filming of *Porgy and Bess* she and other black cast members objected to production-enforced use of quaint pidgin dialect. (Bailey (*The Raw Pearl*), 76)

³⁴⁸ In *The Raw Pearl* (40-41), Bailey shows nothing but respect and admiration for Calloway, especially in his early career when Calloway was the more luminescent star than Bailey. This is in contrast to Calloway’s complaints concerning Bailey’s sense of professionalism as discussed later in this chapter.

³⁴⁹ Bailey, Pearl. *Pearl’s Kitchen: An Extraordinary Cookbook* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973, Pocket Book edition 1974, 174-175 in Pocket Book edition), for example, contains a tantalizing lasagna recipe from the kitchen of singer Tony Bennett’s mother.

³⁵⁰ From a picture in Bailey’s *Duey* volume, my resident expert in horticulture and partner of more than 21 years (that’s 147 in straight years), Scott Clarence Wiersema, was able to identify Duey as a Japanese maple.

³⁵¹ Bailey, Pearl. *Duey’s Tale*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1975, 12

³⁵² Duck, Steve and David T. McMahan. *The Basics of Communication: A relational perspective*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 2009, 216

³⁵³ Duck and McMahan, 216-217

³⁵⁴ Bailey, Pearl. *Between You and Me*. New York: Doubleday, 1989, 38

³⁵⁵ Bailey (*Between You and Me*), 38. In *Hurry Up, America, & Spit*, Bailey offers two particularly exquisite commentaries on race, education, and the politics of resistance. In “Man, I Want My Identity” (13), Bailey appeals in prayer to the radically activist and separatist black student she has encountered at Georgetown, “Dear God, please close this vicious circle of ‘Who am I?’ and of man seeking not to see himself in all men, of not knowing You are

hidden somewhere within us all-in like measure.” Furthermore, in the short poem “One, Two, Three O’Leary” (14), Bailey bemoans a post-civil rights era in which school children live in fear of violence in the public schools.

³⁵⁶ In a similar anecdote, Bailey would receive criticism from a fellow student when she purchased a cookie on campus from a student of an opposing political faction to a second student to whom she offered a cookie. The second student went into a tirade against the “son of a b****” from whom Bailey had bought the cookie. Bailey’s response was to tell the second student, essentially, to “thank God for the damn cookie, shut up, and eat it!” Whenever Bailey would encounter the second student on campus after this incident, the second student would joke and ask Bailey if she had another cookie. Bailey (*Between You and Me*), 38.

³⁵⁷ Bailey (*Between You and Me*), 97

³⁵⁸ Bailey (*Between You and Me*), 98.

³⁵⁹ Calloway, Cab and Bryant Rollins. *Of Minnie the Moocher and Me*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1976, 7

³⁶⁰ Calloway and Rollins, 7

³⁶¹ Calloway and Rollins, 7

³⁶² Calloway and Rollins, 11

³⁶³ Lewis, 219

³⁶⁴ Lewis, 219

³⁶⁵ Lewis, 219

³⁶⁶ Bowser, 56

³⁶⁷ Calloway and Rollins describe how posh productions at the Cotton Club were in the 1930s (88) and how Calloway and his first wife lived in the finest accommodations Harlem in the period had to offer for a black celebrity (116). In addition, Calloway compares his treatment in Harlem with how he and his band were treated on a tour of the South, writing (125), “We weren’t used to that kind of [mis]treatment [that white Southerners offered]. In the Cotton Club we were the cream of the crop, and we were used to being celebrities. In New York we were the toast of the town with big cars and sharp clothes and broads all over the place.”

³⁶⁸ In *The Raw Pearl*, Pearl Bailey tells similar stories of having to perform for underworld types including those involved in prostitution. Similar to the story told in Sidney J. Furie’s film on Billie Holiday, *Lady Sings the Blues* (referenced earlier in this study), these underworld types would attempt to recruit young, attractive show-business neophytes like Bailey into “the business.” However, writes Bailey, “When [the pimps] found out that you were a nice girl only out to do show business, they respected you.” (24-25) Thus, though optimistic about making positive changes in American race relations, was hardly immune to the social impact of having to deal with underworld types in order to survive in the world of black entertainment in the pre-Civil-Rights era.

³⁶⁹ Calloway and Rollins, 88

³⁷⁰ Calloway and Rollins, 90

³⁷¹ Calloway and Rollins, 116-117

³⁷² Calloway and Rollins, 116

³⁷³ Not to be confused with Caroline Knowles, the race scholar discussed in Chapter I. Calloway himself

acknowledges that no one involved in this enterprise, including jazz promoter and close Calloway associate Irving Mills (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irving_Mills, (accessed February 18, 2011)), knew the woman’s first name.

³⁷⁴ Calloway and Rollins, 122

³⁷⁵ Calloway and Rollins, 122

³⁷⁶ Calloway and Rollins, 124

³⁷⁷ Calloway and Rollins, 113

³⁷⁸ Calloway (137-138) writes, “People think rock stars today get special treatment. Shoot. Forty years ago we got the same kind of reception [in Europe] as Elton John or the Rolling Stones do today.”

³⁷⁹ Citron, 92

³⁸⁰ Citron, 97

³⁸¹ Horn, Barbara Lee. *David Merrick: A Bio-bibliography*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1992, 13

³⁸² Kissel, 233

³⁸³ Kissel, 136

³⁸⁴ Kissel, 137

³⁸⁵ Kissel, 137

³⁸⁶ Kissel, 137

³⁸⁷ Horn catalogs Merrick’s productions in pages 35 through 121, reporting on Merrick’s success producing such prestigious outings as Thornton Wilder’s *The Matchmaker* (1955, upon which *Hello, Dolly!* would be based), John

Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1957), *The Entertainer* (1958), *Epitaph for George Dillon* (1958, written with Anthony Creighton), *Luther* (1963), *Inadmissible Evidence* (1965), and *A Patriot for Me* (1969), Peter Ustinov's *Romanoff and Juliet* (1957),³⁸⁷ Gian-Carlo Menotti's *Maria Golovin* (1958), Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* (1960), Jean Anouilh's *Becket* (1960) and *The Rehearsal* (1963), Bertolt Brecht's *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (1963), Dale Wasserman's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1963, based on Ken Kesey's novel), Tennessee Williams's *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* (1964), *The Seven Descents of Myrtle* (1968), *Out Cry!* (1973), and *The Red Devil Battery Sign* (1975, closed in previews), Peter Weiss's *Marat/Sade* (1965), Brian Friel's *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (1966), Woody Allen's *Don't Drink the Water* (1966) and *Play It Again, Sam* (1969), Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1967) and *Travesties* (1975), and Robert Bolt's *Vivat! Vivat Regina!* (1972), as well as significant revivals of Noel Coward's *Private Lives* (1969), Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1971), Moliere's *The Misanthrope* (1975), and Joe Orton's *Loot!* (1986). Many of the prodigious productions listed here were funded by the David Merrick Arts Foundation, in turn funded by the success of his more commercial Broadway enterprises.

³⁸⁸ Horn, 16.

³⁸⁹ Lantz, Ragni. "Hello, Dolly!: Pearl Bailey, Cab Calloway lend 'black magic' to the show" in *Ebony*, January, 1968, 79-86, 86

³⁹⁰ Woll (227) cites statistics, writing that "[o]f the 523 actors in 22 Broadway shows in March, 1968, only 57 were black, 7 Hispanic, and 1 of Asian origin. Backstage statistics were equally dismal. Of 664 production employees on Broadway that season, only 14 were black. Although the stagehands' union had been integrated in 1955, only 2 of the 381 working on Broadway that season were black."

³⁹¹ Woll, 227. Concerning Merrick's defense of the non-integrated all-black *Dolly!*, Woll writes, "[Merrick] claimed that he sponsored the 'black Dolly' in order to prove that 'a white man's story about the upper class could be done with an all Negro company. Well, as you know,' said Merrick, 'it did work.'"

³⁹² Woll, 227

³⁹³ Woll, 227. Woll continues here by discussing both the aesthetic contribution of Bailey and Calloway to the improvement of the property as well as Merrick's long-standing commitment to racial parity, writing, "Indeed, Bailey and Calloway brought a new charm to a show that had borne Carol Channing's personal stamp since its 1964 opening. Successors Betty Grable, Martha Raye, Dorothy Lamour, and Ginger Rogers had performed the role admirably, but only Bailey started to redefine it. *Hello, Dolly!* also fulfilled Merrick's desire to increase black employment on Broadway, both onstage and behind the scenes. Indeed, his firm commitment to these goals remained remarkable, as others still tended to waver on the commitment to affirmative action on the Broadway stage."

³⁹⁴ Woll, 228

³⁹⁵ Calloway and Rollins, 185

³⁹⁶ Calloway and Rollins, 185

³⁹⁷ Calloway and Rollins, 185

³⁹⁸ Calloway and Rollins, 160

³⁹⁹ In addition to his recording of the title song for the stage version of *Hello, Dolly!*, Armstrong would appear as a band leader at the Harmonia Gardens in the 1969 Gene Kelly-directed film version of *Hello, Dolly!* featuring Barbra Streisand in the title role. This scene was added to the film and was not part of the original stage production of *Hello, Dolly!* in any incarnation. To this observer, Armstrong's presence in the *Dolly!* film seemed forced and contrived, as if the producers of the film (Twentieth Century-Fox) wanted to give homage to the all-black Bailey cast without actually using Bailey herself, not to mention giving metatheatrical credit to Armstrong's hit recording of the title song. Armstrong's performance in the *Dolly!* film should be contrasted to Sammy Davis, Jr.'s performance as "Big Daddy" in the 1969 Bob Fosse-directed film version of the Broadway musical *Sweet Charity*. Where Armstrong's presence as a band leader at the Harmonia Gardens seems to have been inserted artificially, Davis' star turn as the leader of a hippie-era-informed religious cult both made sense in the context of the film and suited Davis' talents as both a singer and actor. If Armstrong's performance demonstrated an instance of tokenism, Davis' performance provided the exact opposite.

⁴⁰⁰ Payne-Carter, 95

⁴⁰¹ Payne-Carter, 95

⁴⁰² Payne-Carter, 94

⁴⁰³ Duck and McMahan, 27

⁴⁰⁴ A contrast might be made between the sense of jazz-like improvisation inherent in Herman's score and Gower Champion's comparatively less flexible direction, taken step-for-step by Lucia Victor in her reworking of the piece

for the Bailey cast. However, this is a false comparison. More to the point is that Gene Kelly's aforementioned and perhaps less than successful film version of *Hello, Dolly!* in 1969 allowed Kelly to impose the production values of an MGM musical from the 1940s or 1950s onto the piece. Thus, even direction and choreography for *Hello, Dolly!* could enjoy differing interpretation, much as a more traditional interpretation of Sophocles' *Antigone* compares and contraststo recent "punk" interpretations. A choice was made on the part of David Merrick and company to maintain Champion's masterful original direction and choreography. While ultimately this was a successful choice on Merrick's part, another interpretation, perhaps more Afro-centric (as we will see with the Motown *Guys and Dolls* in Chapter VII), might have worked as well.

⁴⁰⁵ Citron (page 103) reports, "Herman had actually written a tongue-twisting song around the subtitled called "'You're a Damn [sic] Exasperating Woman.'"

⁴⁰⁶ In his previously cited memoir *Showtune* (pages 71-72), Herman writes,

We were of town working on the show, and when you are out of town you are so isolated from the real world, you might as well be on the moon. None of us even knew this Louis Armstrong record existed until someone from my music publishing company in New York got on a plane and showed up at my hotel room in Detroit clutching this little 45 record in his hand and grinning all over place.

"I am so excited about this record that I had to deliver it to you myself," he told me. "I couldn't even wait to send it through the mail."

All I could say was: "Louis Armstrong? Louis Armstrong? That is totally crazy!"

The poor man was dying to play me the record, and I have to admit that I was really curious to hear it myself, but there was no equipment at the hotel to play the record on. So we went down to the Fisher Theater, where the company was in the middle of rehearsing a dance number. I asked Gower to call a break so we could hear this new recording.

Gower wasn't all that crazy about being interrupted. But when I told him it was Louis Armstrong doing "Hello, Dolly!" his reaction was just like mane. "Louis Armstrong? *Louis Armstrong?* You have got to be kidding!"

We couldn't begin to imagine what a jazz musician would do this song. In my mind the whole number felt and sounded very Victorian. It was supposed to be like a scene from *Lillian Russell*, which was this old black-and-white movie starring Alice Faye that had been my real inspiration for the number. Our designers Oliver Smith and Freddie Wittop were working very hard on the right period look-the gaslights and the red velvet staircase and the long white gloves and all that gorgeous, schmaltzy, business.

The melody I wrote was also very 1890s. Not the kind of song you tap-dance to, but the kind of song you sway to. Like "Shine On, Harvest Moon." So here we were in the thick of all this Victorian atmosphere, when this jazz version of our sweet, old-fashioned sing-along song comes blasting over the sound system.

[. . .] Louis Armstrong had not changed a single note or a single word [with the exception of the phrase, "This is Lou-*ISSS*, Dolly!"]. But by imprinting the song with his own personal style, this incredible musician had made it into a piece of authentic jazz. Our song had taken on a life of its own.

The music publisher started jumping up and down. "That's it!" he said. "That's the title of your show!"

⁴⁰⁷ In a performance with Tijuana Brass trumpeter and ersatz song-stylist Herb Alpert, Alpert sings the "cakewalk" lyric. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ojte8xhqoM8> (accessed October 29, 2010). See also Citron (139) for a fuller description of this lyrical love-letter to a romanticized south. Citron also describes "the patter Herman created for the third chorus" which he describes as "too good not to be quoted." This patter, set in "stunning rhythmic counterpoint against the basic melody," includes further references to a romanticized south, including the ripening of watermelon and the arrival on the levee of the "Robert E. Lee" riverboat. This last reference lies in stark contrast to the treatment by Oscar Hammerstein II and Jerome Kern of a similar vessel, the Cotton Blossom, in the previously cited *Showboat*.

⁴⁰⁸ <http://www.metrolyrics.com/mame-lyrics-louis-armstrong.html> (accessed October 29, 2010)

⁴⁰⁹ Kroll, Jack. "Hello again" in *Newsweek*, November 27, 1967, 105. Kroll's review will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter VI.

CHAPTER VI – CRITICAL REACTION

Chapter Introduction

In this chapter, we consider reaction on the part of the critics' establishment – both scholarly and journalistic – to the *Bailey Dolly!*

We begin with advance journalistic notice of the production. The *Bailey Dolly!*, in addition to its aesthetic appeal, became a media event in itself. In this section, we recognize such coverage as the gargantuan spreads in popular weekly news magazines and newspapers that appeal to both black and white markets. Here, we also acknowledge the wealth of special recognition received by the production – recognition unusual for a replacement cast to garner.

We then deal with both the failure on the part of other scholarly efforts to adequately comment on this production, especially in comparison to the popular press. As we will see in this chapter, musical theatre scholars, over the years since the production, have paid little attention to the *Bailey Dolly!* In contrast, mass-media drama critics were nothing short of ecstatic in their collective reaction to the production when it premiered in 1967.

It is from among the comments of mass-media critics that we will be able to fashion a picture of the overwhelmingly positive reaction to the production. In this process, we will be able to attach import to the *Bailey Dolly!* with respect to its success – commercial, aesthetic, *and* with regard to social and political issues. It would be a stretch of the imagination to say that the *Bailey Dolly!* *caused* any change in racial attitudes on the Broadway stage. However, after analyzing popular critical reaction to the *Bailey Dolly!*, it will be reasonable to claim that the production served as a flashpoint – a line of demarcation – concerning changes in attitude on race in commercial American musical theatre.

Advance and Concurrent Journalistic Coverage

We now direct our sights to print-journalism coverage of the media event that was the Bailey *Dolly!* In this effort, we will focus on items that offer, rather than the kind of after-the-fact criticism and evaluation we will see later in this chapter, strictly direct, who-what-where-why-how journalistic coverage of the event itself. Discussion of such journalistic coverage will enhance the import of the moment in terms of both celebrity *and* socio-political significance. Please note that where the journalism presented here crosses over the line from simple reporting to criticism and evaluation, such material will be placed later in this chapter in sections that covers such matters. (In other words, with one exception we will note later in this chapter, if it's journalistic coverage, we cover it here. If it's critique and evaluation, we cover it later in this chapter.)

We start with the lavish spread offered by *Ebony* magazine, a periodical that catered and continues to cater to interests of the African-American community. The *Ebony* effort begins with a magnificent photograph of President Johnson and Lady Bird joining Bailey, Calloway, and the entire cast of the all-black *Dolly!* during the curtain call for the pre-Broadway tryout in Washington, D.C. Other photographs in the spread include Dolly and Horace dining at the Harmonia Gardens, Dolly descending the stairs, Dolly and cohorts boarding the train from Yonkers to New York City, the waiters' dance, Horace dining with Ernestina, the woman Dolly presents to him as a possible replacement for Irene Molloy, Cornelius, Barnaby, Irene, and Minnie Fay (played by Calloway's daughter, Chris) performing "Elegance" (the aforementioned Bob Merrill/Jerry Herman collaboration), the 14th Street Parade, Dolly lecturing Horace during the "So Long, Dearie" scene, Bailey dressed in an elegant white costume standing at the apron of

the stage, and an especially poignant photograph of the original musical Dolly Levi, Carol Channing, enthusiastically applauding her replacement. Photographs of various luminaries and well-wishers follow. A final photograph of Bailey shaking hands with well-wishers during a curtain call ends the photo spread.

In a background piece that accompanied the lavish photo spread, *Ebony* reporter Ragni Lantz⁴¹⁰ begins her article by describing Bailey as having given “one of the greatest opening night performances Broadway ever had experienced.”⁴¹¹ Lantz describes how unrepentant ad-libber Bailey, in her curtain call, sang the parody lyrics, “When I look above, fellas, all I feel is love, fellas, Dolly’ll never go away again,”⁴¹² an appropriate tag for a performer we have already noted as valuing, perhaps naively, her Christian spirituality. Lantz notes with glee and accuracy that “New York’s dreaded drama critics, whose verdicts make or break a show, surrendered without reservation”⁴¹³ at the arrival of the Bailey *Dolly!* Lantz buys in lock, stock, and barrel to the Merrick “not a word or note had to be changed” argument, with the caveat that the production contained an additional element. Lantz writes, “Maybe [this additional element is] soul – not simply because all the members of the cast are Negroes, but it helps. But all the characters, from the leads to the smallest bit parts, are portrayed with unusual depth, zest, and – yes – love.”⁴¹⁴ Lantz continues by noting that Merrick concurred in this observation after claiming that he’d finally found the best cast for the show. In terms of the “blackness” of the proceedings, Lantz describes Bailey’s ad libs – “an extra ‘child’ here and ‘honey’ there and little asides like ‘Hold on, girl,’ uttered during a strenuous dance number.”⁴¹⁵ And in what might seem an homage to the urban unrest of the period, Lantz describes the audience as reacting in “near riot proportions”⁴¹⁶ to Bailey, as Dolly Levi, descending the stairs at the Harmonia Gardens in Act Two. Lantz includes cast reactions to criticism of the all-black casting. For

example, Jack Crowder (as Cornelius Hackl) “lauded” David Merrick for presenting *Dolly!* “in living color,”⁴¹⁷ while Bailey refused to discuss the issue, at least for Lantz.

If *Ebony*’s reaction was merely glowing, *Life*’s reaction could be compared to a metaphoric fireworks display. The once-again lavish spread starts with a cover photo of Bailey, dressed in a white costume and cast against a dark background, smiling out at her audience. The cover features the headline, “Well, Hello Pearl!” The frou-frou and ostrich feathers on Bailey’s costume exude an air of fireworks in mid-explosion for this cover photo, as well as many of the interior photos. Many of the scenes from the *Ebony* spread are repeated here, including a shot of Lyndon and Lady Bird Johnson onstage with Bailey and Calloway after the D.C. tryout performance. In addition, *Life* presents a wonderful photo of Jack Crowder as Cornelius wooing Emily Yancy as Irene. In this photo, Yancy wears the hat with “ribbons down her back,” as praised earlier in the play in song.

Here, in “A bedrock Christian turns the show into a rousing love-in,” an article accompanied by a highly compelling photo of Pearl Bailey and Carol Channing sharing the stage together, *Life* reporter Tom Prideaux discusses Bailey’s spiritual connection with her audience – the kind of genuine, if naïve, spirituality on Bailey’s part as discussed in the thumbnail biography in Chapter V. In contrast to Bailey’s silence on the subject in Lantz’s *Ebony* piece, Prideaux begins by allowing Bailey to vent on the issue of race, quoting Bailey as saying, “Integration [. . .] is one of the most distasteful words in the language. Wherever I am, *that*’s integration – because there’s love there.”⁴¹⁸ Here, Prideaux credits Bailey as responding to those who object to any all-black *or* all-white production. Continuing on this line of thought that connects racial aspects of the Bailey *Dolly!* with Bailey’s personal faith, Prideaux writes

Pearl is proving her point [concerning race] every night at *Hello, Dolly!* [. . .] She turns *Dolly* into a Broadway love-in that rings with her own brand of bedrock Christian brotherhood. “I really

don't see any color in front of the footlights or behind me," she declares. "God has no complexion. When are people going to lose it?"⁴¹⁹

To amplify this message, Prideaux quotes Bailey, whom Prideaux identifies as a preacher's daughter, as quoting the gospel of Matthew: "Come all ye who are heavy laden."⁴²⁰ Later in the article, Prideaux mentions that the race of her fellow cast members was never part of the negotiation for Bailey when Merrick pitched the idea to her. Bailey relates, "[. . . W]hen I heard it was going to be an all-colored company, I paid it no mind." Prideaux affirms Woll's discussion of objections Actors Equity had with the all-black cast, writing, "The Negro president of Actors Equity, Frederick O'Neal, firmly disapproved of a Negro cast, saying that in the interest of true integration it should be sprinkled with whites. Some white critics complained that the whole idea of bringing Negroes into a white show smacked of condescension."⁴²¹ Furthermore, Prideaux quotes Bailey's response to those who would object to an all-black cast: "If anyone was worried about integration, why didn't they worry about it at the time of the first *Dolly*?" Bailey's reaction here reflects efforts on the part of CORE to boycott all-white shows on Broadway in the 1960s, as cited earlier by Woll. Uncharacteristically, Calloway, as quoted by Prideaux, concurs with Bailey on this issue of race, saying, "What's the difference [. . .] if they want it all-white, all-Jewish, or all-anything else?"⁴²² In a preview to a similar discussion in which we will engage later in this chapter, Prideaux suggests "an all-white *Porgy and Bess* or an all-Negro *Banjo on the Roof*." Yet as if to acknowledge the ridiculousness of such suggestions, and in tandem with the detailed discussion of Jerry Herman's score as discussed earlier, Prideaux acknowledges the special nature of the material involved in *Hello, Dolly!*, writing

[. . . T]he fact is that very few musicals could switch color as effectively as *Dolly*. Thornton Wilder in his play *The Matchmaker*, on which *Dolly* is based, wrote a piece of comic fluff. But it is fluff with steel ribbing, a paean to love and life that can be validly translated to any tongue, time, or place.⁴²³

Thus, *Life*'s Prideaux confirms earlier verdicts on the suitability of the material for an all-black cast.

Later in this chapter, we will see that senior *New York Times* drama critic Walter Kerr was unable to contain his enthusiasm for the newly arrived version of *Hello, Dolly!* In the same Sunday arts section in which Kerr's comments appeared, *Times* reporter Joan Barthel offered a multi-page interview with Bailey herself coinciding with the opening of the Bailey *Dolly!* Barthel's interview of Bailey covered much of the material discussed in Chapter V concerning Bailey's biographical background and Christian spirituality. Perhaps nowhere else in the literature is the electricity of Bailey's opening night covered with such sensitivity as in Barthel's interview. Barthel writes

At the final curtain, people rush to the stage, grab up at your hands. Some cry. Tossed bouquets are not enough, so a man in the first row throws his fur lined coat down on the runway for you to walk over. When you stand at the top of those stairs, all scarlet and plumes, and the house explodes – WOW WOW WOW FELLAS LOOK AT THE OLD GIRL NOW FELLAS – the St. James air, already foggy with bravos, turns valentine colors from so many hearts draped over so many sleeves. Ed Sullivan smiles and sings along. Dietrich telephones and says, "I'm supposed to be a legend, but I never saw anything like this," Thornton Wilder and Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas, neither of whom you've met, offer, respectively, red roses and the anytime use of his swimming pool. Perle Mesta adores telling people, "We're two identical pearls." Critics flip. And the man who catches a performance in Washington and ends up stage center singing "Hello, Dolly!" with you is the President of the United States.⁴²⁴

In this rather long quote,⁴²⁵ Barthel captures the star-studded electricity that surrounded the opening of the Bailey *Dolly!* and the laser-charged excitement of the moment. Later in the Barthel interview, in a particularly telling anecdote, Bailey reveals to Barthel that she and David Merrick had not originally conceived the production as "all Negro." Barthel quotes Bailey as saying

I wasn't hired to do an all-colored Dolly; it was just one of those things. A lot of talented people turned up, and what's wrong with them having a job? What is good for the Negro? What is good for the Negro is good for every man. Every man has a place in this word, but no man has a right to designate that place.⁴²⁶

Again, we see Bailey's homespun, casual attitude on race and her desire for conciliation.

From this popular coverage of the Bailey *Dolly!* as a media event, we see New York City would soon enter into an unabashed love-fest with Bailey and her crew. The aesthetics of the production itself provided fodder for lavish photo spreads. Bailey's personal hominess, at once conciliatory on race yet naïve on some of the implications of these racial issues, fed perfectly into the American media machine. If nothing else, Pearl Bailey as Dolly Levi posed no threat to the white hegemony.

Amsterdam News

In the last of these examples of print-journalism coverage of the opening of the Bailey *Dolly!* as a media event (as compared to after the fact evaluation), we turn our attention to the local New York City African-American press. Though perhaps neither as lavish nor as extensive as its more well-heeled competition at *Ebony* or *Life*, notice of the Bailey *Dolly!* in the *New York Amsterdam News*, the local black media outlet, was powerful and positive. A weekly outlet for news of concern to the African-American community, the *Amsterdam News* during the apex of mid-1960s civil-rights upheaval was noteworthy for its mainstream, bourgeois approach to black issues. This approach can be seen as of particular concern to any study of the connection of the Bailey *Dolly!* to bourgeois entrée. We thus embark on an extensive discussion of the role of the *Amsterdam News* and its role as outlet for mainstream African-American social and political thought during the height of the 1960s civil rights movement.

A cursory read through the pages of this newspaper reveal a penchant towards bourgeois aspiration. Advertisements for the likes of retail chains such as Macy's department store appear as they would in a supplement of the Sunday *New York Times*. In addition to the Harlem properties one would expect to find, classified and display real-estate advertising focuses on property available for lease or purchase in middle- to upper-middle-class communities in Queens and on Long Island in which black families would find a welcoming, non-threatening environment. This is not to say that the *Amsterdam News* was completely ignorant of the explosion of black-power consciousness surrounding it. For example, in the *Amsterdam News* published a few weeks before the opening of the Bailey *Dolly!*, a review of the hit mainstream film, *Wait Until Dark* (featuring an Oscar-nominated Audrey Hepburn as a blind woman being terrorized by international smugglers) appears beside an article describing a documentary film by Black-Arts-Movement luminary Larry Neal detailing "ghetto problems as seen through ghetto eyes."⁴²⁷ It is interesting to note that in terms of entrée into any Euro-centered bourgeoisie, *Amsterdam News* devoted significantly more column-inches to the *Wait Until Dark* story than to the Larry Neal story. Another issue of the *Amsterdam News* in the period featured a review which panned the Euro-informed Broadway musical *Henry, Sweet Henry*, based on the quality of the production rather than any racial issue. Elsewhere in the *Amsterdam News*, a small article detailing a production by the New Heritage Repertory Theatre, Inc. of a production entitled *Hip, Black and Angry* appears next to a lengthy listing of television programs featuring black participation. For example, singer/actress Barbara McNair's appearance on the NBC-TV game show *You Don't Say* and singer Dionne Warwick's performance on *Kraft Music Hall* receives the same attention as Nichelle Nichols appearing as Lieutenant Uhura on *Star Trek*. The features pages of the *Amsterdam News* also featured a regularly appearing society/gossip column, "P.S.," written by Cathy W. Aldridge. In the issue of *Amsterdam News* which appeared the Saturday

before the opening of the Bailey *Dolly!*, Aldridge writes of the appearance of Nuffie (Mrs. Cab) Calloway at “the First Annual Testimonial Banquet given by the Ladies Auxiliary of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.”⁴²⁸ Along with advertisements for entertainment venues such as Loew’s and RKO movie theatres, jazz concerts and Broadway plays – the ad for *Hallelujah, Baby!* is prominent, perhaps indicating a desire on the part of its producers to attract a black audience – the entertainment pages of the *Amsterdam News* resembled the entertainment pages of any mainstream daily newspaper in New York City (or anywhere else) coupled with a small dollop of evidence of significant black consciousness.

The editorial pages of the *Amsterdam News* in this period presented an interesting study in apparent contradictions. In a pair of editorials which followed the opening of the Bailey *Dolly!*, the editors of the *Amsterdam News* both lauded then-President Johnson for advances in the War on Poverty, while at the same time chiding the President for not being more forthright in dealing with a Congress reticent to devote resources to the effort. In the first editorial, “A Strong LBJ,” *Amsterdam News* editorial writers note that the President “served notice that he is not intimidated by the growing hue and cry against how we are conducting the war in Vietnam.”⁴²⁹ Furthermore, the editorial board of the *Amsterdam News* was so supportive of Johnson’s war effort that they wrote, “[LBJ’s] scoring of those [who opposed the war effort] reminded us a lot of Give-em Hell Harry Truman.” Reading between the lines, one can surmise from these comments concerning the Vietnam war that, unlike those in more radical quarters in the black community, the *Amsterdam News* had no significant difficulty with Johnson’s war policy. Rather, the editorial board of the *Amsterdam News* was more concerned with the progress of the domestic War on Poverty than finding fault with a foreign policy initiative with which it had no particular quarrel. In “A ‘Soft’ LBJ,” this theme of concern that Johnson was being soft on a reticent Congress with respect to the War on Poverty finds full focus. After describing how

Office of Economic Opportunity head Sargent Shriver considered recent run-ins with Congress as successful, the editors of the *Amsterdam News* write

This [description of success by Shriver] may be true, but the simple fact remains that while we are spending billions daily for war, we are at the same time, pinching pennies in the battle against poverty. It is here Mr. Johnson's strong leadership is needed if his Great Society program is to succeed, here as well as against the hippie paint-slingers.⁴³⁰

This pair of editorials demonstrates the significant conundrums facing defenders of mainstream black-community values like the *Amsterdam News*. Certainly, these editorials show at least modest concern for issues of poverty in communities of color. In contrast, there is demonstrated support for the war effort opposed by radical elements – the “hippie paint slingers” – with whom those at the *Amsterdam News* often found themselves in opposition. In an op-ed piece, Roy Wilkins, then-Executive Director of the NAACP, would expound on this division in the black community. Wilkins singles out those among the black bourgeoisie who would ignore the needs of those still experiencing recalcitrant poverty. Nevertheless, Wilkins reserves stronger words for those who would oppose the desire for material improvement among African Americans, writing

[I]f a man automatically becomes a “tom.” simply because he has managed to escape poverty, then who among his accusers will themselves want to get out of poverty? That is to say, the “super militants” in their automatic resentment of anyone who has made it, may end up making a romantic virtue of deprivation - ultimately to the detriment of the poor.⁴³¹

Comparable to the tone of the rest of the *Amsterdam News*, Wilkins here would seem to defend the idea of material improvement as liberation for the African American.

Given the status of the *Amsterdam News* as defender of avenues of bourgeois entrée for African Americans, it makes sense that its entertainment staff would laud the arrival of the *Bailey Dolly!* In the *Amsterdam News* of October 21, 1967, drama critic Jesse H. Walker reports

enthusiastically of David Merrick's plans to bring the Bailey company of *Hello, Dolly!* to Broadway after the rousing success of the Washington, D.C., try-out.⁴³² In his weekly entertainment-news column in the weeks that followed the November 1967 opening of the Bailey *Dolly!*, Walker would devote significant space to the comings and goings of the star-charged cast members.

For Walker and the *Amsterdam News*, let us make an exception to the rule that we will not devote space to any critique or evaluation of the Bailey *Dolly!* No more space is devoted in the *Amsterdam News* to Walker's review than in other comparable media outlets. In fact, the length of Walker's review for the Bailey *Dolly!* compares to the review of the aforementioned *Henry, Sweet Henry*. Nevertheless, we discuss Walker's review of the Bailey *Dolly!* both in terms of the excitement generated among rank-and-file African Americans *and* in terms of the sheer electricity we will see in the mass-media reviews to be presented later in this chapter.

As the reader might expect, Walker began his review lauding the prodigious performing talent involved in the production, writing

You take Pearl Bailey. You take Cab Calloway. [. . .] You take a hit show, like "Hello, Dolly", that's nearly four years old and you put all that talent in it. And you get just what you would expect.

A resounding hit.

And that's what shaking the St. James Theatre these nights as Pearl Mae puts her indelible imprint on the role of Mrs. Dolly Gallagher Levi [. . .].⁴³³

In reflecting the excitement of the moment, Walker mentioned the presence of the Johnsons in attendance at the Washington, D.C., try-out and Carol Channing in attendance for opening night in New York City. Noting how well the old war-horse worked in this "ethnic"⁴³⁴ version, Walker spared no effort in lauding other cast members besides Bailey, including Calloway, his daughter Chris as Minnie Fay, Jack Crowder and Winston DeWitt Hemsley as Cornelius and

Barnaby, and the “robust wallop”⁴³⁵ of Mable King’s performance as Ernestina, a ridiculous blind date Dolly Levi has arranged for Horace Vandergelder to meet at the Harmonia Gardens. Walker reserved special praise for the performance of Emily Yancy as milliner Irene Malloy, whom Walker declared “is beautiful and sings beautifully.”⁴³⁶

In evaluating production values for the Bailey *Dolly!*, Walker showed equal enthusiasm. Walker wrote, “Plus all this, you have these gorgeous girls in dazzling costumes and the talented waiters [. . .]” The breakneck waiter’s ballet scene in Act Two of *Hello, Dolly!* would always provide testimony to the legacy of Gower Champion (as reproduced here by Lucia Victor) and his ability to fashion well-wrought middle-brow entertainment, as discussed in Chapter V. But it was Pearl Bailey herself that impressed Walker the most. Walker wrote of the great star

It’s a real swinger of a show. But it’s really Pearlie Mae’s when you get down to it. She puts her own stamp on the whole thing and gives it life. And when you applaud her she applauds you back.

And that means Miss Bailey has a lot of applauding to do every night!⁴³⁷

Walker’s review, taken in tandem with his journalistic coverage of the production and its cast in his weekly entertainment-news column, certainly reflect the excitement generated by the Bailey *Dolly!*, especially among African Americans, more especially among African Americans possessed of bourgeois aspiration.

One can infer that the Bailey *Dolly!* empowered such feelings of aspiration, especially among her fan base at the *Amsterdam News*. Furthermore, this focus on middle-class interests allowed for positive reviews from the *Amsterdam News*. Similarly, the reaction on the part of white print/mass-media critics’ establishment can be seen as being informed by such middle-class concern. In comparison, more serious theatre scholars, in a manner perhaps described by

Mukerji and Schudson in Chapter III, may have demonstrated an anti-populist sense of elitism towards the production.

Cast Recording

One more primary source exists that demonstrates how hot a property the Bailey *Dolly!* would prove to be on its Broadway arrival. This source is a particular gem – the RCA Victor press release that accompanied the Bailey cast’s recording of Jerry Herman’s score for *Hello, Dolly!*⁴³⁸ To the best of the knowledge of this author, no Broadway replacement cast has *ever* been granted the privilege of recording a *second* Broadway cast album.⁴³⁹ Many of the mass-media reviews that will appear later in this chapter derive from this RCA Victor press release. The press release also contains many interesting bits of history surrounding the production, including a discussion of the cast and circumstances of the 1958 film version of Thornton Wilder’s source play for *Hello, Dolly!*, *The Matchmaker*. In addition, the press release provides glorious, minute-by-minute detail concerning the session in which this *third* cast album for *Hello, Dolly!* – after the original Broadway cast featuring Carol Channing and the London cast featuring Mary Martin – was recorded. Such details included when box lunches for the cast were provided and when Cab Calloway sneaked away to watch a New York Jets football game. Typical of the detail provided by this press release would be the description of Bailey’s performance of the title number. The promotions personnel at RCA Victor write

It was THAT time -- the “Hello, Dolly!” number, and Pearl joyously offered a complete performance. Shouts of “Again![,]” “More![,]” “Once more, Pearl![,]” “Encore![,]” filled the hall during the playback as the star danced with virtually everyone in the cast. And one by one each started moving to where his coat was draped and began preparing to buck the strong winds on the

outside as Miss Bailey returned to the stage for her final number,
“So Long, Dearie.”⁴⁴⁰

Much of this material might come across to the reader as mind-numbing minutiae. It is reproduced here in this study to underscore how seriously RCA Victor took the recording of this production. As we will see in later in this chapter, the promotions personnel at RCA Victor were not alone in their enthusiasm.

Accolades for Bailey

Ultimately, Bailey would be rewarded for her effort, both by her peers and the critics’ establishment. Bailey ultimately would settle in Philadelphia (where she died of heart disease in 1990), making her biographical background a source of concern for the library staff at Pennsylvania State University. A snippet from the website prepared by the PSU library personnel confirms the awards Bailey received for her performance. The PSU library personnel write, “In 1968, she received a special Tony Award for *Hello, Dolly!*, as well the Outer Critics Circle Award for Outstanding Performances for *Hello, Dolly!*, in 1969.”⁴⁴¹ It is interesting to note that under more recent Tony Awards rules, Bailey could have been nominated for and won a Tony as a member of a replacement cast. The same could have been said of (Cab) Calloway, Yancy, Crowder, Hemsley, and (Chris) Calloway in the acting categories besides Best Actress in a Musical. Given the competition in 1968 – Melina Mercouri in *Illya Darling*, Patricia Routledge in *Darling of the Day* (tie winner), Leslie Uggams in *Hallelujah, Baby!* (tie winner), and Brenda Vacaro in *How Now, Dow Jones*, four shows that enjoyed lackluster reception and runs – Bailey probably would have won the Tony. In addition, Bailey’s co-stars likely would have fared well.

Scholarly Avoidance of the Bailey *Dolly!*

With respect to scholarly reaction to the Bailey *Dolly!*, let us refer momentarily to the film comedy *Pat & Mike* (1952).⁴⁴² In this film Spencer Tracy plays a sports manager who notes how attractive female athlete Katharine Hepburn is by saying, “Not much meat on her, but what there is, is cherce [choice].”⁴⁴³ A similar sentiment could be expressed concerning scholarly comment on David Merrick’s 1967 “all-Negro” production of *Hello, Dolly!* featuring Pearl Bailey and Cab Calloway. Of a significant sampling of the work of musical theatre scholars, one finds a range of reaction that includes non-existence, brevity, indifference, disdain, or gross inaccuracy. Despite the inadequacy of such comment, one finds an intriguing array of scholarly opinion on the production.

Let us start in this investigation of scholarly coverage of the Bailey *Dolly!* with an auspicious list of musical theatre scholars and historians who simply have avoided discussion of this production in their generalized texts on musical theatre. One is tempted to second-guess these scholars and historians as to what would seem an egregious omission, failure to include the Bailey *Dolly!* in their otherwise prodigious discussions of race. A number of possible explanations exist to explain the omission.

1. Perhaps this omission is the result of the Bailey *Dolly!*’s failure to meet Black Arts Movement standards of serious resonance with a “true” black perspective. Yet these scholars do not demur from covering other commercial efforts involving race, such as *Show Boat* and *Finian’s Rainbow*.

2. Perhaps we deal here with a scholarly avoidance of commercial success as evidence of Murphree's sense of "poverty." Yet these scholars deal with such commercial successes as *My Fair Lady* and *South Pacific*, as well as numerous other examples of middle-brow musical-theatre fare.
3. Perhaps some of the historians discussed here were simply too young to have been affected directly by the mammoth success of the Bailey *Dolly!* This may be a case of "you had to be there."
4. In another generational issue, perhaps the excitement of the moment that we will see in journalistic critical and audience reaction to the 1967 Bailey *Dolly!* had passed by the time these critics began to work.
5. As we will see in various reactions to the Bailey *Dolly!*, many people of a liberal bent on race felt uncomfortable with what was perhaps the "segregated" nature of the production. Yet we will see coverage of such productions as *Swing Mikado* and *Carmen Jones* by the very historians that avoided the Bailey *Dolly!*
6. As we will see with the work of John Bush Jones, perhaps poor scholarship led the historian to be unaware of the production.

With the exception of explanation #6, let us be crystal clear that these explanations represent near-pure conjecture on the part of this author. Ultimately, one is at a loss to understand why scholars would avoid discussion of a production as important to the trajectory of race relations in

commercial American musical theatre as the Bailey *Dolly!* (If this study succeeds in its objectives, it will be doing scholarship a service in redressing this omission, for reassessing the history, and by filling in a significant gap in the history of musical theatre and race.)

In our investigation into race and musical theatre, we have already cited Richard Kislán's *The Muscial: A look at the American musical theatre*, as a marvelous resource for musical theatre history scholarship in general.⁴⁴⁴ In particular, Kislán's discussion of the legacy of the lingering racial issues involved with minstrelsy in twentieth/twenty-first century commercial American musical theatre may well be peerless.

Kislán does not mention the Bailey *Dolly!*

In his prodigious two-volume set, Raymond Knapp explores musical theatre from the point of view of individual and societal identity. In *The American Musical and the Performance of Personal Identity*, Knapp discusses two seminal events in the history of musical theatre, "the emergence of the first auteur of the American musical, George M. Cohan, and the beginning of a series of fitful attempts to displace the blackface minstrel tradition with something more directly representative of African[-]American life, music, and characteristic modes of theatrical performance."⁴⁴⁵ Knapp continues, writing

Neither of these events may be construed as definitive, however. Minstrelsy maintained strong presence in some areas of the country until the civil rights movement of the 1960s and even beyond, and its imprint continues to be felt in the persistence of its stereotypes and attitudes. Moreover, most early landmarks in the establishment of a viable black presence and sensibility in the American musical initially had little effect on the mainstream development of the genre, and even when blacks emerged more forcefully several decades later, most notably with *Show Boat* (1927) and a variety of projects in the 1930's and into the 1940's, it was mainly under the oversight of existing mainstream white control.⁴⁴⁶

Here, Knapp shows a fine sensitivity to issues of race as concerns the history of musical theatre, especially as concerns the issue of white privilege in musical theatre and, as with Kislan, the legacy of minstrelsy in the development of commercial American musical theatre. Furthermore, in the early pages of his companion text, *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity*, Knapp pays particularly close attention to the racial aspects of the history of jazz in America, admonishing the reader “not to choose along racial or other divisive lines, but to take greater care to construct nonexclusionary histories.”⁴⁴⁷ This last discussion goes to the heart of the ostensible purpose of the *Bailey Dolly!*, a production that might be seen as an effort to include African Americans without “choosing” a mode of artistic expression that divides along lines of race.

Knapp does not mention the *Bailey Dolly!* in either text.

In *The Musical Theatre: A celebration*, noted Broadway librettist Alan J. Lerner, here in his incarnation as musical-theatre historian, discusses such racially informed productions as *Show Boat* (which Lerner cites as one of the few musicals from the 1920s that remains viable for contemporary audiences),⁴⁴⁸ Duke Ellington and John LaTouche’s *Beggar’s Holiday* (1946) (a “swing” adaptation of John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera*),⁴⁴⁹ *Finian’s Rainbow*, and *Jamaica*.⁴⁵⁰ Lerner pays particular attention to the role of composer Harold Arlen and his involvement in the creation of the Cotton Club revues.⁴⁵¹ While perhaps not presenting as extensive a discussion as either Kislan or Knapp, Lerner certainly showed awareness of and sensitivity to the issue of race in commercial American musical theatre.

Lerner does not mention the *Bailey Dolly!*

In *You Can’t Do That on Broadway: A Raisin in the Sun and other theatrical improbabilities*, Philip Rose offers a thorough autobiographical reflection of his role as a groundbreaking theatrical producer in such efforts as *A Raisin in the Sun*, *The Owl and the*

Pussycat, and *Purlie* (1970, a musical adaptation of Ossie Davis's non-musical play *Purlie Victorious* (1961), discussed in detail in its musical version in Chapter VII). The *Bailey Dolly!* transpired at the height of Rose's involvement in Broadway stage production.

Rose does not mention the *Bailey Dolly!*

A number of examples exist among the efforts of musical theatre scholars in which the *Bailey Dolly!* is not mentioned but for which there is a reasonable explanation. In *The Musical Drama*, Scott McMillin discusses Kern and Hammerstein's racially informed *Show Boat* from a structural perspective – what motivated creators Hammerstein and Kern to use certain plot points and characterizations in order to maximize the effectiveness of the piece. McMillin's *Musical Drama* text, however, was never intended as a discussion of the social history of musical theatre. It is therefore reasonable that McMillin should not mention the *Bailey Dolly!* Similarly, in *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway musical*, Andrea Most discusses such issues as Eddie Cantor's blackface in the context of Jewish-black intersection.⁴⁵² Yet the thrust of Most's work discusses Jewish-American presence on the Broadway stage. The connection of the Jews involved as primary forces in the *Bailey Dolly!*, in particular David Merrick and Jerry Herman, is fairly tangential to the racial issues involved in the production. Thus, like McMillin, Most can be excused in her exclusion of the *Bailey Dolly!* in her effort.

King, Jones, Kirle, and Woll

As one might expect, advocates of the Black Arts Movement did not pay much attention to this commercial, non-“street real” production. Yet there exists at least one example of a Black-Arts-Movement take on the *Bailey Dolly!* More confrontational theatre scholar Woodie King, Jr., derided the arrival of the *Bailey Dolly!*, arguing that “The all-Black *Hello Dolly* is

jostling David Merrick. He could produce an *all-[N]egro* Andy Gump. Hungry actors, all colors, all nationalities will beg to be in it.”⁴⁵³ If brevity be the soul of wit – in this case, wit in the form of sarcasm – then King’s short quip on the Bailey *Dolly!* certainly achieves its purpose. It would, nevertheless, be unfair to hold King to any standard of rigorous scholarly inquest based on his “Andy Gump” remark. This is an example of the proverbial apples and oranges – items that do not belong in the same discussion. From the outset, the Bailey *Dolly!* made no pretense at dealing with the kinds of “street real” issues of interest to advocates of the Black Arts Movement. In turn, let us offer King a similar courtesy, and assume that he makes no pretense of attempting a serious analysis of commercial American musical theatre.⁴⁵⁴

This leaves us with three general musical theatre historians who devote small effort to the Bailey *Dolly!* This list of authors include John Bush Jones, Richard Kirle, and Allen Woll. We deal with Jones first, who writes

[. . . S]ome black shows were strictly commercial ventures, such as two all-black revivals of previously white musicals. *Hello, Dolly!* (11/6/75) with Pearl Bailey in the title role had a disappointing run of fifty-one performances. Maybe Broadway had just “Dollyed” itself out by 1975. The second attempt in this dubious subgenre of allegedly moneymaking gimmicks was an all-black *Guys and Dolls* (7/22/76), directed and choreographed by the gifted Bill Wilson. Even though none of the cast had the immediate name recognition of Ms. Bailey, it fared much better than *Dolly*, playing 287 times.⁴⁵⁵

Never mind Jones’s apparent bias against “commercial ventures,” a bias which appears throughout his attempt at an interpretation of musical theatre history informed by a sense of 1960s/1970s counterculture. And let us avoid a discussion of the successful Motown-produced all-black version of *Guys and Dolls*. The 1975 production of *Hello, Dolly!* featuring Pearl Bailey (what we will call the Bailey *Dolly!* “redux” in Chapter VII), this time with singer-actor Billy Daniels (who had appeared with Sammy Davis, Jr., in *Golden Boy* in the 1960s) as Horace

Vandergelder, was never intended as an open-ended run. Rather, this “revival of the revival” was a limited engagement. Despite what we will see in Chapter VII as the failure of this production, Jones completely ignores of the 1967 production that was a massive commercial success and helped *Hello, Dolly!* break *My Fair Lady*’s record for longest running musical in Broadway history.⁴⁵⁶ This omission only can be described as bad scholarship.

Of the three musical theatre history scholars who deal with Pearl Bailey and *Hello, Dolly!*, it is Bruce Kirle who offers the most focused analysis of the play itself. In his thorough discussion of the creation of *Dolly!*, Kirle mentions the reliance of this otherwise well-crafted piece of musical theatre on “a big name descending that staircase at the Harmonia Gardens”⁴⁵⁷ in Act Two. Kirle links this need for star-power in *Dolly!* to noted Broadway-musical director Harold Prince. Prince had been offered the job of directing the original Carol Channing cast of *Hello, Dolly!* but turned the offer down because of its failure to be sufficiently character-based. Rather, Prince felt the success of *Dolly!* would be based on star power and audience familiarity.⁴⁵⁸ Kirle quotes Prince, writing

“The “Hello, Dolly!” number has nothing to do with Dolly Levi. She’s a woman who has no money and scrounges around; she’s never been to a place as fancy as the Harmonia Gardens, where the number happens. She’s heard about it, and she goes there because she’s heard about it and wants to have a good time. The way the number is now, you’re talking about a woman who has lived her life at ‘21’ [the famous New York nightclub].”⁴⁵⁹

Prince’s criticism of Dolly’s motivation and presence at the Harmonia Gardens seems odd, as there would seem to be every reference in the world to the late Efraim Levi’s generosity in both *The Matchmaker* and *Hello, Dolly!* Nevertheless, let us not quarrel with this obscure criticism on Prince’s part. More important is that in the next breath, Kirle waxes eloquently on the performances of the legions of middle-aged women, each of whom played a Dolly Levi crafted to her strong points. For example, dance numbers were added for hoofers Ginger Rogers and

Betty Grable and a bit of humor was added for broad comedian Martha Raye involving her collision with a human-inhabited horse in the opening number.⁴⁶⁰

After this well-focused analysis of the literary value and stage-worthiness of *Hello, Dolly!* in general, Kirle offers one sentence with reference to Pearl Bailey, to wit, “Pearl Bailey ad-libbed and was supported by an all-black cast, including jazz great Cab Calloway as an unlikely Horace Vandergelder.” This sentence, of course, refers to the star-power argument that describes Bailey’s personal success in this role. One could take this star-power observation as a criticism of the show-business-y, presentational nature of Bailey’s performance. On the other hand, one could interpret Kirle’s observation as describing a particular strength in Bailey’s performance: the flexibility of this Dolly Levi role that allowed performers as diverse as Carol Channing, Ginger Rogers, Martha Raye, *and* Pearl Bailey to craft performances tailor-made to their talents. In Bailey’s case, this flexibility allowed her to “play black” at a comfort level that white audiences found unthreatening.

Woll’s analysis of the Bailey *Dolly!* takes particular note of the politics and social concerns. Like Jones, Woll begins his analysis by discussing the advent in the late 1960s and early 1970s of black-populated productions of previously whites-only productions such as the Motown *Guys and Dolls* and the Bailey *Dolly!*, offering an odious comparison with the various black-infused adaptations of *Mikado* and *Carmen Jones* from the 1930s and 1940s. Woll lauds the Motown *Guys and Dolls*, noting that “[d]espite a healthy run [on the part of the all-black *Guys and Dolls*] through the summer of the Bicentennial year, few endeavored to follow in the footsteps of *Dolly or Dolls*, as new and original black musicals began to appear on the scene.”⁴⁶¹ With great insight that sums up the argument against black versions of formerly all-white material, Woll writes

The all-black swing versions or modernizations of the classics were efforts during a time of crisis when no black alternatives were feasible or available. Once a new black theatre began to blossom in the late 1970s, these makeshift modernizations were consigned to the dustbin.⁴⁶²

While it might be debatable to describe the Bailey *Dolly!* as a “makeshift modernization,” Woll certainly gets to the heart of the matter – whether the Bailey *Dolly!* served as an advance or decline for African-American involvement in musical theatre. Taking his reporting of the Actors Equity “according to ability” predicament we saw in Chapter V in tandem with his “dustbin” discussion of the explosion of non-Euro-centered black expression in musical theatre in the era that followed the Bailey *Dolly!*, Woll would seem to have thoroughly covered highlights of the diversity of argument against an all-African-American production of *Hello, Dolly!* Woll completes his thorough survey of this production by discussing issues mentioned elsewhere in this study, including the Johnsons’ involvement and Pearl Bailey’s personal aversion to criticism of the production because it was not integrated.

New York Critics

Kirle and Woll notwithstanding, if academia either ignored the Bailey *Dolly!*, got it wrong, or offered little elucidation on the subject, the same could *not* be said for print journalists or other non-scholarly commentators. There was in fact counter-example to the effusive reaction the production engendered among both mass-media critics and audiences to the Bailey *Dolly!* Miles Kreuger, coordinator of the Institute of the American Musical in Los Angeles, recalls having seen this production and *not* being impressed with the quality of the performance, especially as compared to the production surrounding any of the Dolly Levis who appeared on Broadway before Pearl Bailey. In a telephone interview with the author of this study, Kreuger

complained of sloppy choreography among other issues. Kreuger is the only non-scholarly critic whom this author has encountered who had anything negative to say concerning the quality of the performers and performance. Others gave producer David Merrick the moral equivalent of a belated bar mitzvah gift. One can only surmise that the raves the Bailey *Dolly!* received served as a countervailing reaction to such panned shows as the aforementioned *Subways Are for Sleeping*, the advertising campaign for which involved Merrick finding ordinary citizens with the same name as famous critics and attempting to use the quotes of the ordinary citizens in advertising. Merrick did not have to pull such shenanigans this time. The glowing reviews for the Bailey *Dolly!* gave Merrick all the room in the world to promote the production on its own merits.

Despite the paucity of coverage and analysis among musical theatre scholars concerning the Bailey *Dolly!*, Kirle and Woll at least give us a relevant starting point for an analysis of mass-media reaction to the Bailey *Dolly!*. Kirle makes the argument, via Harold Prince, that *Hello, Dolly!* is, at its heart, a star vehicle for any woman playing Dolly Levi. Woll, in turn, considers the issues of musical-theatre material previously reserved for whites only, as well as the related issue of the history of racial hiring practices on Broadway, both of which revolve around the concept of redressing previous mistreatment of black musical theatre performers. Let us begin our analysis of mass-media critical response by considering these two issues – *Hello, Dolly!* as a star vehicle for Bailey, and the change in treatment of African-American performance personnel in commercial American musical theatre for which the Bailey *Dolly!* seemed a harbinger.

Let us now focus our attention on this group of privileged, not particularly well-trained, often arbitrary, and, not coincidentally, all white and all male (at least in November of 1967, the time frame of interest for this study) group of individuals with the power to make or break a

Broadway production. We speak of course of the mass-media drama critics located in and working for media outlets in the vicinity of New York City. In “The Newspaperman as Critic: The New York Drama Reviewers,” Lenyth Brockett outlines a broad set of criteria by which one can evaluate the meaning and effect of the opinions of the New York mass-media drama critics establishment. Brockett acknowledges via then-*New York Herald Tribune* drama critic Walter Kerr that even in 1953, when Brockett’s article was published, these drama critics wielded inordinate power over the economic success of any Broadway production. Brockett quotes Kerr (whom we will see later in this chapter in his capacity as a senior drama critic at the *New York Times*, the position he took after the *Herald Tribune* folded in the 1960s) as saying, “The present day audience insists on being guided by newspapers before it will go to the theatre . . . There have always been critics, but the audience has not always given them this power.”⁴⁶³ Brockett offers further comment on this power Kerr has vested upon the critics, writing, “As a consequence of their present position of authority, the work of the newspaper critics now assumes a practical significance now out of proportion, in most cases, to its intrinsic merit.”⁴⁶⁴ In wielding this power, Brockett notes that drama critics working for commercial newspapers, in addition to offering criticism of questionable value, have become “unnecessarily harsh”⁴⁶⁵ in their reviews. Central to Brockett’s difficulty with these harsh, sarcasm-laden reviews, is the complaint that these drama critics, with rare exception, receive little training in theatre, either with respect to practical application or history and theory. (Brockett notes that of the critics active at the writing of the article, only Walter Kerr had any significant training in theatre.) These critics, to Brockett, receive most of their training and apprenticeship in journalism rather than theatre. Thus, rather than offering a serious discussion of any aspects of theatre involved in a reviewed production, newspaper drama critics act in the role of “consumer affairs reporter,” offering what William Hawkins of the *World-Telegram* describes as a “shopping service” for

theatre audiences. Brockett quotes Hawkins as saying, “I have always objected to the use of the word ‘criticism’ as applied to newspapers. I don’t believe that what is written in a hurry during a couple of hours after a nerve wracked original performance of a play has anything to do with criticism. It is, at best, straight reporting, which is what the newspaper wants anyway.”⁴⁶⁶

Brockett also offers a similar opinion from *New York Times* critic Brooks Atkinson, who asserts that he works not for the theatre but for the public.⁴⁶⁷ (We note that although journalists writing for weekly or monthly periodicals do *not* have overnight deadlines for their drama reviews, for the purposes of this study, they will be considered, much as their daily newspaper cohorts, as lacking sufficient time to consider a theatrical performance in a manner that reflects any long term import.)

Of particular interest to the Bailey *Dolly!* in this discussion is how Brockett associates this “shopper’s guide” function of the newspaper drama critic with temporary tastes offering little lasting import. Brockett refers again to Walter Kerr, who acknowledges that as a reporter covering theatre, he reports “what is tolerable for the moment.”⁴⁶⁸ This acknowledgement leads Brockett to conclude that the “context of the season”⁴⁶⁹ influences the newspaper-drama-review business. This conclusion is especially germane to the Bailey *Dolly!* As we shall observe in Chapter VII, the electricity surrounding the 1967 incarnation of Pearl Bailey’s performance as Dolly Levi as a reflection of advances in the arena of civil rights would give way to ennui surrounding her return visit to Broadway in 1975.

In consideration of Brockett, one must consider that a proviso exists as to the value of comments offered by newspaper drama critics with respect to any academic inquest. Yet this “shopping service” offered by newspaper drama critics must be seen as a reflection of a number of factors of interest to this study. These factors include accurate descriptions of Murphree’s

“poor theatre” concept, social and political issues reflected in the production, and especially the electric response engendered by the Bailey *Dolly!*

What follows is a long survey of mass-media critical reaction to the Bailey *Dolly!* While an effort will be made to avoid casual repetitiveness, the reader is warned of a cavalcade of the near universal praise this production received. We use this repetition as a device to emphasize how incredibly well-received this production was, both in terms of aesthetic value *and* social import. Anything less than a thorough survey of these mass-media reviews would not do justice to the amazing reviews the Bailey *Dolly!* tallied up. The reader will take note of superlative heaped on superlative to describe reaction to the Bailey *Dolly!*

Pearl Bailey’s Star Vehicle

In the “consumer affairs reporter” capacity as described by Brockett and as we saw in Walker’s *Amsterdam News* review of the production, it would almost go without saying that the reaction on the part of mass-media drama critics to the star power Pearl Bailey brought to her performance as Dolly Levi – as referenced by Kirle via Harold Prince – was universal in its wholehearted recommendation. Not only were these critics, contrary to Brockett’s assertion, far from “unnecessarily harsh.” Their reviews of the Bailey *Dolly!* were love letters to the at least momentary excitement generated by this production.

In this discussion of Pearl Bailey’s star power, we begin with John McCarten of *New Yorker* magazine who described Bailey as “an entertainer impossible to fault.”⁴⁷⁰ Similarly, Leonard Harris at the local CBS television outlet news offered that “[. . .] Pearl Bailey is the fourth Dolly I’ve seen, and only the original – Carol Channing – is comparable”⁴⁷¹ and “Miss Bailey is certainly the most hip Dolly yet.”⁴⁷² Clive Barnes at the *New York Times* added, ““She

took the whole musical in her hands and swung it around her neck as easily as if it were a feather boa.”⁴⁷³ Other critics offered even grander prose. After discussing Bailey’s performance method, replete with trademark Bailey contrivances, Prideaux (*Life*) agreed with McCarten, offering, “But for all her spurts of gab, Pearl in her role is a sensitive and deft actress because she never overacts [. . .] What makes Pearl such an all-conquering Dolly is her reconciliation of lion and lamb, the love-in between the two.”⁴⁷⁴ Gerald Strober of *Christian Century* magazine heaped voluminous praise on Bailey, offering that after Carol Channing, Ginger Rogers, Martha Raye, and Betty Grable, Pearl Bailey would “have to be the last [Broadway incarnation of Dolly Levi] because no one can possibly follow her.”⁴⁷⁵ Kroll (*Newsweek*) wrote, “The original Dolly, Carol Channing, is a one-of-a-kind performer about whose merits the world’s great minds could argue forever; Pearl Bailey is also one-of-a-kind, and there is no argument about her at all.”⁴⁷⁶ Richard Watts, Jr., of the *New York Post* wrote, “[. . . A]t the end of the performances, it appeared that [members of the audience] were determined to climb onto the stage en masse and embrace the splendid Miss Bailey.”⁴⁷⁷ Contrary to other observations of lack of professionalism on the part of the star, Watts commented on Bailey shedding her previous reputation of playing hard and fast with the book of any show in which she was performing, noting that “[i]n the title role of ‘Dolly’ [Bailey] resists the temptation and really acts the role, playing the part charmingly and humorously, making the managerial-type widow from Yonkers a believably formidable but utterly endearing woman.”⁴⁷⁸ In the press release to which we alluded in Chapter V, the promotion people at RCA Victor amplified their accolades of Bailey, writing

Jack O’Brian spoke of her in his *Voice of Broadway* column: “Pearlie Mae is the 8th Dolly- and the best.” And in *Women’s Wear Daily*, Chauncey Howell was equally as enthusiastic: “The redoubtable Pearlie Mae, as she refers to herself in her nightclub act, is the last - and possibly the best - in a long line of Dollies.”⁴⁷⁹

One of the strongest takes on the electricity of Bailey's performance appeared in the *Morning Telegraph*.⁴⁸⁰ *Telegraph* critic Whitney Bolton lamented on how as a drama critic one would have so precious little to do on the occasion of the Bailey *Dolly!*, writing

Of what possible use is a dramatic critic at a performance of "Hello, Dolly!" with Pearl Bailey in the title role? None. It's a night off for him, a breeze, a time to relax and let that lustrous performer take over and shake the place down. Which is what she does. She comes onto that stage, steps off that horse-car, looks you right in the eye and says in effect, "all right, chum, let's get this show into high speed."⁴⁸¹

Bolton's comments here reflect sardonically on the Brockett commentary concerning the role of the New York drama critic. These comments reflect no particular depth at professional theatre acumen. Nevertheless, Bolton's air of the blasé only adds to the cumulative irresistibility of Bailey's performance.

At the *Daily News*, critic John Chapman complimented Bailey's acting acumen and her ability to find the amiable "fraudulence"⁴⁸² Concurring with Chapman's contention of the inherent "fraudulence" written into the part of Dolly Levi, Bolton complimented Bailey on her realization that an audience knows "right away what Dolly Levi is- a con woman, smooth, attractive, beguiling and silken, a lovely lush and luxuriant and self-confident con woman, a slick and affectionate heister [sic – perhaps Bolton meant "sheister"] who gets everything she wants from anybody in sight."⁴⁸³

Supporting Cast and Crew

In addition to the "Bailey star power" argument as put forth by Kirle and Prince, New York critics were effusive concerning the performances of Cab Calloway and the rest of the cast. Praise was especially strong for Calloway. Kroll (*Newsweek*) echoes other critics in saying that

the small role of Horace Vandergelder, with only the song “It Takes a Woman” available for the Vandergelder character to perform, was no test of Cab Calloway’s talent.⁴⁸⁴ Watts (*New York Post*) joined Kroll in lamenting that there wasn’t more for Calloway to do. Lantz (*Ebony*) also commented on the change in the Horace Vandergelder character. Where once Horace had been portrayed as “gray”,⁴⁸⁵ Calloway’s portrayal of Yonkers’ notorious “half a millionaire,” in Lantz’s opinion, was now a “colorful, distinctive character, a perfect sparring partner to Pearl’s Dolly.”⁴⁸⁶ An un-credited *Life* reviewer repeats many of the accolades already mentioned by other reviewers, adding an additional twist concerning the chemistry between Calloway and Bailey. After discussing Calloway’s fine contribution to the effort, the review sums up with the coy flirtation, “But over Cab – and the entire show – smiling Pearl holds the whip.”⁴⁸⁷ Barnes (*New York Times*) wrote, “The gorgeous Mr. Calloway, as the mean and respectable Horace Vandergelder who is Dolly’s perfect match, amply shared his Dolly’s triumph.”⁴⁸⁸ David Goldman, drama critic for WCBS-AM radio (an all-news outlet), noted, “Cab Calloway is slick and easy in the role of Vandergelder, and performs in such a way that one thinks if there were no Robert Preston, Cab Calloway could fill the same parts.”⁴⁸⁹ In an un-credited review in *Time* magazine, the reviewer called Calloway “first-rate.”⁴⁹⁰

The New York critics’ establishment, however, was not as strictly unanimous concerning Calloway’s performance as they were with Bailey’s. At the *Wall Street Journal*, Richard P. Cooke dissented with the majority on the subject of Calloway. Cooke writes, “Mr. Calloway struts and acts and sings well, although he lacks the comic pomposity of David Burns, which made Horace Vandergelder so amusing in the original production.”⁴⁹¹ Cooke found himself in the distinct minority in his assessment of Calloway’s performance.

In addition to praise for Calloway’s performance, the New York critics had many fine things to say concerning the rest of the cast. Chapman (*Daily News*) complimented the lesser

players as well, especially Calloway's daughter Chris in her Broadway debut as ingénue Minnie Fay. Goldman (WCBS-AM) concurred with other critics in their praise for the ensemble, tossing almost randomly tossed compliments in all directions for the new *Dolly!* cast.⁴⁹² Reviews contained in the press material from RCA Victor add depth to these observations. Concerning the performance of Emily Yancy as Irene Molloy, the promotions personnel at RCA Victor wrote

[. . .] Emily Yancy [is a] former anatomical research specialist at NYU, fashion model, and stand-by for Leslie Uggams in "Hallelujah, Baby!" Miss Yancy makes her Broadway debut [presumably as a member of the regular cast and *not* a standby-by] in "Hello, Dolly!" and has drawn such critical comment as " . . . a great find" (*Women's Wear Daily*); " . . . sings and dances with uncommon grace" (*Cue Magazine*); " . . . one of the most beautiful girls I've seen on the stage since the first appearance of Lena Horne." (*New York Post*).⁴⁹³

Similarly, the promotions personnel at RCA Victor provided complimentary prose concerning Jack Crowder's performance as Cornelius, writing

Jack Crowder is Vandergelder's chief clerk, Cornelius Hackl, and comes to "Hello, Dolly!" from the only show in town which has been running longer, "The Fantasticks." Leonard Harris said in his WCBS-TV review: "Jack Crowder and Emily Yancy are simply the best people who ever played those roles." In *Cue Magazine*, Greer Johnson commented: "(He) is a baritone of unusual skill."⁴⁹⁴

The promotions personnel at RCA Victor were equally effusive concerning the performance of Cab Calloway's daughter Chris as Minnie Fay, writing

The *Women's Wear Daily* review singled her out as "a Carol Burnett with good looks and taste" and said that she plays the role of Minnie Fay, the milliner's assistant, "to squeaking perfection." Wrote *Cue Magazine*: "Chris Calloway is a pert and sparkling comedienne who all but takes over the show."⁴⁹⁵

Praise was doled out liberally for the production values of the Bailey *Dolly!* by the New York critics. McCarten (*New Yorker*) wrote, "The production has been exuberantly restaged by

Lucia Victor, and Freddy Wittop has supplied some dazzling costumes. The ubiquitous Oliver Smith created the settings, which are admirable.”⁴⁹⁶ In the un-credited review in *Time* magazine, the correspondent focused on the “dazzling exaggerations of turn-of-the-century elegance”⁴⁹⁷ featured in this production. This comment would seem to beg the issue of racial inclusion in capitalist excess as proof of bourgeois entrée. In this production, as compared to something like the Gershwins’ *Porgy and Bess*, African Americans were no longer automatically cosigned to a rural boondocks like Catfish Row. Audiences could watch on as the black Dolly, Horace, and their cohorts had arrived in style and “elegance.”

Comparison to the Original Production and Audience Reaction

This praise for performances of the entire company as well as first-rate production values for the Bailey *Dolly!* yielded inevitable comparisons of this company to previous incarnations of *Hello, Dolly!* on Broadway. Watts (*New York Post*) led the crowd of critics by declaring, “You really haven’t seen ‘Hello, Dolly!’ unless you’ve seen it in the production headed by Pearl Bailey and Cab Calloway that has now taken over at the St. James Theater.”⁴⁹⁸ Cooke (*Wall Street Journal*) added, “‘Hello, Dolly!’ seems to get older as it gets younger.”⁴⁹⁹ One assumes that via the context of uncontained enthusiasm surrounding this comment, Cooke means to say that longevity had been kind to *Hello, Dolly!*, especially in the Bailey incarnation. McCarten (*New Yorker*) would seem to have concurred in Cooke’s observation on the longevity of *Hello, Dolly!* and how Bailey and company helped the process. Cooked noted that “[. . . A] lot of bounce has been added to a show that has been running since the McKinley Administration.”⁵⁰⁰ Harris (WCBS-TV) added, “[The new production] will bring the musical to the attention of those who haven’t seen it and get old Dolly-goers back for a second look.”⁵⁰¹

In light of all these superlatives, it would have been difficult for the New York critics to avoid commentary concerning the overwhelmingly positive audience reaction. Watt (*New York Post*) was unqualified in his observation of the joy shared by audience members during the performance he attended. Perhaps because it was a replacement cast and in lieu of attending the official opening night, Watts attended a Saturday matinee preview performance, hardly prepared for the sheer electricity of the moment. Watts wrote, “[The audience] was made up of paying customers, many of whom probably didn’t know in advance that an entirely new cast was going into it, and I have rarely been among so many unaffectedly enthusiastic spectators.”⁵⁰² Chapman (*Daily News*) concurred with Watts, writing, ““In my many years of playgoing I have seldom heard a more vociferous welcome given to a pair of stars – and it came right from the heart.”⁵⁰³ Sharing Chapman’s overwhelming sense of emotion concerning audience response to the Bailey *Dolly!*, Alan N. Bunce of the *Christian Science Monitor* wrote, “Here is an audience whose irrepressible applause is no mere gesture of social approval for the newcomers. It is an honest response to dazzling showmanship.”⁵⁰⁴

The New York Critics and Race

Given the ethnic make-up of the cast, comments touching on the issue of race were bound to fill the columns of many of these New York critics. Strober (*Christian Century*) paid particular attention to the racial make-up of the audience. “The audience, already more integrated than most Broadway crowds,” wrote Strober, “will become, under the spell of this black company, a unit, a single group of pleasure sharers, partners in a great experience and in the larger society, which on occasions like this can live up to its billing.”⁵⁰⁵ In this instance, Strober would seem to note how attractive this production is to bourgeois black audiences, who

perhaps, as discussed in earlier chapters, might long to see their lives reflected in the onstage hijinks of Dolly, Horace, and company. In a larger frame, Strober furthermore acknowledges the possible triumph of the Great Society rubric of race relations. Clearly, Strober sees success in this moment.

To the New York critics, the Bailey *Dolly!* offered a moment of reconsideration of the quality of performance and production values in the original incarnation in light of the new all-black cast, as well as a newfound fervor in terms of audience response to the show. Furthermore, as we saw with Woll, the New York critics found much upon which to comment when considering the role of race in the new production. Much like the lion's share of musical-theatre academicians in their reaction to this production, these New York critics offered a wide range of commentary on the racial aspects of the Bailey *Dolly!*, from light-hearted dismissal and borderline condescension to fairly serious consideration. McCarten (*New Yorker*), in addition to his "bounce" comment mentioned earlier with respect to the entire production, noted that Calloway could "strut with the best of them."⁵⁰⁶ In both cases, McCarten would seem to have been treading on thin ice concerning racial stereotypes. As important here is McCarten's avoidance of any underlying political issues, owing perhaps to white comfort level, both on McCarten's part and on the part of his readership. In perhaps a similarly condescending vein, the un-credited reviewer from *Time* magazine brought up the issue of applying Merrick's Africanization formula to other productions. After commenting that this production had risen above blackface stereotype, the reviewer added, "In fact, David Merrick's Negro *Dolly* comes off so well that other producers may soon be using black power to pump new life into other hits that have gone the distance. Louis Armstrong as Tevye? Diahann Carroll as Mame?"⁵⁰⁷ The Diahann Carroll reference of course begs an issue already discussed in Chapter V. With the reference in the title song from *Mame* to bringing "the cakewalk back into style" as well as other

odes to the romanticizing of any racism associated with the American South, it would be insensitive to picture a black Auntie Mame performing in the Lawrence/Lee/Herman musical adaptation, no matter how talented the performer. Though perhaps equally ridiculous, especially with respect to ethnic roles, the idea of Louis Armstrong as Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*, in contrast to the *Mame* example, offers delicious post-modern possibilities.⁵⁰⁸ One might imagine Armstrong teamed with Ella Fitzgerald as wife Golde tossing off a scat version of Tevye and Golde's sardonic charm song, "Do You Love Me?"

Edward Sothern Hipp of the *Newark (New Jersey) Evening News* wrote of the sheer electricity that marked Pearl Bailey's opening night performance. Hipp commented

Her first appearance, without a word, brought an ovation lasting several minutes. After that it was a series of show-stopping numbers, but with most of the hysteria saved up for "Before the Parade Passes My By" and, of course, "Hello, Dolly!" That number brought a shouting, waving, audience to its feet and Miss Bailey, wearing a flaming red period evening gown with picture-hat to match and loving every precious moment, strutted, cakewalked -- and beamed.⁵⁰⁹

In addition to bolstering and further informing the "Bailey star power" discussion in which we engaged earlier, Hipp's review raises two significant issues concerning race. First, Hipp tosses off the possibly racially-infused reference to the "cakewalk" with no consideration of possible political implications. Second, and consequentially, the full minutes of ovation for Bailey may have been a result of years of goodwill built up by the star. Yet these ovations also would seem to be informed not only by the goodwill of Pearl Bailey, but the political and social implications of the moment.

Hipp was joined by others in considering, either implicitly or explicitly, the more serious aspects of race in this production. Kroll (*Newsweek*) was less than impressed with source material of Stewart and Herman's *Hello, Dolly!* (This compares to the *Daily News*' Chapman's

praise of the source material.) Kroll goes one step further, suggesting that *Dolly!* was perhaps a minstrel show that had been playing in “whiteface” in the nearly four years preceding Bailey’s arrival. Given the discussion of minstrelsy in Chapter IV, this would seem perhaps an unfair criticism. What would seem to be at issue is the intersection between “gay 90s” styles as portrayed in any production of *Dolly!* with the aesthetics of minstrelsy, often co-opted by whites of the era as discussed in Chapter IV. Yet Kroll backs up this opinion, writing

It was producer David Merrick’s idea to hypo the four-year-old multimillion-gross musical with an all-Negro cast and it is a diabolically brilliant idea, despite (or maybe because of) its somewhat embarrassing echoes of the old eyeball-rolling truckin’-on-down days of *Hallelujah*, *The Hot Mikado*, *Carmen Jones*, and those other sepia shows that treated Negro entertainers as if they were exotic ethnic groups from the Hotcha Islands imported by S. Hurok.⁵¹⁰

Other critics joined in Kroll’s left-handed compliment of Merrick’s “show biz” acumen as well as Merrick’s ability to negotiate what might once have been considered an impassable racial divide. Chapman (*Daily News*) wrote, ““Producer David Merrick has never been anybody’s fool, and putting a Negro company into this old musical has been a brilliant stroke of showmanship.”⁵¹¹ Harris (WCBS-TV) complained, “I don’t suppose there is any good artistic reason for this segregated ‘Hello, Dolly!’, but commercially, it’s a brilliant move [on Merrick’s part].”⁵¹² In contrast, Kroll would seem to have been in the vast minority in this “Hotcha Islands” comment on presenting blacks as exotics. Most critics acquiesced in the “party line” offered by David Merrick, that not a word or note of the original script and score had to be changed in order to suit the all-black company. Harris (WCBS-TV) concurred in this party line, offering the observation that “[racial] motives should in no way reflect on the excellence and the excitement of the production.”⁵¹³ If *Hello, Dolly!* offered some off-center presentation of

exoticism, as Kroll would seem to contend, this exoticism would seem to have had little if anything to do with any racial divide.

In contrast to Kroll, Bunce (*Christian Science Monitor*) wrote, “The show’s attraction lies not in any ‘exotic appeal’ of an all-black cast. It rests on material and performers, pure and simple.”⁵¹⁴ For Lantz (*Ebony*), any criticism of the all-black nature of the production fell to the wayside. Lantz included a quip from *New York Times* drama critic Clive Barnes, who went to the show expecting to find “*Blackbirds of 1907*, [something] all too patronizing for words,”⁵¹⁵ yet came home from the performance thoroughly converted to the gospel according to Pearl Bailey. As a fitting end to a glowing review, Lantz concludes, “To those who object to an all-Negro *Dolly!*, one can only say, ‘Go and see it.’ You’ll become so involved with the characters as human beings, you’ll leave the theatre in love with the world. You may not be a better person after seeing [Pearl Bailey in] *Hello, Dolly!*, but you’ll feel like one.”⁵¹⁶ Contrary to Harold Prince’s admonition against the one-dimensionality of *Hello, Dolly!*, Lantz stresses the heart-warming yet not-necessarily-maudlin humanity involved in this production.

Earlier, we discussed Strober’s (*Christian Century*) observations on the racial make-up of the Bailey *Dolly!* audience, along with the observation that this more black-infused audience showed success of the Great Society ethic. In a more in-depth discussion of race on Strober’s part, we notice that Strober cast this success in terms of comparing such conciliatory race relations to a seemingly polar opposite. Strober observed that the production

[. . .] does not involve Jesse Gray and rent strikers, Milton Galamison and irate parents or even [H. Rap] Brown, [Stokely] Carmichael and unreconstructed snick chicks. It does involve Pearl Bailey, Cab Calloway and a singularly gorgeous company of the swiftest people to grace to boards since Rosa Parks decided to sit down.⁵¹⁷

One interpretation of this comparison to the Black Power movement involves white comfort levels. It would seem that where Strober is uncomfortable with the radical likes of Gray, Galamison, Brown, and Carmichael, he was very comfortable with Bailey and her cohorts. In the process, Strober would seem to be able to use his praise of the all-black *Dolly!* company as evidence of an absence of racism on his part. It is not unfair to paint Strober as concerned with such accusations. In addition to his earlier comment on how no performer could follow Pearl Bailey as Dolly Levi, Strobel praised Bailey's "grace, rhythm (yes, dammit, rhythm) and consummate skill."⁵¹⁸ The "yes, dammit, rhythm" comment shows an effort on Strober's part to at once be sensitive to racial stereotype yet to show a lack of fear invoking such a stereotype when appropriate. Involved here is a difficult line to negotiate, between a fear of being accused of racism and a desire to describe the situation accurately. Yet Strobel would seem to have negotiated the line as admirably as possible. In yet another racial commentary, Strobel writes, "If I had some bread I'd lay it on CORE and suggest that it organize theatre parties for blacks who struggle with inferiority feelings and whites who swagger with superiority." This would seem to be a reference to the CORE boycotts of Broadway theatre productions mentioned in the discussion in Chapter V of David Merrick's career as a producer. That Strobel notes with irony the presence of whites with presumably false feelings of racial superiority makes sense. However, Strobel's comment on supposed black feelings of inferiority presents yet another dicey issue concerning race. This may be a generational issue, as "black is beautiful" was a relatively new concept when Strobel wrote his review.

Special Recognition

Certainly, the mass-media reviews covered in this study demonstrate how powerful an effect the Bailey *Dolly!* had upon its opening. The power of the Bailey *Dolly!* would not, however, end with this set of glowing opening night reviews. For the Bailey *Dolly!* was special, and would be singled out for special treatment by mass media. Two particular special instances come to mind: a special drama commentary on the part of senior critic Walter Kerr in the arts section of the Sunday *New York Times*, and Cue Magazine's selection of Bailey as its "Entertainer of the Year."

Let us deal with the *New York Times* first. In addition to Clive Barnes' enthusiastic opening night review as quoted earlier in this chapter by Lantz (*Ebony*) and Barthel's (*New York Times*) lengthy interview with Bailey which we discussed earlier in this chapter, senior *Times* drama critic Walter Kerr joined in the merriment, heaping praise on the production. Kerr waxed poetic, writing,

EVENTUALLY [capitals sic] people are going to stop going back to see "Hello" Dolly!" They'll just settle down and live there.

It's lovely living light living, let's-get-about-on-tiptoe living, and what's most remarkable about it is not that Pearl Bailey is remarkable (which she is) but that the whole show makes you feel as though you'd just stepped onto one of those old-fashioned garden swings that somebody had already set in motion and that was going to go on swooping and diving, soaring and dipping and soaring again, until it finally took off for the moon. Apollo rockets forsooth. The Government is working on the wrong project.⁵¹⁹

Unable to curb his enthusiasm, Kerr offers great detail of how the Bailey *Dolly!* reminded him of the high points of the original production. Kerr writes

Though I'd clearly remembered Gower Champion's manic management of his shoo-fly waiters, skewering dinners on the run and popping corks during half gainers, as well as the runaway on

the runway that constitutes the title number, I'd really forgotten how flute-happy and how carbonated a number of the other songs were. There's a dandy little piano-roll rattle at the opening of Act II ("Elegance"), a shimmering, summery plaint ("Ribbons Down My Back") that is now being very sweetly sung by Emily Yancy, a quiet but manly ballad ("It Only Takes a Moment") perfectly managed by a fine performer named Jack Crowder, and, above all, a combination tap and soft-shoe airlift for the whole company called "Dancing." When the orchestra struck up "Dancing" during the second-act overture at a recent matinee, a child who will never see two again simply sailed out of her seat in the very first row and went winging up and down the aisle like a seagull who'd been slipping brandy. She couldn't help it. Personality, I felt like bolting back to the lobby to buy myself of stronger stuff and I supposed it.⁵²⁰

The author of this study apologizes for the perhaps undue length of these quotes from Kerr's paean to the Bailey *Dolly!* This material has been inserted because simple paraphrasing neither would nor could demonstrate the reaction to the Bailey *Dolly!* on the part of as distinguished a dramaturg as Kerr. Like the rest of New York in November, 1967, Kerr had fallen head-over-heels in love with the new *Dolly!*

Kerr was not alone. In our other instance of special journalistic treatment of the Bailey *Dolly!*, we turn to *Cue* magazine, a publication devoted specifically to coverage of mainstream arts and performance events in New York City. *Cue*'s front-line drama critic Greer Johnson concurred with critics mentioned earlier in singling out the Bailey *Dolly!* as superior to any previous incarnation, writing, "This is without doubt or reservation the best of all the Dolly productions. The entire show has a silken integration of book, music and dance it has never before possessed."⁵²¹ In addition to Johnson's immediate review that followed opening night for the Bailey *Dolly!*, the editors of *Cue* magazine unanimously named Bailey 1967 "Entertainer of the Year" – an honor previously reserved for the likes of Diahann Carroll, Sammy Davis, Jr., Zero Mostel, and Barbra Streisand – based on Bailey's "dazzling versatility and her extraordinary artistry."⁵²² *Cue* senior critic Emory Lewis offered further concurrence with

fellow critic Johnson on the superiority of this all-black cast of *Hello, Dolly!* as compared to its predecessors, writing, “Certainly this is, without doubt or reservation, the best of all the Dolly productions.”⁵²³

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, we looked at advance journalistic reception for the Bailey *Dolly!* and scholarly discussion of the event. The paucity of scholarly discussion was compared to the effusive reaction engendered by the production among popular media commentators.

Advance journalistic reception for the Bailey *Dolly!* was notable for its thoroughness and enthusiasm. Such coverage allowed the mainstream public to get a glimpse of both the mammoth, glittering nature of the production (amplified by the replacement cast creating a new recording of the score) as well as the intent and attitudes of its principal agents, especially the racially conciliatory Pearl Bailey. Bailey’s discussions of race in this pre-production publicity could be seen as serving as a signal to white audiences of the safety and non-threatening nature of the production.

Of particular interest in dealing with critical reaction to the Bailey *Dolly!* was the near-dismissal by the establishment of academic musical-theatre historians of the Bailey *Dolly!* We discussed the role of and conundrums involved in scholarly efforts, and how ignoring the production did a disservice to the history of the Broadway stage and race relations.

We then explored the overwhelmingly positive critical reaction, especially in terms of the star power generated by Bailey herself, the high quality of both performance and production (as will be compared especially to Bailey’s tepid attempt to revive her *Dolly!* performance in the 1970s), and the racial implications of the production. In the latter-most concern, the New York

City theatre critics' establishment nearly unanimously found itself on the side of lauding the all-black cast as an improvement, both aesthetically and in any social or political sense, to *Dolly!* casts that had proceeded the Bailey incarnation.

From the point of view of popular/mass-media criticism, the Bailey *Dolly!* was a rousing, unqualified success. As we shall see, such positive reaction would serve as harbinger to changes in the treatment of interests of African Americans on the Broadway stage.

Endnotes

⁴¹⁰ According to the website http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1355/is_n6_v84/ai_13825082/ (accessed November 29, 2010), designed to promote the achievements of Michigan State University students and graduates, an article appeared in *Jet* magazine (*Ebony's* cohort publication) on June 7, 1993, describing Lantz, a journalist associated with *Jet* and *Ebony* in the 1960s, as an apparently white native of Sweden who married Junius Griffin, a presumably black executive with Motown records. The child from their by-then-dissolved marriage was being honored as the recipient of a National Science Foundation grant as outstanding minority student graduating in psychology.

⁴¹¹ Lantz, 80

⁴¹² Lantz, 80. Bailey continues by saying, "We're not doing a show at all. Just love, that's all." In another anecdote, Lantz (85) describes a "mystic" interaction between Bailey and a group of flower children at the Lincoln Memorial. The flower children were in Washington, D.C., for a peace march at the Pentagon during the Bailey *Dolly!* out-of-town tryouts.

⁴¹³ Lantz, 80

⁴¹⁴ Lantz, 80

⁴¹⁵ Lantz, 85

⁴¹⁶ Lantz, 85

⁴¹⁷ Lantz, 86

⁴¹⁸ Prideaux, Tom. "A bedrock Christian turns the show into a rousing love-in" in *Life*, December 8, 1967, volume 63, page 23

⁴¹⁹ Prideaux, 23

⁴²⁰ Prideaux, 24

⁴²¹ Prideaux, 25. Presumably here, Prideaux refers to the *New York Times's* Clive Barnes' and *Newsweek's* Jack Kroll's remarks in their respective reviews.

⁴²² Prideaux, 25

⁴²³ Prideaux, 25

⁴²⁴ Barthel, Joan. "'Dolly' is a Pearl of Great Price" in *The New York Times*, November 26, 1967.

⁴²⁵ . . . for which the author apologizes. As we will see later in this chapter with Walter Kerr's gushingly emotional Sunday-supplement tribute to the Bailey *Dolly!*, there is little way, in some important cases, to express the excitement surrounding the Bailey *Dolly!* short of exact, if lengthy, quotation.

⁴²⁶ Barthel

⁴²⁷ Please see Anekewe Simon, "Movie Review: Audrey Oscar-Bound In *Wait Until Dark*" and "Ghetto Document Filmed On Summer Riot Sites" in *N.Y. Amsterdam News*, October 28, 1967

⁴²⁸ Aldridge, Cathy W. "P.S." in *N.Y. Amsterdam News*, November 11, 1967. In a separate article on the same page, Aldridge described a gala "supper dance" in support of mental-health charities in Harlem. In addition, a photograph featuring federal Judge Constance Baker Motley (formerly the first black borough president of the Borough of Manhattan) and Coretta Scott King as they are honored by Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority appears on this page. The website <http://www.aka1908.com/> (accessed December 23, 2010) describes Alpha Kappa Alpha as "an international service organization that was founded on the campus of Howard University in Washington, D.C. in 1908. It is the oldest Greek-lettered organization established by African-American college-educated women."

⁴²⁹ “A Strong LBJ” in *N.Y. Amsterdam News*, November 25, 1967

⁴³⁰ “A ‘Soft’ LBJ” in *N.Y. Amsterdam News*, November 25, 1967

⁴³¹ Wilkins, Roy. “Along the Way: The Militants and the Middle Class” in *N.Y. Amsterdam News*, October 7, 1967

⁴³² Walker, Jesse H. “Theatricals” in *N.Y. Amsterdam News*, October 21, 1967

⁴³³ Walker, Jesse H. “‘Hello, Dolly!’ Is Now ‘Hello, Pearlie!’” in *N.Y. Amsterdam News*, November 18, 1967

⁴³⁴ Walker (Hello, Pearlie!)

⁴³⁵ Walker (Hello, Pearlie!)

⁴³⁶ Walker (Hello, Pearlie!)

⁴³⁷ Walker (Hello, Pearlie!)

⁴³⁸ Both here and later in this chapter, the study will make ample reference to an RCA Victor press release detailing the release of the Bailey cast recording of *Hello, Dolly!* (heretofore referred to as “RCA Victor”). This material is available in the theatre collection at the New York Public Library, Lincoln Center branch.

⁴³⁹ If anyone reading this study knows of any other case of a replacement cast being allowed to record a cast album, please get in touch with the author. In any event, the notion of a replacement cast recording a new cast album will be treated as an *extreme* rarity in the annals of commercial American musical theatre. Furthermore, in addition to the special cast recording, Jerry Herman composed an overture that had not been in use for any of the other cast recordings of *Hello, Dolly!*

⁴⁴⁰ RCA Victor

⁴⁴¹ http://pabook.libraries.psu.edu/palitmap/bios/Bailey__Pearl.html, accessed February 6, 2011

⁴⁴² *Pat & Mike* coincidentally was co-written by Ruth Gordon, who in her capacity as an actor played Dolly Levi in the Broadway production of Thornton Wilder’s *The Matchmaker* (1955). *The Matchmaker* was the source material for *Hello, Dolly!*

⁴⁴³ Waldman, Sharon Levine. “TRIBUTE TO Katharine Hepburn: Special thoughts for FILMS FOR TWO.” <http://www.films42.com/tribute/hepburn.asp> (accessed November 23, 2010).

⁴⁴⁴ This author uses and recommends Kislán’s text as an otherwise superb choice for any course in musical theatre history for undergraduates and honors high school students. The author has used this text in both capacities.

⁴⁴⁵ Knapp (Personal), 1

⁴⁴⁶ Knapp (Personal), 1-2

⁴⁴⁷ Knapp (National), 5

⁴⁴⁸ Lerner, 114

⁴⁴⁹ Lerner, 175

⁴⁵⁰ Lerner, 193

⁴⁵¹ Lerner, 120

⁴⁵² Most, Andrea. *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway musical*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004, 10

⁴⁵³ King, 206. <http://www.toonopedia.com/thegumps.htm> (accessed December 23, 2010) identifies *Andy Gump* as a cartoon strip which first appeared in the cartoon pages of the *Chicago Tribune* in 1917, featuring “a domestic comedy strip about ordinary people — not too bright, not too rich, not too good-looking — and their ordinary adventures.”

⁴⁵⁴ And besides, one could argue that a successful nearly all-black version of *Andy Gump* would arrive post-Bailey *Dolly!* in the guise of the Norman Lear-produced sitcom *Sanford and Son* (1972).

⁴⁵⁵ Jones, 225. In Jones’s defense, his coverage of obscure musicals is often exemplary. Specifically, this author has used Jones’s coverage of Jones and Schmidt’s *Celebration* (1969), a groundbreaking musical play that would seem to be ignored otherwise by musical theatre history scholars.

⁴⁵⁶ The website <http://www.upne.com/1-58465-311-6.html> that promotes *Our Musicals, Ourselves* (accessed November 27, 2010) describes Jones as a retired professor of theatre from Brandeis University. A picture of Jones presents him as man of at least late middle-age. Thus, it is highly unlikely that Jones was either not born or not old enough to have experienced the Bailey *Dolly!* first hand, at least from the mammoth journalistic coverage of the event. Thus, Jones’s glaring omission becomes even more egregious.

⁴⁵⁷ Kirle, Bruce. *Unfinished Business: Broadway musicals as works in progress*. Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005, 33

⁴⁵⁸ Kirle, 33. In subsequent paragraphs, Kirle (34) describes the difficulty Prince would have directing Zero Mostel in *Fiddler on the Roof*, who was as notorious for not following the script as Bailey herself. While he thought he’d found a property that would live or die on its literary value as compared to the star-driven *Dolly!*, Prince soon found himself with a show that Mostel himself treated as a star vehicle for his vaudevillian style. To Prince’s relief and

Mostel's come-uppance, the show would survive financially when the lesser known Luther Adler took over the role of Tevye.

⁴⁵⁹ Kirle, 33

⁴⁶⁰ Kirle, 33.

⁴⁶¹ Woll, 191

⁴⁶² Woll, 191

⁴⁶³ Brockett, Lenyth. "The Newspaperman as Critic: The New York Drama Reviewers" in *Educational Theatre Journal*, Volume 5, Number 3 (October 1953), 240-246, 241. It is noted that while Brockett refers to seven critics at the seven newspapers still in existence in 1953 – the *New York Times*, the *New York Post*, the *Daily News*, the *Daily Mirror*, the *World-Telegram & Sun*, the *Journal American*, and the *Herald Tribune* – only the *Times*, *Post*, and *Daily News* remained in publication in 1967 when the *Bailey Dolly!* debuted, as they do today. This weeding out of the less financially successful newspapers resulted from a debilitating newspaper strike in New York City in the mid-1960s. Since the mid-1960s, the New York City journalism scene has also seen the ascendancy of the suburban Long Island-based *Newsday*. Thus, any discussion of the power any particular newspaper outlet over commercial theatre becomes unnecessary once we get to particular reviewers and their reviews.

⁴⁶⁴ Brockett, 241

⁴⁶⁵ Brockett, 241

⁴⁶⁶ Brockett, 241-242

⁴⁶⁷ Brockett, 242

⁴⁶⁸ Brockett, 243

⁴⁶⁹ Brockett, 243

⁴⁷⁰ McCarten, John, Review of *Hello, Dolly!* in *New Yorker*, November 25 1967, 149

⁴⁷¹ Harris, Leonard. Broadcast review of the *Bailey Dolly!* coinciding with the November 1967 opening of *Bailey Dolly!*. (RCA Victor)

⁴⁷² Harris, RCA Victor

⁴⁷³ Barnes, Clive, RCA Victor

⁴⁷⁴ Prideaux, 26

⁴⁷⁵ Strober, Gerald. "Paeon to Pearl" in *Christian Century*, January 24, 1968, 118

⁴⁷⁶ Kroll

⁴⁷⁷ Watts, Richard Jr. "Two on the Aisle: Pearl Bailey and the New 'Dolly'" in the *New York Post*, November 13, 1967

⁴⁷⁸ Watts

⁴⁷⁹ RCA Victor

⁴⁸⁰ Wikipedia identifies the *Morning Telegraph* as "a [now] defunct New York City newspaper that merged with the *Daily Racing Form*." Please see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morning_Telegraph (accessed December 23, 2010).

⁴⁸¹ Bolton, Whitney. "Pearl Bailey Brings Down 'Dolly' House" in *Morning Telegraph*, November 14, 1967

⁴⁸² Chapman, John. "Pearl Bailey, Cab Calloway & Co. Make a Brand-New Hit of 'Dolly!'" in the *New York Daily News*, November 13, 1967

⁴⁸³ Bolton

⁴⁸⁴ Kroll

⁴⁸⁵ Lantz, 85

⁴⁸⁶ Lantz, 85-86

⁴⁸⁷ "The New Company Adds Snap and a Coming Star" in *Life*, December 8, 1967, volume 63, page 19. It is the humble opinion of this author that anyone who would make a connection between the references to Bailey's handling of a whip and black slavery in the American South is looking for racism where it does not exist.

⁴⁸⁸ Barnes, RCA Victor

⁴⁸⁹ Goldeman, RCA Victor

⁴⁹⁰ RCA Victor

⁴⁹¹ Cooke, Richard P. "Pearl as Dolly" in the *Wall Street Journal*, November 14, 1967

⁴⁹² Goldman, David. Broadcast review of the *Bailey Dolly!* coinciding with the November 1967 opening of *Bailey Dolly!*. RCA Victor.

⁴⁹³ RCA Victor

⁴⁹⁴ RCA Victor

⁴⁹⁵ RCA Victor

⁴⁹⁶ McCarten

⁴⁹⁷ “THE THEATER ON BROADWAY: Dolly Rediviva” in *Time*, November 24, 1967, 56

⁴⁹⁸ Watts

⁴⁹⁹ Cooke

⁵⁰⁰ McCarten

⁵⁰¹ Harris

⁵⁰² Watts

⁵⁰³ Chapman

⁵⁰⁴ Bunce, Alan N. “Pearl Bailey Scores in New *Hello, Dolly!*” in *Christian Science Monitor*, November 27, 1967

⁵⁰⁵ Strober

⁵⁰⁶ McCarten

⁵⁰⁷ *Time*

⁵⁰⁸ On the television situation comedy *The Nanny*, Ray Charles plays the boyfriend/fiance of Yetta Rosenberg (coincidentally the name of the author’s mother’s paternal grandmother), nanny Fran Fine’s elderly grandmother. One of the more interesting sequences in this series happens when Sammy, the Charles character, serenades Yetta with his rendition of “My Yiddisheh Mama.” One should also be aware of Rabbi Capers Funnye, a black man who runs an all-black Jewish congregation in Chicago. Funnye’s congregation operates out of a synagogue formerly occupied by turn-of-the-twentieth-century Jewish immigrants.

⁵⁰⁹ Hipp, Edward Sothorn. “New York Stage: Pearl Bailey New ‘Dolly’” in *Newark Evening News*, November 13, 1967.

⁵¹⁰ Kroll. Wikipedia describes Sol Hurok as a mid-twentieth-century theatrical impresario. In his capacity as a business agent for performing artists, Hurok was instrumental in arranging with first lady Eleanor Roosevelt and Secretary of State Harold Ickes a plan to have black opera singer Marian Anderson deliver a racially ground-breaking concert on the Washington, D.C. mall in 1939. This concert was presented as Roosevelt’s reaction to the racism of the Daughters of the American Revolution. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sol_Hurok, (accessed November 28, 2010.))

⁵¹¹ Chapman

⁵¹² Harris

⁵¹³ Harris

⁵¹⁴ Bunce

⁵¹⁵ Lantz, 86. Barnes echoes the *Time* magazine critic’s call for Louis Armstrong as Tevye or Diahann Carroll as Auntie Mame, writing, “Maybe Black Power is what some of the other musicals need.” In his own review of the production, Barnes joined the lauds offered by the rest of the print critic establishment, writing, “For Miss Bailey this was a Broadway triumph for the history books. She had no trouble stopping the show -- her problem was getting it started again.”

⁵¹⁶ Lantz, 86

⁵¹⁷ Strober. Wikipedia writes, “Jesse Gray (1924?-1988) was a leader of rent strikes in Harlem in the 1960s and served as a New York State Assemblyman from 1972 to 1974.” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesse_Gray (accessed November 28, 2010)). In an obituary, the *New York Times* (<http://www.nytimes.com/1988/03/11/obituaries/milton-galamison-leader-in-a-dispute-over-the-schools-65.html>, (accessed November 28, 2010)) described Rev. Milton Galamison as “a major figure in the dispute over decentralizing the New York City schools in the 1960’s” Such decentralization would allow for community control of the schools, a prized goal of black activists in New York City in the 1960s. “Snick chicks” presumably refers to Stokely Carmichael’s Student Non-violent (later “National”) Coordinating Committee. In another race-informed comment, Strober notes that “[t]his is a company which could turn upside down the confederate flags atop the Alabama state capitol.” We note with irony that the confederate flag is symmetric with respect to both its horizontal and vertical axes. Thus, turning the confederate flag upside down has no effect on its appearance.

⁵¹⁸ Strober

⁵¹⁹ Kerr, Walter. “Kerr: Life With ‘Dolly’ Is Delovely” in *The New York Times*, November 26, 1967

⁵²⁰ Kerr (Delovely)

⁵²¹ Johnson, Greer. Untitled review of Bailey *Dolly!* in *Cue* coinciding with November 1967 opening of Bailey *Dolly!* No date is available for this article, extracted from the theatre collection at the Museum of the City of New York. One assumes that the article was written in late 1967 or early 1968. In addition to those mentioned already in the main body of the text, any number of opening night reviewers joined Johnson and Lewis in finding that the Bailey *Dolly!* was superior to any *Dolly!* production that had preceded. Chauncey Howell of *Women’s Wear Daily* (RCA Victor) concurred in the view that the Bailey *Dolly!* was superior to any previous incarnation of Stewart and

Herman's creation, including the original cast led by Carol Channing. Syndicated columnist Jack O'Brian, in *Voice of Broadway* (RCA Victor), declares Bailey to be the best of the cavalcade of Dolly Levis. Hobe Morrison of *Variety* (RCA Victor) writes, "When 'Hello, Dolly!' opened nearly four years ago at the St. James Theater, it was a memorable occasion - the arrival of a new smash hit musical. It seems questionable, however, whether the remembered excitement of that event can have equaled the enthusiasm of Sunday night when Pearl Bailey and a Negro company took over the show on the same stage."

⁵²² Lewis, Emory. "A String of Pearls: Cue's editors choose Pearl Bailey as Entertainer of the Year" in *Cue*. No date is available for this article, extracted from the theatre collection at the Museum of the City of New York. One assumes that the article was written in late 1967 or early 1968.

⁵²³ Lewis. Later in the article, Lewis mentions the RCA Victor cast recording which was discussed earlier in this chapter.

CHAPTER VII -- AFTERMATH

Chapter Introduction

One could imagine that the more optimistic of those involved in the production of (as well as reaction to) the Bailey *Dolly!* experienced a sense of elation concerning the overwhelming commercial success of that production and may have expected better race relations in the larger society. After the production, these people might have dreamed of a “new world order” that would emerge concerning race in America. While such an observation reasonably might be considered somewhat overblown, let us recall the effusiveness of the mass-media critical response we saw in Chapter VI, especially in terms of race. In these mass-media responses, one could see hope for a America awash in racial harmony.

Response to the Bailey *Dolly!* redux in 1975 would serve as evidence that the hope for a “new tomorrow” might have been short lived. As quickly as eight years after the original Bailey *Dolly!*, the landscape concerning race in America had changed dramatically – in the generalized socio-political milieu, as would concern popular entertainment in general, and specifically as would concern the negotiation of racial issues in commercial American musical theatre. Ennui ensued when reception for the Bailey *Dolly!* redux was less electric than the 1967 version. This is *not* to say that no progress was made in any of these arenas concerning improving race relations in the era that followed the Bailey *Dolly!* It is simply to say that by 1975 and beyond, the landscape in America concerning race had changed dramatically. In the socio-political arena, America would experience an expansion of the black middle class as well as a minimization of race as a factor in individual success, seemingly positive results of the civil rights movement of

the 1960s. In popular entertainment, expanded opportunity for African-American talent on one hand contrasted with difficulties concerning stereotypes and buffoonery.

Yet despite lingering difficulties in American race relations, some genuine progress would ensue. The exception to the mixed bag of progress and difficulty concerning race would come in the arena of commercial American musical theatre. In the 1970s and beyond, despite or perhaps in tandem with the failure of the Bailey *Dolly!* redux, Broadway would see a glorious influx of black talent, both in terms of performance and creation of raw material. As we shall see concerning commercial American musical theatre, and despite occasional reasonably expected setbacks, it would be difficult to fault commercial American musical theatre with regard to racial inclusion. This explosion of African-American talent in the arena of commercial American musical theatre would lie in stark contrast to the fits and starts experienced in the arenas of society and politics in general, as well as for popular entertainment venue. We recall that in earlier parts of this study, we saw fits and starts at racial progress that were reflected as well in the minstrelsy legacy of commercial American musical theatre.

Through the first four chapters of this study, we discussed, in order of appearance *and* relevance, social structures of race, disappointment concerning issues of race in the political arena in the era following World War II, and the treatment of race in popular entertainment in general and in musical theatre, with its legacy of minstrelsy, in particular. Our discussion of race in the era that followed the Bailey *Dolly!* will follow the same trajectory as these earlier discussions. In this chapter, we will begin by exploring the change of landscape in American race relations in terms of social and political interaction. A survey of changes in the treatment of race in popular entertainment will follow, including a discussion of cross-racial casting in non-musical theatre, an issue that was virtually non-existent in the era that preceded the Bailey *Dolly!* but would become especially relevant both to entertainment in general and paralleled

developments in musical theatre. Finally, we will explore changes in musical theatre in the post-Bailey *Dolly!* era concerning treatment of African-Americans, primarily in terms of performance but also, to some extent, as concern creative control.

Throughout this analysis of the aftermath of the Bailey *Dolly!*, we will concern ourselves with the major questions this study already has addressed. Specifically, we will concern ourselves with how American society dealt with the racism of previous eras, how the entertainment industry in general and commercial American musical theatre in particular adapted to changes in attitudes on race, and how these changes were informed by the slow eradication of class barriers that, in previous epochs, prevented bourgeois entrée for African Americans. It is our intent, once again, to show how the Bailey *Dolly!* served as a flashpoint with respect to these concerns.

Society and Politics

The material presented in Chapters I and II of this study framed many important questions for the Bailey *Dolly!* with respect to its position in the negotiation of race in commercial American musical theatre. Such questions dealt with the social and cultural aspects of American racism, as well as political response to such racism as reflected in paradigms of the civil rights movement of the 1960s. In looking at the aftermath of the Bailey *Dolly!*, let us then begin with a discussion of the social and political landscape that transpired in the era that followed the production.

The creators of the Bailey *Dolly!* may have sought, consciously or otherwise, to break down vertical barriers of racism as discussed in Chapter I. To a great extent and especially as we will see in the performing arts and entertainment industry, this breakdown of social barriers has

happened. While the Bailey *Dolly!* may not have served as a causative agent in this process, it reasonably can be seen as a flashpoint for such change. Before this flashpoint, gross and obvious mistreatment of African Americans abounded. After the flashpoint, redressing such mistreatment became the order of the day. Such redress would have successes and failures.

In an ideal circumstance as envisioned perhaps by the Bowser model, any breakdown of class barriers based on race and social status might have been accompanied by a change in economic status for African Americans. In fairness to Bowser, and despite his presentation of this model, we must acknowledge that Bowser stresses that such a correlation does *not* exist, based on the failure of African Americans to close the gap with white America with respect to accumulated wealth. Here, we use the Bowser hypothesis of social barriers as the obstacle to economic parity to underscore the sense of optimism that surrounded the Bailey *Dolly!* In this failure of the model to secure the positive economic outcome, Bowser talks of recent improvements in economic parity for African Americans, especially in upper echelons of American enterprise. Bowser points to “a class of wealthy African Americans [. . .] that did not exist prior to 1964,” writing

People such as Michael Jordan, Oprah Winfrey, and Bill Cosby certainly constitute an upper class. There were five black chief executive officers (CEOs) of Fortune 500 companies in 2005 (Jones, 2005) and more than 200 others in striking distance of becoming CEOs in the future (Zweigenhaft and Domhoff, 2003). There are a legion of other highly paid business executives, professional athletes, actors, entertainers, television personalities, and rappers. They have money and lots of it.⁵²⁴

Yet Bowser offers a caveat in terms of the achievement of wealth and status among African Americans in the post-civil-rights era. Bowser distinguishes the large immediate income earned by the celebrities he mentions from inter-generational wealth accumulation, using the latter as a barometer for lasting achievement. Bowser, in fact, argues that such wealth accumulation must

occur over three generations or more in order to true upper-class status to be achieved. As compared to non-WASP European Americans who have been engaged in such wealth accumulation since the early-to-mid-twentieth century, African Americans continue to play catch-up in amassing accumulated wealth. There hasn't been enough time, according to Bowser, for the Cosbys and Winfreys of upper-crust black America to have achieved this goal. "Some [members of the upper economic echelons of African-American society] may take great pride in coming from families that have had middle-class values for generations and for struggling to the top," writes Bowser, "but their success and money are still first generational (Benjamin, 1991; Edwards and Polite, 1992)."⁵²⁵

Concurring with Bowser, Robert D. Bullard offers a take on what has happened in the arena of recalcitrant black poverty on a broader scale. Bullard offers similar evidence of anecdotal incidents of improvement in the economic lot of African Americans, citing a "narrow[ing of] the income inequality gap [between blacks and whites]."⁵²⁶ In contrast, Bullard points to problems that remain, including an increase of the poverty rate in the new millennium, both in general and with specific regard to marginalized populations. On the issue of bourgeois entrée with which this study is specifically concerned, Bullard notes that despite the best of intentions, "Rising personal income and education attainment have not erased the black-white wealth gap."⁵²⁷

Yet despite any failure on the part of African Americans to make the kinds of gains in economic parity as might have been envisioned during the heyday of the civil rights era, the era following the *Bailey Dolly!* would see a significant breakdown in the vertical, social barriers that enforced racism through slavery and Jim Crow – the very barriers that the *Bailey Dolly!* seemed designed to destroy. A fine example of such a breakdown recently celebrated its fortieth anniversary. Samuel G. Freedman writes of the first college football game in the American

South in which teams from black and white colleges (Florida A & M and the University of Tampa, respectively) played each other in 1969, as the Bailey *Dolly!* either completed or neared completing its run on Broadway. At the fortieth anniversary festivities, retired Tampa Coach Fran Curci commented graciously on the 34-28 Florida A & M victory. Freedman reports, “Speaking to about 725 people gathered for the [2009 Florida A & M] homecoming gala, Mr. Curci repeated the generous words he had spoken to reporters back on Nov. 29, 1969: his team had been outplayed and he had been outcoached.”⁵²⁸ Curci’s grace under what were then difficult circumstances stemmed from collaboration on the issue of race with A & M Coach Jack Gaither (who had died in 1994). Freedman writes

[. . . B]y 1967, Coach Gaither had begun privately lobbying members of Florida’s Board of Regents, which oversaw state schools of both races, to allow him to play a white team. A year later, when Mr. Curci took over as head coach in Tampa, Mr. Gaither found a willing collaborator.⁵²⁹

In the game that would follow, despite predictions of riots in the face of the first black/white college football match-up in the south, the drama involved dealt more with the closeness of a game the outcome of which was in doubt until the last minute, than with race. Most importantly, one witnessed a near-absence of rancor among fans in the stadium. Ultimately, both sides saw this first meeting of black and white as both necessary and successful. In the twilight of the Great Society, the races had begun to mix in an atmosphere of harmony.

It would be redundant to list further instances of similar breakdowns in social segregation based on race in the era that followed the Bailey *Dolly!* Suffice it to say that many such instances existed, evidence that the era that followed the Bailey *Dolly!* would see a significant breakdown of the vertical, social enforcement of segregation among the races. If the Bailey *Dolly!* made a contribution to this barrier breakdown, it was in providing a live-action model for

how African Americans might be seen by all – black *and* white – as part of the American mainstream.

This is *not* to say that all would go smoothly concerning social relations among the races in the era that followed the Bailey *Dolly!* In contrast to a positive outcome such as the Tampa/Florida A & M game of 1969, there would be instances demonstrating continued complications between black and white in this post-civil-rights era. Such complications reflected significant changes in the political landscape on race in the era that would follow the Bailey *Dolly!* In earlier chapters in this study, we saw a range of political attitudes on race, from the separatism of Malcolm X to the conciliation of the Great Society. Two significant developments would occur in the arena of racial politics in the late twentieth century – the backtracking on race by significant architects of the Great Society racial paradigm, and the advent of the black “neo-con” movement. We deal with the latter first.

The Bailey *Dolly!* offered a blueprint for what bourgeois entrée might entail, the kind of entrée further described by the research of the likes of Bowser and Wiese described in Chapter I. For a significant number of African Americans seeking the kind of bourgeois entrée imagined by the Bailey *Dolly!*, it was not unusual for such entrée to involve a change in political values. Associated Press reporter Valerie Bauman describes the alienation from other members of the African-American community as experienced by Timothy F. Johnson, “chairman of the Frederick Douglass Foundation, a group of black conservatives who support free market principles and limited government.”⁵³⁰ As part of a broader description in the predominantly white “tea party” movement that arose in reaction expansion of government during the Obama presidency, Bauman quotes Johnson as saying that he’s been told that he “hate[s] himself” and is an “Uncle Tom,” a “traitor,” an “Oreo,” and “the spook at the door.”⁵³¹ Bauman quotes Johnson as saying, “Black Republicans find themselves always having to prove who they are. Because the

assumption is the Republican Party is for whites and the Democratic Party is for blacks.”

Bauman continues, writing

Johnson and other black conservatives say they were drawn to the tea party movement because of what they consider its commonsense fiscal values of controlled spending, less taxes and smaller government. The fact that they're black — or that most tea partyers are white — should have nothing to do with it, they say.⁵³²

Johnson and his black-conservative ilk would seem to implicitly reject the party realignment described in Chapter II. Recall that in this post-World-War-II realignment, African Americans switched allegiance from the “party of Lincoln,” the Republicans, to a Democratic Party experiencing liberalization on race issues in sharp contrast to its roots in Southern Jim-Crow culture. But such reaction and realignment on the part of some African Americans entering the bourgeoisie in greater numbers only can be seen as a consequence of such success. An assumption is made here that in the large picture, protection of the economic interests of the underclasses can be seen as the province of the Democrats, while protection of the economic interests of higher-income individuals can be seen as the province of the Republicans. As one becomes more successful economically, one might be more likely to sympathize with the Republicans.

We recall in this discussion of African-American attraction to the “party of Lincoln” that Pearl Bailey herself identified as a Republican. Thus, perhaps a connection can be made between the black “neo-cons” and the race politics involved in the Bailey *Dolly!* The two would seem to share the same concern that race not be considered as a yoke to prevent individual African-American achievement. The idea of race as a “non-issue” – the “post-racialism” we discussed in the biographical portrait of Bailey in Chapter V – would seem to permeate the intent of the Bailey *Dolly!* as espoused by Bailey herself. This post-racial political point-of-view

would seem to be a hybrid of the Great Society ethos engineered by centrist Democrats and pre-“Southern Strategy” Republicanism.

The phenomenon of black neo-conservatism in the post-Bailey *Dolly!* era may be seen as isolated to a small cadre of African-American Republicans, libertarians, and “tea party” adherents. Yet even white centrist Democrats from the 1960s broke rank on race issues in the era that followed the Bailey *Dolly!* Perhaps no greater example of such reaction came from a major architect of 1960s Democratic Party race and social policy, the aforementioned Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. In his *Disuniting America*, Schlesinger comes out solidly against the post-civil-rights-era vogue toward so-called “multiculturalism.” With specific reference to the craft of filmmaking, Schlesinger rails against determination of casting, writing

The consanguinity principle is extended to directors. Thus Norman Jewison was vetoed as the director of *Malcolm X* because he was the wrong color. Spike Lee, who was right color, got the job and then carried the rule to the extent of proclaiming a preference for black interviewers. The fine black playwright August Wilson insists on a black director for the film of his play *Fences*. “We have a different ideas about religion, different manners of social intercourse. We have different ideas about style, about language. We have different esthetics. . . .The job requires someone who shares the specifics of the culture of black Americans. . . . Let’s make a rule. Blacks don’t direct Italian films. Italians don’t direct Jewish films. Jews don’t direct black American films.”⁵³³

Here, Schlesinger echoes criticism of the Bailey *Dolly!* such as Actors Equity Association President Frederick O’Neal, whose organization, as mentioned in Chapter V, found difficulty with the production because it was not color-blind. However, the comparison here is incomplete. In the case of the choice of director for the film version of Malcolm X’s life story, those who would support the choice of Lee over Jewison sought to maximize the presence of a supposed black mindset in the proceedings. In contrast, David Merrick sought no comparable sense of “blackness” in his production. Rather, Merrick sought a conciliatory venue for his proceedings,

one in which black performers cooperated with white creative and production talent. One should not make the mistake of thinking that Schlesinger's dismissal of racial pre-determination in the hiring of a director for the film version of Malcolm X's life story could be equated with a rejection of the musical theatre "mascot" of the Johnson administration, the Bailey *Dolly!* Nevertheless, Schlesinger buttresses his criticism of racial pre-determination in the performing arts, writing, "By the Wilson rule, only Norwegians would be permitted to direct Ibsen, only Danes to play Hamlet. What a terrible rule that would be!"⁵³⁴ Showing sympathy to past injustices in racial casting, Schlesinger continues,

One sympathizes with the resentment of Chinese-American actors watching Swedes (as, for example, Warner Oland and Nils Asther in the old days) playing Chinese roles, and one rejoices at the breakthrough of nonwhite actors these days into stage and film. Yet is there not something basically hostile to the actor's art in the consanguinity? After all, what is acting but an exercise in dissimulation?⁵³⁵

As a germane example, Schlesinger points to the able-bodied and coincidentally African-American Denzel Washington playing Shakespeare's disfigured Richard III.

Furthermore on the subject of white Kennedy/Johnson-era luminaries and issues of African-American concern, Patricia Cohen comments on a recent revival in currency of the race/sociology theories of Daniel Patrick Moynihan. As discussed in Chapter II, Moynihan described what he believed were pathological difficulties that prevented African Americans from joining the mainstream, attributing such difficulties to a culture of poverty. Cohen writes,

Now, after decades of silence, these scholars are speaking openly about you-know-what, conceding that culture and persistent poverty are enmeshed.

"We've finally reached the stage where people aren't afraid of being politically incorrect," said Douglas S. Massey, a sociologist at Princeton who has argued that Moynihan was unfairly maligned.⁵³⁶

As with the attraction on the part of some black bourgeois aspirants to conservative politics as we saw with the black “neo-cons,” we see here in this revival of Moynihan’s emphasis on culture as an affirmation a conservative “self-help” model in dealing with recalcitrant black poverty. In both cases – black “neo-cons” and changes to the legacies of Great-Society icons Schlesinger and Moynihan – we can see the center-right political ideology of the Bailey *Dolly!* coming to the fore. This ideology stressed, rather than separatism aimed at racial identification on the part of African Americans as the path to liberation, a treatment of race as less important than hard work and self-reliance.

It is very important to note that both these phenomena – black neo-conservatism *and* the rejection of multi-culturalism on the part of the centrist white Democrats who were the architects of Great Society policy on race – reflect the political and social ideals evident in the Bailey *Dolly!* David Merrick’s vision was a fantasy of what the world would look like if racism did not exist. Though perhaps naïve, this fantasy was cooperative with the white mainstream. It was neither confrontational nor separatist. In rejecting confrontation and separatism, black neo-conservatives and white centrist Democrats would seem to concur with the Bailey *Dolly!* – that the answer to racial strife lie in encouraging bourgeois entrée for African Americans rather than rejecting the mainstream of American society.

Changes in Mass-media Representation of African Americans

The era that followed the Bailey *Dolly!*, despite any changes in political ideology, presented a milieu of increased social parity. It is with this change in social structure that we turn our attention to the mass media and the performing arts. In this venue, while there have been roadblocks to greater parity to full African-American participation, both in terms of

creation of product *and* performance, the era that followed the Bailey *Dolly!* would see an explosion of African-American performing talent appealing to mainstream audiences of all racial backgrounds. Whether this explosion can be attributed directly to the Bailey *Dolly!*, especially in the arena of musical theatre, is a matter for reasonable debate. What cannot be denied is that the Bailey *Dolly!* would serve as a harbinger to an era of greater appreciation of the diversity of performing talent among African Americans.

In Chapter III, we began the discussion of race and popular culture with an exploration of cartoons and comics of the early- and middle-twentieth century. Let us engage in a similar exploration in the era that followed the Bailey *Dolly!* McMillan discusses what would become the “grand-daddy” of all syndicated cartoon strips in the post-World-War-II era, Charles M. Schultz’s *Peanuts*. Paying particularly close attention to Franklin, the black child who frolics along with Charlie Brown and Lucy and the *Peanuts* gang, McMillan writes

Peanuts, as a “classic,” includes Franklin, an African American character the same youthful age as the others. He is the only character of color, and generally enters the stage on or around Martin Luther King Jr. Day. [. . .] To a large extent, this cartoon strip is representative of modern strips with tertiary minority characters. Absence of minority characters, like strips of the 1950s, is the dominant pattern. When the minority character is present, however, the derogatory depiction has largely been omitted.⁵³⁷

Here, McMillan raises the ugly specter of tokenism. One advantage of the all-black, as opposed to integrated, *Hello, Dolly!* is, at least within the production itself, there is no possibility of an accusation of such “Martin Luther King Jr. Day only” tokenism. In contrast to the tokenism of Franklin in *Peanuts* lie the various characters of color in Garry Trudeau’s *Doonesbury*, a comic strip that gained currency in the Vietnam and Watergate eras. McMillan points to Ginny, “an African American female [who] ran for Congress in the strip in the mid-1970s as well as “Nate’ Hale and Sammy,” two characters based on the mythology of the American Revolution who

discuss the meaning of the phrase “All men are created equal” as part of the plot arc of the comic strip.⁵³⁸ Always more cutting-edge than competing strips, *Doonesbury* featured the antics of the racially insensitive, “chemically challenged” Duke and his various assistants of Samoan and Chinese extraction.⁵³⁹ Though the strip revolved around white characters Mike Doonesbury and Zonker Harris, these characters had more substantial and focused interaction with secondary characters of color than most strips of the era. Thus, *Doonesbury* represented perhaps an improvement in non-white representation in mainstream cartoon strips. McMillan also describes the changes endured by comic strips that originated before 1950, writing

At the National Cartoonist Society gathering in April 1962, “Hal Foster told delegates of the many furious letters of protest he had received, because he had included Nubian Negro slaves, a Jewish [m]erchant, and an Irishman in his [strip] *Prince Valiant*” and went on public record at the meeting as saying “the only people you can draw are white, rich Protestants.” Dale Messick had his drama strip, *Brenda Starr*, pulled from southern states after including an African American girl in a group of youths [. . .]⁵⁴⁰

In addition to all-black strips that would appear in the era, McMillan’s description of the terrain among syndicated comic strips in the era that followed the Bailey *Dolly!* points to at least glacial improvement in the representation of African-American interests. It might be a stretch of the imagination to propose that the Bailey *Dolly!* caused such change. Nevertheless, we return to the Bailey *Dolly!* as a flashpoint in the treatment of race in commercial entertainment. Before the Bailey *Dolly!*, the marginalized faced discriminatory and condescending treatment at the hands of a white-controlled media establishment. While no magic cure to such ails would appear in the era following the Bailey *Dolly!*, the aftermath of the Bailey *Dolly!* and the civil rights era would find efforts – some effect, some less so – to seek solutions to the endemic racism that preceded.

In the arena of commercial television, near ignorance and tokenism of the pre-civil-rights era at first gave way to safe African-American role models in the era that followed the Bailey *Dolly!* Woll and Miller cite the advent in 1968 of the assimilationist role Diahann Carroll played in the weekly sitcom *Julia*, writing

Julia was almost totally assimilated; she lived in an integrated neighborhood and interacted easily with whites. She had black boyfriends, but she seemed never to confront questions of race in her work or life. The series strived to avoid racial or socially topical issues. Carroll herself described the character as “a white Negro” and increasingly felt uncomfortable in the role. Critics labeled the series as a sellout to racism, for it implied that the “good life” of middle-class America was available to all blacks who did not protest or criticize “the system.”⁵⁴¹

Even the ingratiatingly “hip” *The Mod Squad* (1968), according to Woll and Miller, put forth the message that even someone who offered as Afro-centric an image as Clarence Williams III’s “Linc” character couldn’t succeed unless he played by the rules of the white hegemony.

In contrast, Woll and Miller offer the then-revolutionary fare presented by producer Norman Lear, whom the authors describe as having “redefined situation comedies in such a way as to put ‘white Negroes’ out of work.”⁵⁴² In addition to the ground-breaking *All in the Family*, Lear produced three sitcoms in particular that dealt with black issues head on: *The Jeffersons* (a spin-off of Lear’s *All in the Family*) (1975), *Sanford and Son* (1972), and *Good Times* (a spin-off of Lear’s *Maude*) (1974). Ignoring *Julia*, television scholar Pamela S. Deane asserts that the three Lear shows were the first presumably dramatic/comedic television programs to feature African-American leads since the cancellation of *Amos ‘n’ Andy* in the 1950s. Despite this possible stretching of fact and apparent ignorance of *Julia*, Deane acknowledges the central difficulty of the otherwise groundbreaking *The Jeffersons*. Deane writes,

To some, the early Louise Jefferson character was nothing more than an Old-South Mammy stereotype. And George, though a millionaire businessman, was generally positioned as nothing more

than a buffoon or the butt of someone's joke. [. . .] Some blacks questioned, "Are we laughing with George as he balks at convention, or at George as he continuously makes a fool of himself?"⁵⁴³

Despite such negatives, Deane accentuates the positive contributions made by *The Jeffersons*.

Such contributions include Sherman Hemsley and Isabel Sanford as the first lead married black couple on television, Franklin Cover and Roxie Roker as the Willises, the Jeffersons' in-laws and the first interracial married couple on television, and the exploitation of African-American actress Marla Gibbs' "Florence the Maid" character both for comic relief and commentary on race/class roles. Nevertheless, Deane comments on how the show survived well into the Reagan years, becoming more and more assimilationist and tepid as time passed.

Similar racist complaints would dog Lear's *Sanford and Son*. Starring comedian Redd Foxx as a cantankerous widower with a sense of racial insensitivity similar to that of George Jefferson, Deane reports that ultimately, Foxx would walk off the show, complaining of mistreatment on the part of white producers to the African-American experience. Deane writes,

Although *Sanford and Son* was enormously successful, Foxx became dissatisfied with the show, its direction, and his treatment as star of the program. In a *Los Angeles Times* article, he stated, "Certain things should be yours to have when you work your way to the top." At one point, he walked off the show, complaining that white producers and writers had little regard and appreciation of African-American life and culture. In newspaper interviews, he lambasted the total lack of black writers and directors. Moreover, Foxx believed that his efforts were not appreciated, and in 1977 left NBC for his own variety show on the American Broadcasting Company (ABC). The program barely lasted one season.⁵⁴⁴

As reported by Deane, the *Sanford and Son* experience raises three important issues with regard to black entrée into mainstream, bourgeois America. First, one needs to ask if Foxx's complaint of mistreatment was legitimate and race-based, or if Foxx was merely being a star/diva, complaining over mere slights rather than serious mistreatment. Second, regardless of Foxx's

complaint's concerning his personal treatment, one must take into account Foxx's concern over the absence of African-American creative personnel on the *Sanford and Son* set. Third, and most importantly, is what the failure of Foxx's variety show on ABC signified. This failure may have been the result of the falling fortunes of the television variety show in the 1970s. At the same time, Foxx's particular failure may have been the result of white audiences unable to make the leap from Foxx as the buffoonish Fred Sanford to Foxx as the suave and sophisticated host of a variety show.

The third Lear attempt at African-American inclusion in television sitcom, *Good Times*, presented perhaps the most focused attempt at portraying "street" reality for African Americans. *Good Times* was a spin-off of Lear's popular *Maude* sitcom, in which black actress Esther Rolle played Florida Evans, Maude Findlay's black housekeeper. Transferred from the upstate-New York suburbs of New York City to a low-income housing project in Chicago, *Good Times* attempted to portray the adventures of the impoverished Evans family, with Rolle's "Florida" character from *Maude* as the matriarch and John Amos as her husband James. While *Good Times* attempted to portray a more gritty reality of black poverty, albeit mixed with humor, similar accusations of insensitivity to African-American concerns plagued the production. Walkouts by both Rolle and Amos centered around their frustration of the show's focus on what was perhaps the first example of an African-American "teen idol," Jimmie Walker's "J.J." ("Kid Dy-no-mite!") character. Deane points to the "ire" J.J. inspired in the black community, writing

With his toothy grin, ridiculous strut, and bug-eyed buffoonery, J.J. became a featured character [. . .] J.J. lied, stole, and was barely literate. More and more episodes were centered around his exploits. Forgotten were [younger brother] Michael's scholastic success, James' search for a job, and anything resembling family values. [. . .] "We felt we had to do something drastic" Rolle said [. . .] in the *Los Angeles Times*, "we had lost the essence of the show."⁵⁴⁵

The problem of drawing the line between presenting light-hearted humor and encouraging minstrel-like buffoonery – a problem that would plague characters like George Jefferson, Fred Sanford, and J.J. – would continue to plague black participation in television situation comedy. In contrast to the buffoonery of the Norman Lear black characters and as we saw in the clip from the film *Crash* in Chapter I, *The Cosby Show* would be accused of so overly-sanitizing its proceedings that the show would barely be recognizable as black. With this *Cosby Show* example, an interesting contrast exists with its clone, ABC-television's *Family Matters* (1989). Originally conceived as light-hearted attempt to explore issues affecting a middle-class black family, the plot lines of *Family Matters* would be hijacked by the arrival and overwhelming success of actor Jaleel White's "Steve Urkel" character. Widely viewed as television's first black "nerd," White combined a humorous "klutziness" with a strong intellectual background (many episodes of *Family Matters* were built around Urkel's outrageous scientific experiments and inventions) to create a compelling foil to the otherwise sedate Winslow family, its patriarch Carl, a Chicago police officer, in particular. And therein lay the rub – whether to interpret this Urkel character as a buffoon in the style of J.J. or as a demonstration of black intellectual acumen, humor notwithstanding. On the basis of his intellectual abilities, the NAACP defended the Urkel character. "Urkel is a very refreshing character," said Sandra Evers-Manly, the president of the Beverly Hills-Hollywood chapter of the NAACP. "He shows the diversity within the African-American community rarely seen on TV."⁵⁴⁶ Even Alvin Pouissant, Harvard psychology professor and consultant for *The Cosby Show*, concurred, saying, "[Urkel]'s not up on street talk, not a dancing, bopping kind of kid [. . . But t]he fact that he's a nerd and very bright may be a step forward -- accepting that a black kid can be bright and precocious and might end up in an Ivy League school."⁵⁴⁷ Thus, Urkel could be seen as a break from the buffoonery of the J.J. stereotype because of his intelligence.

Thus, as we saw in attempts at reform in the arenas of film and the musical stage in the era following minstrelsy, attempts in the post-Bailey *Dolly!* era at reforming the portrayal of African Americans in television have demonstrated successes and failures. Despite some failure, much has transpired in the arena of television that reflects the kind of breakdown of racial-social barriers envisioned by the Bailey *Dolly!*

In film, the trend discussed in Chapter III of black performers playing race-neutral roles continued in the era following the Bailey *Dolly!* Looking at Academy Award winners in the various acting categories⁵⁴⁸, one sees that after “perfect Negro” Sidney Poitier’s win for Best Actor in 1963, no black actor of either sex would win again until Louis Gossett, Jr.’s, Oscar for Best Supporting Actor in 1982 for a “white written” role in *An Officer and a Gentleman*. However, a greater variety of roles would yield Oscars for black actors after Gossett. In 1989, Denzel Washington won his first Academy Award, a Best Supporting Actor nod for his role as a white-identifying black soldier in the Civil-War drama *Glory*.⁵⁴⁹ In 1990, Whoopi Goldberg would win a Best Supporting Actress Oscar for her role as counterfeit ghetto medium Ota Mae in *Ghost*, making Goldberg the first black actress to win an Academy Award since Hattie McDaniel in 1939 for *Gone with the Wind*. In 1996, Cuba Gooding, Jr. would win Best Supporting Actor for his role as the avaricious sports star Rod Tidwell in *Jerry Maguire*.

Gooding would be the last African-American actor to win an Oscar in the twentieth century. It is also interesting to note that since Gossett’s win in 1982, all three black acting Oscar winners, Washington, Goldberg, and Gooding, played roles that required them to be black. Yet as of 2000, the Oscar score-card included one Best Actor win (Poitier, 1963), three Best Supporting Actor wins (Gossett, 1982, Washington, 1989, and Gooding, 1996), and two Best Supporting Actress wins (McDaniel, 1939, Goldberg, 1990). Of the hundreds of Oscars handed out for acting in the history of the Academy, five went to African Americans. Furthermore,

despite strong performances by Academy nominees such as Dorothy Dandridge for *Carmen Jones* (1952), Diana Ross for *Lady Sings the Blues* (1972), Cicely Tyson for *Sounder* (also 1972, the first and only time two African American actresses would be nominated for acting in the main category), Diahann Carroll for *Claudine* (1974), Whoopi Goldberg for *The Color Purple* (1985), and Angela Bassett for *What's Love Got to Do With It* (1993), no female African American performer had won a Best Actress Oscar in the twentieth century.

As we saw in Chapter III, the film industry in the twentieth century, especially before the Bailey *Dolly!* and the civil-rights era of the 1960s, treated race with condescension or avoidance. Such mistreatment would be reflected in Oscar nominations and wins. In contrast, the new millennium saw an explosion of Oscar wins for black performers, especially in roles written with specifically-black casting in mind. This explosion was especially true for the Best Actor category. In 2002, Denzel Washington won a Best Actor Oscar, thus becoming the first black performer to win two Oscars, for his performance as a corrupt black police officer in *Training Day*. In 2004, television star Jamie Foxx won Best Actor for his performance as the iconic musician Ray Charles in *Ray*. Finally, in 2006, Forrest Whitaker received a Best Actor Oscar for his performance as Ugandan leader Idi Amin in *The Last King of Scotland*. In the supporting categories, wins were posted for Morgan Freeman (coincidentally a member of the Bailey *Dolly!* cast) (*Million Dollar Baby* (2004), the first and only time to date that black actors won in both lead and supporting categories), Jennifer Hudson (*Dreamgirls* (2006)), and Mo'nikque (*Precious* (2009)). 2002 was a particularly fruitful year for black performers. In addition to the Denzel Washington Best-Actor trophy, Halle Berry broke the failure of the Academy to recognize the talents and contributions of lead black actresses with her performance in *Monster's Ball* as a dysfunctional black single mother. Thus, since the turn of the millennium, the ratio of black performers winning Oscars has gone from negligible to eight in the forty acting Oscars awarded

– twenty percent of the total. Given that the United States Census reports that the percentage of African Americans in the general population stands at between twelve and thirteen percent⁵⁵⁰, it would seem that African-American performers have achieved more than parity with respect to acting Oscars.⁵⁵¹

This explosion of black Oscar wins for acting is coupled with serious stardom for a small group of black actors. For example, msnbc.com contributor Michael Ventre begins his article on the subject with the pronouncement, “They are three of the biggest stars in Hollywood. They are also black”⁵⁵² in a discussion of the careers of Denzel Washington, Will Smith, and Tyler Perry. Ventre quotes Kara Keeling, assistant professor of critical studies at the University of Southern California’s School of Cinematic Arts, in framing the dilemma involved in these actors’ stardom. First, Keeling laments for the lack of black identity involved in many of the roles (with the notable exception of Perry), saying that “[these black actors] don’t bring a racial consciousness to bear on the story in a way that disturbs the audience.”⁵⁵³ In contrast, Keeling notes the breakthrough involved in the serious star treatment of these actors, saying that “On the one hand it is surprising that now we can all sort of identify with the black leading character whereas before the assumption was that it was only the white character that audiences could identify with. That transformation is an important one.”⁵⁵⁴ These reflections on the situation with black actors in contemporary film would seem to reflect the situation for the performers in the *Bailey Dolly!* While the black *Dolly!* performers’ performances might have been seen as bereft of any specific race consciousness, the production allowed audiences, black *and* white, to identify with blacks performing as lead (and supporting characters). Thus, the *Bailey Dolly!* would seem to have provided a blueprint for accepting performances by African Americans in lead (and supporting) roles in post-civil-rights-era American film.

Of particular note to Ventre is the niche market created by the multi-talented Tyler Perry.

Ventre writes

Perry's approach is different. He has aimed his work at a predominately black audience and has become hugely successful by tapping into that niche market with such works as the "Madea" series of films and "Why Did I Get Married?" He also finances his own projects.⁵⁵⁵

It is interesting to note that not only Perry found success in film – he has found considerable success in the always financially dubious venue of live theatre, where his plays become source material for his financially successful films. Furthermore, Perry is a successful producer in network television. Two of his situation comedies, *House of Payne* and *Meet the Browns*, enjoy successful runs on the Turner Broadcasting System cable outlet. Perry is joined on TBS by rap star Ice Cube, executive producer of the TBS sitcom *Are We There Yet?* In addition, this year (2010), Perry ventured into more serious fare by directing *For Colored Girls*, the film version of Ntozake Shange's play *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf* (1976).

Both in television and film, we have seen changes in landscape concerning black inclusion in the post-civil-rights, post-Bailey *Dolly!* era. A similar change in the negotiation of race would occur in animated feature films. In Chapter III, we considered the racist legacy of the Walt Disney's studio's efforts to portray African American characters in its pre-civil-rights-era efforts as concerned its animated features. In 2009, Disney attempted to rectify this legacy by releasing *The Princess and the Frog* that featured the first black Disney princess. Problematic in this production was its setting, the racially healing New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. CNN entertainment reporter Breeanna Hare writes,

Critics pointed out that Princess Tiana spends most of her time mucking through the movie as a frog. A Charlotte Observer column noted that the film's combination of voodoo and alligator

sidekicks in the setting of New Orleans, Louisiana -- a city still trying to heal racial wounds exacerbated by Hurricane Katrina -- was a decision made in poor taste.⁵⁵⁶

Nevertheless, Hare reports that many black parents see the film as a breakthrough. Hare quotes Diane Millner, African-American mother of two girls in Atlanta, as saying

When I had [my daughters], I had to consider how I was going to get them to navigate the low self-esteem that black girls end up having when you're constantly bombarded with images that don't look like you and people are constantly telling you that beautiful is not what you are, [. . .] I'm bothered by the criticism because as a mom, my heart is full. Finally, there's a princess that looks like my little girls.⁵⁵⁷

It would be apparent that in the venue of animated feature films, the powers that be at Disney had responded to accusations of racial exclusion with what would seem at least a minimally successful effort with *The Princess and the Frog*. In addition to the commercial success this film would enjoy, there would seem to be at least anecdotal evidence of rank-and-file African-American acceptance of a black Disney princess.

Clearly, there has been an increase in black participation in the film industry in the era that followed the *Bailey Dolly!* Like the *Bailey Dolly!*, this increase in black participation often dealt with the conundrum of whether race consciousness was appropriate in performances by such black participants, or whether race neutrality was the operating ethos. At the same time as a Will Smith might be performing a role into which race does not factor, Tyler Perry creates popular entertainment directed specifically towards a black consciousness. Concerning race consciousness in contemporary American film, once again we see a mixed bag – offerings that sometimes stress the racial nature of the material, and offerings that sometimes stress race neutrality.

Wilson-Brustein and Cross-racial Casting

If change in mass entertainment media has been, if somewhat successful, then slow in coming in terms of the discussion of race, the same might not be said for live theatre. At the heart of this discussion was the debate over cross-racial casting that ensued in the era following the Bailey *Dolly!* We recall from Chapter III the casting of a black Blanche in an off-Broadway 1950s production of Tennessee Williams' *Streetcar*, a rare occurrence for that period. In contrast, the debate over such cross-racial casting – the kind of casting we saw in the Bailey *Dolly!* – would take center stage. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., comments on Pulitzer-Prize-winning black playwright August Wilson's aversion to such casting, writing

To cast black actors in “white” plays was, [Wilson] said, “to cast us in the role of mimics.” Worse, for a black actor to walk the stage of Western drama was to collaborate with the culture of racism, “to be in league with a thousand naysayers, who wish to corrupt the vigor and spirit of his heart.” An all-black production of *Death of a Salesman*, say, would “deny us our own humanity.”⁵⁵⁸

Wilson's objection to “mimicry” might seem overblown, as all acting involves mimesis.

However, his complaint of “collaboration with a culture of racism” rings more true, and goes to the heart of any problem with the casting of Pearl Bailey and Cab Calloway as Dolly Levi and Horace Vandergelder.

One critic besides Wilson has remained intransigently cynical over the idea of cross-racial casting in theatrical enterprises previously reserved for whites only. Woodie King, Jr. – whom we encountered previously with his “Andy Gump” comment on the Bailey *Dolly!* – first comments on cross-racial casting from an economic standpoint, writing, “You can do an all-black play on Broadway with ten characters, and there'll be twenty-five union white people making more than those actors, sometimes three times as much. And that's what's really

frightening about this system.”⁵⁵⁹ Viewing mid-century Harlem-Renaissance-style white patronage as “another form of slavery,”⁵⁶⁰ King displays similar mistrust of “integrationist”⁵⁶¹ African Americans with the power and resources to finance black-informed commercial theatrical ventures. Most importantly, King comments on the race-loyalty of blacks who perform in such cross-cast ventures. In the same breath as his “Andy Gump” comment concerning the Bailey *Dolly!*, King writes

Most white producers would like to get [b]lack actors who look [b]lack, but act white, sound white and hate their [b]lackness. That’s the reason [b]lack playwrights would rather have [b]lack critics judge their work. White people have been living three hundred years with Black people and refuse to see them. How can a white critic who’s stated that [b]lack actors should play white roles in white make-up judge a [b]lack play? Wow!⁵⁶²

With specific reference to *Death of a Salesman*, African-American actor Charles S. Dutton would appear as Willy Loman in a 2009 all-black Yale Repertory production of the play. *New York Times* critic Charles Isherwood comments on the irony of August Wilson’s professional connection with Yale Rep, as well as the connection of Robert Brustein, his debate nemesis on the issue of cross-racial casting. Isherwood writes

But Mr. Wilson stood opposed to the practice [of cross-racial casting], famously engaging in a public debate at Town Hall in Manhattan in 1997 with Robert Brustein (the founding artistic director of Yale Rep) over “color-blind” casting and the lack of support for black-oriented theaters. In “The Ground on Which I Stand,” an address to a national theater conference that helped spark the contretemps, Mr. Wilson said, “To mount an all-black production of a ‘Death of a Salesman’ or any other play conceived for white actors as an investigation of the human condition through the specifics of white culture is to deny us our humanity, our own history.”⁵⁶³

Isherwood criticizes Dutton’s performance starting from an aesthetic point of view. In the scene in which Willy comes to Charley’s office to borrow money, Isherwood takes note of both the advantage and disadvantage of having an actor of Dutton’s physical dimensions and vocal

prowess. In noting the range of Dutton's vocal instrument, Isherwood takes particular note of how this big man with a big voice delivers the line, "Charley, you're the only friend I got," in a voice "the size of a thimble."⁵⁶⁴ Yet after paying respect to Dutton's vocal range, Isherwood writes

But if Mr. Dutton's voice is a great actor's asset, it can also be a hindrance to expressive nuance. For too much of the first act, and intermittently throughout the second, we register the volume without detecting the tangle of feelings beneath it. The performance is marked by flashes of piercing clarity, but there are also passages when Willy's fluctuations between fantasy and reality, between reckless hope and nagging despair, become blurred.⁵⁶⁵

The race of the performer would not seem to be the issue here, although it is noted with irony that white actor Brian Dennehy, an actor of similar physical girth and vocal talent as Dutton, received a Tony Award for playing Willy Loman in 1997.⁵⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the larger issue for Isherwood would seem to be the race politics involved in this production. Isherwood writes,

There are specifics in "Death of a Salesman" that would not seem to apply to the African-American experience in the middle of the 20th century. When Biff dreams happily of returning to Texas to become a rancher, it is jarring to ponder the potential fate of a young black man embarking on such an endeavor in 1949. It is easier to see beyond skin color in some plays than others. Unlike Williams, Miller was a social critic in his plays as well as a general observer of the moral failings universal in man. And revivals that cast classic plays entirely with black performers — and are thus not "color-blind" at all — can reasonably be viewed with race at least present in mind.⁵⁶⁷

As we will see momentarily, Tennessee Williams would seem to translate more easily to a black experience than Arthur Miller. Additionally, perhaps the Bailey *Dolly!* crosses the line in a positive direction as a production in which race "can reasonably be viewed with race at least present in mind" yet in which the racial component, unlike Biff's dreams of cowboys and Texas, does not interfere with the thematic relevance of the source material. Despite the reality of race

in America in the 1890s, it would seem perhaps less difficult to imagine the denizens of Wilder's Yonkers enjoying the high life of 14th Street in New York City than to imagine a black Biff Loman as a rancher in late-1940s Texas.

In his review of the Dutton *Death of a Salesman*, Isherwood mentions a similar all-black effort, a black-only production of Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* featuring James Earl Jones as Big Daddy. This production would seem to have fared better than the Dutton *Death of a Salesman*, being able to boast the attendance of Barack and Michelle Obama on opening night during the 2008 campaign,⁵⁶⁸ an event comparable to the Johnsons' attendance of the road-show version of the Bailey *Dolly!* in Washington, D.C., in 1967. *New York Times* correspondent Campbell Robertson notes the financial success of this production, citing a \$700,000 weekly take, "an outstanding number for a nonmusical."⁵⁶⁹ Even more impressive for this production, Campbell reports that "Stephen C. Byrd, the rookie producer of 'Cat,' estimates the audience to be between 70 percent and 80 percent African-American."⁵⁷⁰ Robertson contrasts this with the 1987 production of August Wilson's *Fences* that "had trouble drawing an African-American crowd."⁵⁷¹ There does not seem to be any record of the Bailey *Dolly!*'s attendance by race. However, one might extrapolate, based on the enthusiasm the production received in the *Amsterdam News*, that the Bailey *Dolly!* may have seen similar percentages of African-American attendance. (Sadly for history, such extrapolation, though not completely unreasonable, must be treated in the harsh light of inquest as speculation.) In addition, Robertson cites the commercial success of productions like Suzan-Lori Parks' *Topdog/Underdog* and Denzel Washington's star turn in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* among black audiences as breaking the tendency of African-Americans to avoid live, serious theatre. Robertson notes with prejudice the absence of so-called "auids," white middle-aged women – a demographic often

considered crucial to the success of any commercial venture on Broadway – from these successful African-American-oriented productions.⁵⁷²

While Wilson's argument against such cross-racial casting might hold water among those who subscribe to a Black-Arts-Movement mindset, Gates cites any number of examples of working artists who disagree with Wilson. Gates offers numerous examples, writing

Lloyd Richards – Wilson's long-time director and creative partner – has never thought twice about casting James Earl Jones As Timon of Athens or as Judge Brack in *Hedda Gabler*. Wole Soyinka, Nigerian playwright and Nobel Laureate, staunchly declares, "I can assure you that if *Death of a Salesman* were performed in Nigeria by an all-Eskimo cast it would have resonances totally outside the mediation of color." What's more surprising is that many stars of the Black Arts firmament are equally dismissive. "If O. J. can play a black man, I don't see any problem with Olivier playing Othello," Amiri Barka says, with a mordant laugh. And the legendary black playwright and director Douglas Turner Ward claims that many of Sean O'Casey's plays, with their ethos of alienation, actually work better with black actors.⁵⁷³

Such commentary on Gates' part would seem to acquit the Bailey *Dolly!* of any wrongdoing concerning the kind of racial insensitivity of which the likes of Woodie King, Jr. might see as David Merrick's motivation. Much like Douglas Turner Ward's comment on O'Casey working "better with black actors," journalistic reviews of the Bailey *Dolly!* we have seen offer a similar point of view – that the Bailey *Dolly!*, especially in the middle of the civil rights upheaval of the 1960s, made more sense aesthetically and politically than any of the versions that would precede or follow.

As with other forms of performance and entertainment with which we've dealt, live theatre in the era that followed the Bailey *Dolly!* presented a conundrum concerning black consciousness. The Wilson-Brustein controversy brought to the fore the efficacy of black performers involved in productions of Euro-centric source material. On the one hand, as argued

by August Wilson, such involvement was a negation of black consciousness. On the other, as argued by the likes of Ed Bullins and Douglas Turner Ward, such involvement often added a defensible dimension to any such production, one that reflected previously ignored issues of race.

The Bailey *Dolly!* Redux

The accolades for the 1967 version of the all-black Bailey *Dolly!* seemed universal and endless. The same could *not* be said for the 1975 “revival of a revival” – the Bailey *Dolly!* redux – mentioned in Chapter VI as part of the incomplete scholarship of John Bush Jones. This limited engagement would feature Billy Daniels as Horace Vandergelder. Notably absent was the presence of producer David Merrick. Instead, this production was produced by Robert Cherin in association with Theatre Now, Inc.⁵⁷⁴ Perhaps the critical failure we will see for this production can be connected, at least in part, to the absence of Merrick’s iron fist. As important, though, is the idea that excitement over a black performer being cast in a part previously reserved for white performers was either novel or noteworthy, as was the case with the 1967 incarnation of the Bailey *Dolly!*

Clearly, Cherin and his production team had hoped for a repetition of history. In a press release announcing the new production, Cherin and company boasted of the history of the Bailey *Dolly!* The press release read in part, “History was made on Broadway on November 12th, 1967 when Pearl Bailey made her debut as Dolly Levi in the long-running bonanza. The New York critics embraced Pearlie-Mae. [. . .] Two years of capacity business at the St. James Theatre ensued.”⁵⁷⁵ Yet such unbridled praise would not happen this time. Reaction on the part of mass-media critics to the Bailey *Dolly!* redux ranged from an occasional accolade for Bailey’s star

power to abject dismissal. On the plus side, Clive Barnes of *The New York Times* (this time) would praise Bailey to the heavens, writing

I saw this new “Dolly” at the Wednesday matinee preview (always the best time to see this kind of show), and Miss Bailey was exultant, triumphant and as relaxed as if she were on a swing in her own backyard. She is a treasure with audiences-she makes everyone feel as if she were singing just for them she takes them into her confidence with a naughty glitter of an eye, a swoosh of an eyebrow or the parody of a grin. And her voice is so sweet and so funny-it is also musically very interesting stylistically. She is still a jazz singer.⁵⁷⁶

Yet even Barnes, whom as we saw in earlier in this chapter was a huge fan of the original Bailey *Dolly!*, was less than impressed with Daniels as Vandergelder (most other critics agreed) as well as the set design for this new production.

Barnes was in a minority in his praise, however, as other critics were less kind to the Bailey *Dolly!* redux. Marilyn Stasio’s review in *Cue* bordered on cruelty. After left-handedly complimenting Bailey on her evergreen performance of the title number, Stasio wrote

You’d better enjoy this powerhouse number, because that’s it, folks; it’s all that’s left of old Dolly. This lack-luster-style energy, wit, professionalism, and heart. [. . . T]he show has that telltale attenuated look of so many road-bound shows, a pale and sickly look that pathetically asks: “Am I light enough to pack yet?” With its truncated numbers, tacky costumes, gim-cracky sets, and match-doll chorus, this poor ghost of a great show could float on a down-draft.⁵⁷⁷

Although Stasio was impressed by the title number, she even complains of Bailey “sleepwalking”⁵⁷⁸ through the rest of the show. Martin Gottfried of the *New York Post* concurred with Stasio concerning the “road show” feel of this new Broadway production. Gottfried wrote

Doesn’t out-of-town mean everywhere but New York and amateur anywhere but Broadway? They say that’s provincial thinking and, like the old New York Yankees we’re too smug to defend ourselves, but it is embarrassing to have a road company level “Hello, Dolly!” booked into the Minskoff Theater for six weeks. Such productions are the reason they invented Chicago.⁵⁷⁹

After referring to the 1967 *Bailey Dolly!* as a “segregated, modern day minstrel show”⁵⁸⁰ – an issue that seemed less of an obstacle in the electric moment that was the first *Bailey Dolly!* production – Gottfried mentioned that this new production boasted an integrated cast. But even more upsetting to Gottfried was Bailey’s lack of professionalism in her performance, especially the title number that so impressed Stasio. Gottfried wrote

To give you an example, and I’ve never seen stage behavior so unprofessional, after singing the title song at the Wednesday preview, Miss Bailey interrupted the show and broke character to chit-chat with the audience. She ribbed the dancers, she asked if the house wanted an encore, she did the encore, she thinks she is in Vegas.⁵⁸¹

Gottfried complained further about the “ridiculous”⁵⁸² casting of Daniels as Vandergelder, the poor timing of set changes, and unacceptable sound quality from the orchestra.

Perhaps the nastiest review the *Bailey Dolly!* redux faced came from Michael Feingold at the *Village Voice*. Dismissing Stewart and Herman’s source material as “garbage with some clever dancing in it,”⁵⁸³ Feingold acknowledged that Bailey might be privy to her audience pleasing sham, writing, “The interesting aspect of Miss Bailey’s performance is that she appears to recognize the garbage as garbage.”⁵⁸⁴ Feingold offered faint praise to the structure of the first act, but has no such kind words for the liberally well-spread follies of the second act, writing, “[In this second act,] Miss Bailey seems to realize that the libretto has run wild on its own inanity, and destroyed Mr. Wilder’s painstaking, if silly, structure. She makes no effort to conceal her contempt for what she is performing [. . .]”⁵⁸⁵ This contempt leads Feingold to an unavoidable conclusion, similar to that of Harold Prince as mentioned earlier, that *Dolly!* itself is nothing more than a “vehicle”⁵⁸⁶ for its potentially charming star, but that Bailey had become disengaged from the vehicle. Referring to Bailey’s announced plan to quit live performance once her commitment to the redux ran out, Feingold wrote, “If she is giving up theatre because

she is bored with things like ‘Hello, Dolly,’ she needs to learn more about the theatre , which, as Harold Clurman once wittily said, is outside Broadway’s normal purview. A great many of us would be happy to tell her.”⁵⁸⁷

The Bailey *Dolly!* redux failed over two issues. The first was aesthetic. In the absence of David Merrick’s iron fist, production values for the 1975 were second-rate. Furthermore, stage interaction between Bailey and the suave Billy Daniels could not compare to the more explosive chemistry between Bailey and her 1967 co-star, the more irascible Cab Calloway.

More important to our analysis, though, is the notion that by the time the 1975 Bailey *Dolly!* redux had come to town, excitement over cross-racial casting for its own sake might have become passé. This notion will be of particular importance later in this chapter when we discuss David Merrick’s attempt to fit an all-black cast to the Gershwins’ *Oh, Kay!*

Musical Theatre and Black Interests

With specific reference to musical theatre on Broadway, the era following the Bailey *Dolly!* would see an explosion of musical productions of African-American interest. One might have expected a Wilson-Brustein-style debate over black control of the means of the production of culture, with attendant glacial progress. However, a quick survey of the Tony Awards from 1967 onward shows a significant number of African-American inspired efforts that were nominated for Best Musical. Of the nearly 150 musicals nominated during the period, these include *Hallelujah, Baby!* (winner 1968), *Purlie* (1970), *The Me Nobody Knows* (1971), *Ain’t Supposed to Die a Natural Death* (1972), *Don’t Bother Me, I Can’t Cope* (1973), *Raisin* (winner 1974), *The Wiz* (winner 1975), *Bubbling Brown Sugar* (1976), *Ain’t Misbehavin’* (winner 1978), *Sophisticated Ladies* (1981), *Dreamgirls* (1982), *The Tap Dance Kid* (1984), *Sarafina* (1988),

Black and Blue (1989), *Five Guys Named Moe* (1992), *Jelly's Last Jam* (1992), *Bring in 'da Noise/Bring in 'da Funk* (1996), *The Lion King* (winner 1998), *It Ain't Nothin' But the Blues* (1999), *Caroline, or Change* (2004), *The Color Purple* (2006), *Passing Strange* (2008), *Fela!* (2010), *Memphis* (winner 2010), and *The Book of Mormon* (winner 2011).⁵⁸⁸ While this list of more than two dozen of approximately 150 productions might be seen as an improvement over the era that preceded the *Bailey Dolly!*, one must consider that many of these productions, like *Hallelujah, Baby!*, *The Lion King*, and *Caroline, or Change*, were created by non-African-American writers and composers. But even with such a proviso, one must consider further that before the *Bailey Dolly!*, little if any attention was paid by Broadway to the expressive needs of African-Americans. Thus it is not unreasonable to conclude that the Broadway musical theatre venue has significantly improved its performance since the era of the *Bailey Dolly!* with respect to inclusion of material that reflects the black experience. Such a change can be attributed to a greater consciousness of the presence of African-Americans in the mainstream of American life that followed the civil rights era of the late 1960s. While it would be faulty logic to imply a direct causal relationship between the *Bailey Dolly!* and such advances, one might point to the *Bailey Dolly!* as a harbinger of improvements to come.

In addition, with a few exceptions, the era of taking a nominally race-neutral musical play and casting it with an all-black cast would expire. There would seem to be two explanations to this phenomenon. First, as we saw with the *Bailey Dolly!* redux, the excitement of the civil rights era had passed. No longer would any all-black re-envisioning of previously “whites only” musical-theatre fare be considered revolutionary. Second, the era that followed the *Bailey Dolly!* saw an explosion in commercial-American-musical-theatre material informed by African-American interests.

While the aforementioned Motown all-black *Guys and Dolls* would prove successful – perhaps owing to the “funkifying” of Frank Loesser’s tin-pan-alley score – there would be two glaring failures in this genre. The first, the Bailey *Dolly!* redux discussed earlier in this chapter, failed owing to a number of factors including poor casting, shoddy stagecraft, and a general ennui (if not antipathy) concerning the source material. Implicit but never mentioned in these negative reviews would be the sense that the “parade” had “passed by,” i.e., that the political moment of the civil rights movement of the 1960s that had so energized the original Bailey *Dolly!* had long since “left the station” a mere eight years later. A similar ennui would plague our second example of failure in the genre to adapt a “white” show to an all-black cast – David Merrick’s colossally failed attempt to revive the Gershwins’ *Oh, Kay!* (original production 1926, revival 1990). Suffice it to say that the boredom engendered by this attempt to rekindle the race-neutral Bailey *Dolly!* magic was so endemic that it can be summed up in the last sentence of the opening paragraph of Frank Rich’s *New York Times* Review. After cataloging Merrick flops like *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* (1966), *Mata Hari* (1967), and *Mack & Mabel* (1974), Rich writes, “This loose adaptation of the Gershwins’ 1926 musical is a chintzy, innocuous slab of stock that is likely to leave more than a few theatergoers shrugging their shoulders and asking, ‘Didn’t I doze through that a couple of summers ago in a barn?’”⁵⁸⁹ Rich compares this production to the Bailey *Dolly!*, which he acknowledges as derided in some circles as reminiscent of minstrelsy. On the contrary, Rich argues that “history should more kindly regard [the Bailey *Dolly!*] as an exhilarating example of what current parlance calls non-traditional casting.”⁵⁹⁰ Rich pays particularly close attention to Merrick’s overriding selling point for the Bailey *Dolly!* – that not a word had to be changed from the original Stewart/Herman effort – noting that Bailey and Calloway were given relative freedom to pursue their own interpretation of the material. In contrast, this all-black revival of *Oh, Kay!* was transplanted from the typical Bolton/Wodehouse

venue of the ritzy Hamptons on New York's upper-crust Long Island to Harlem in the midst of its Afro-centric renaissance. Rich comments that this *Oh, Kay!* has "transported the libretto to an ersatz Jazz Age Harlem, with eye-popping gags and stereotypes that are less redolent of the Cotton Club than of 'Amos 'n' Andy.'" ⁵⁹¹ And much like the 1975 Bailey *Dolly!* redux, Rich found the production lacking in professional standards, writing, "But 'Oh, Kay!' is so deficient in more mundane theatrical areas that debating its curious racial politics is a critical luxury." ⁵⁹²

Thus, by 1990, much less 1975, the idea of adapting any Euro-centric musical theatre material to an all-black cast had become passé because of the end of the end of the civil-rights era as well as the explosion of Afro-centered material in commercial American musical theatre. This is not to say that African-American performers did not make their mark on such Euro-centric material. The point now was that after Pearl Bailey as Dolly Levi, a) it was no longer any kind of revolutionary act for an African-American performer to play a role originally conceived as white, and b) such performances would take place in a racially integrated environment. Particularly successful examples of performances by black actors in previously "whites only" roles include Whoopi Goldberg's replacing Nathan Lane as lead-Roman-slave Pseudolus in the 1996 revival of *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, ⁵⁹³ Aurda McDonald's performances in Carrie, Julie Jordan's best friend, in *Carousel* (revival, 1994) and spinster Lizzie in *110 in the Shade* (revival, 2007), ⁵⁹⁴ and Brian Stokes Mitchell's performances as Latino revolutionary Valentin in *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (replacement, 1993), as Fred Graham, the actor who plays Petruchio in the *Taming-of-the-Shrew* play-within-a-play in *Kiss Me Kate* (revival, 1997), and as Cervantes/Don Quixote in *Man of La Mancha* (revival, 2002). ⁵⁹⁵

Afro-informed Commercial American Musical Theatre

The performances mentioned in the previous section underscore the durability of Pearl Bailey's original contribution to the notion of cross-racial casting, for better or worse, in musical theatre. More to the point is that in the era that followed the Bailey *Dolly!*, the Broadway musical would pay significant attention to stories with African-American resonance. What follows is a short survey of such contributions.

In addition to producing the groundbreaking *A Raisin in the Sun*, Philip Rose would produce Ossie Davis' black-informed comedy, *Purlie Victorious* (1961). Davis' play dealt with life among share croppers in the Jim-Crow South. In 1970, Rose put together a mostly white creative team – himself as producer, director, and co-bookwriter (along with the original author Ossie Davis), and Gary Geld and Peter Udell as composer and lyricist – and developed *Purlie*, a musical version of Davis' play. Despite this mostly white control of the creative process for *Purlie*, Rose was very conscious of the difficulties involved in black/white interaction in theatrical production. For example, Rose writes of the career of “Super Negro” Sidney Poitier, with whom he worked on *A Raisin in the Sun*, “Somehow black people knew that when they joyfully greeted Sidney on any street, his response would be equally warm and friendly. No matter the occasional criticism of his choice of roles as a ‘Black Superman,’ the black community knew better.”⁵⁹⁶ Here, Rose acknowledges that the sometimes imperfect effort at racial integration in commercial theatre was a necessary in order to achieve an ultimate goal of fair and equal treatment of African Americans in the arts. Yet among theatre professionals, Rose would not always find such a cooperative environment. Rose offers the example of attempting to hire black actress Novella Nelson, who had heard second-hand that the original *Purlie Victorious*, which contained much broad comedy, degraded black people. Rose finally had to

appeal to the Nelson's respect for both Ossie Davis and his wife, actress Ruby Dee, in order to interest Nelson in the project.⁵⁹⁷

In commenting on the social importance of *Purlie*, Woll writes, "*Purlie* introduced Broadway [mostly white] audiences to a new black musical that had a social message beneath the comedy." This message was not always accepted by whites, however. Rose describes how white theatre owners buckled at the idea of booking a play they thought was an attack on white people.⁵⁹⁸

Despite the advances of the Bailey *Dolly!* in this regard, condescension toward black-informed material and those associated with such efforts would continue in the era following the Bailey *Dolly!* Rose expresses particular concern over the shoddy treatment he and his *Purlie* stars, ultimate Tony performance winners Cleavon Little and Melba Moore, would receive at Tony Awards festivities, describing how the press ignored the *Purlie* entourage in favor of Lauren Bacall and her entourage from the ultimate Tony winner for Best Musical 1970, *Applause*. Rose, Little, and Moore would start walk out of this Tony press event before Tony producer Alexander Cohen successfully got them to return. The *Purlie* entourage had already gotten to the elevator at the press venue when, as Rose describes, "[i]n a fraction of a second Alex Cohen came to apologize and say that everybody was now ready and anxious to meet Cleavon and Melba and to ask if we would come back. I looked at Melba and Cleavon and since I could tell they really wanted to meet the press. I agreed."⁵⁹⁹

Though received well by critics, *Purlie* had trouble finding an audience, especially among African Americans. This led to Rose hiring black ticket agent Sylvester Leaks to drum up business. With respect to Leaks' prowess among African-American theatre-goers, Woll writes

He had extensive contacts with church, fraternal, and social organizations, and such groups might be encouraged to attend performances of shows like *Purlie*. Leaks, unlike all other ticket brokers, aimed for black theater parties, which most Broadway agents had previously ignored. The effort ultimately aided *Purlie* and helped to extend its run to 688 performances.⁶⁰⁰

Woll finds particular significance in the economic consequences of Leaks' efforts for *Purlie* and writes

While Leaks's work cannot be considered the only reason for *Purlie*'s success, it put Broadway producers on notice that a potent source of ticket sales had been under-utilized. Rather than ignore black audiences, producers might start to consider them as a part of the ultimate profit picture. *Purlie*'s efforts in this direction started a new push in the 1970's to bring a formerly invisible black audience to the Great White Way.⁶⁰¹

This strategy of attempting to attract black audiences apparently proved successful. *Purlie* would end up scoring a respectable 688 performances in its original run. This successful run is significant as it would seem to represent the first time that the financial success of a *new* Broadway musical (as opposed to the recycled nature of the Bailey *Dolly!*) was propelled by African-American audiences.

The 1975 Broadway musical season would see perhaps the most successful of the few all-black-performance efforts that followed the Bailey *Dolly!* that *also* included an African-American creative team. *The Wiz*, with score by Charlie Smalls and book by William F. Brown and direction by Geoffrey Holder, took L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* and transported it to an urban black milieu. Jack Viertel notes that mainstream critics were perplexed by this show's appropriation of a white icon like *The Wizard of Oz* but that the show found success on its own terms. Viertel writes,

[*The Wiz*] dared to be entirely post Jim-Crow. It dared to suggest that no one had to ask permission to borrow "The Wizard of Oz," and no one should ever have to ask again. Unlike the black *Hello, Dolly!*, which retained its white, turn-of-the century vernacular

and simply placed it in the mouths of black actors, *The Wiz* spoke the cheerfully slangy argot of the black street. [. . .] It did all of this without anger or recrimination or, seemingly, having anything to prove at all [. . .]⁶⁰²

One might question the idea that the “turn of the century vernacular” Viertel mentions failed in terms of African-American expression. Nevertheless, in contrast to the *Bailey Dolly!*, no one could accuse *The Wiz* of being anything close to “white.” And like the *Bailey Dolly!* and in contrast to Black-Arts enthusiasts, *The Wiz* was possessed of no conscious effort to alienate white audiences as a symbol of social consciousness. Ultimately accepted by the mainstream of the musical theatre establishment, *The Wiz* would win seven Tony Awards, including Best Musical.

Thus, in the era that immediately followed the *Bailey Dolly!*, slow progress could be seen in efforts for more inclusion of African-American interests, both in terms of performance and creation of source material. Going beyond the era immediately following the *Bailey Dolly!*, such African-American participation in commercial American musical theatre would continue to increase. There would, however, remain the occasional problematic production.

Show Boat Revisited

Purlie and *The Wiz* would seem to represent successful attempts at African-izing the proceedings on Broadway. Other efforts would ensue. Sometimes, however, the best intentions yield questionable results. We now turn our attention to the 1992 Harold-Prince-directed revival of *Show Boat* in which Prince attempted to reflect a contemporary racial consciousness on the old war-horse. This production would win a Tony Award for Best Revival of a Musical. In addition, the advertising campaign for the production featured voice-over work by James Earl

Jones, presumably intended to attract an African-American audience.⁶⁰³ Yet according to Robin Breon, this production, especially in its Toronto incarnation, would be plagued by protest because of its promotion of Jim-Crow-era racial stereotypes. Breon acknowledges that Prince had full permission from the appropriate estates to tinker with the text of the musical. Yet Breon questions Prince's sensitivity in applying such free reign, writing

Most of [Prince's] changes, as expected, had to do with how to handle the caricatured and stereotypical black presence in the musical. Whether Prince admits it to the black community or not, these changes also validated their concerns; there is offensive material in *Show Boat* dating back to its inception in 1927.⁶⁰⁴

Breon acknowledges at least one act of racial sensitivity on Prince's part in adapting the show. In the original production, the second act opened with the "In Dahomey" number that takes place at the Chicago World's Fair. This number proved offensive owing to the portrayal of black chorus members dressed gaudily as African natives speaking/singing pidgin African utterances. Though historically accurate to the reality of the 1892 Chicago World's Fair that took place during the late-nineteenth-century timeline of *Show Boat*,⁶⁰⁵ this number, in a context contemporary to the 1992 production, was considered by Prince too offensive to include. Breon finds particular fault with the characters of Queenie and Joe, whom she describes as representing "a more or less set of Negro caricatures that had been established by white writers in silent films beginning in the 1920s."⁶⁰⁶ In terms of black attendance for the production, and despite attempts to attract a black audience on Prince's part, Breon notes that "[. . .] black people have not been historically supportive of [*Show Boat*]. I looked hard to find a black face in any of the 1850 seats of the North York [Ontario, near Toronto] Performing Arts Centre's Main Stage Theatre during an October 1993 performance."⁶⁰⁷ Breon further reports that the correspondent for the *New York Amsterdam News* (which she notes as the largest circulation black newspaper in America) interviewed many blacks who found fault with otherwise noteworthy performer Paul Robeson

for lending his talent to and playing a major role in the success of the original *Show Boat* and the 1936 film version that followed.⁶⁰⁸ Another issue surrounding this revival of *Show Boat* concerned the use of the word “nigger” in the text of the drama, as it appeared in the original 1927 version of the show. Breon writes that producer Garth Drabinsky consulted with Harry Belafonte, who favored retaining the word in the service of historical accuracy, on this issue. In contrast, former Ontario Lieutenant Governor Lincoln Alexander, the first African-Canadian to hold this office, argued against the use of this word. Prince and Drabinsky ultimately would choose to use “colored folk” as sufficiently historically accurate yet less offensive.⁶⁰⁹

In terms of the fairness of labeling this production, and presumable any other production, of *Show Boat* as racist, Breon points to photos that appeared in the *Time* magazine spread that feature all of the white characters yet none of the black ones. Breon quotes *Time* reviewer William A. Henry III in clarifying this paramount difficulty with *Show Boat*, writing, “The real problem is that the show follows the wrong story. It assumes that black people are inherently less interesting than whites.”⁶¹⁰ Expanding on this “blacks as ciphers” mentality, Breon further faults a local Toronto print advertisement showing a black character smiling pleasantly as he stands on the wharf. Breon writes

This idyllic picture was framed in 19th-century ornament showing a few cotton blossoms, a banjo, a fiddle, and at the top of the frame, two flags – the flag of the Confederate Army (the Stars and Bars) hung next to the American flag (the Stars and Stripes) – giving and almost antebellum quality to a scene that was in fact post-Reconstruction 1890s.⁶¹¹

Breon makes mention of the casting of the pivotal *Show-Boat* role of Julie, a light skinned black woman, by white actresses, with particular reference to Ava Gardner in the 1950s film version.⁶¹² In a similar incident of white-to-non-white cross-racial casting, a huge controversy would arise over the casting of white actor Jonathan Pryce as a Eurasian pimp in

Cameron McIntosh's production of *Miss Saigon* (1991). Kislán describes the controversy that initially led to the ban by Actors' Equity Association of Pryce's performance, writing

The producer [McIntosh] responded immediately [to the ban on Pryce] and threatened to cancel the show. Negotiations secured a compromise: Cameron Mackintosh retained artistic integrity in casting matters and was allowed to hire Jonathan Pryce; the union was assured that three-fourths of the company would be cast with minority performers.⁶¹³

Yet even this compromise would not resolve the controversy. Politically conservative actor Charlton Heston would resign from Equity in protest, as "the union's board quickly voted to reverse the Pryce ban." Nevertheless, even this reversal left Pryce unsatisfied.

[. . . T]he carefully worded Equity statement lifting the ban seemed to admit Pryce on a technicality: Equity claimed that, as a recognized "international star," Pryce was exempt from its authority, but it came close to reaffirming its accusations of racism, saying it had "applied an honest and moral principle in an inappropriate manner." Pryce complained that Equity was essentially telling him, "We'll let you in, but you're still a racist — a star racist."⁶¹⁴

Pryce's situation begs the question of the morality of any actor mimicking a character of a different racial background. Where Dolly Levi and Horace Vandergelder could be seen as race-neutral in conception, a Eurasian pimp could not.

Both these situations – the Prince revival of *Show Boat* and the controversy surrounding casting for *Miss Saigon* – demonstrate an imperfect racial landscape for the Broadway musical in the era that followed the Bailey *Dolly!* However, such difficulty would seem to be balanced by black-informed performance and source-material creation surrounding the turn of the millennium.

Recent Efforts

Perhaps the most significant recent effort of white creators attempting to interpret the African-American experience came with the adaptation of E.L. Doctorow's epic novel *Ragtime* to the musical stage in 1997. *Ragtime*, the musical, would lose Best Musical Honors to Disney's attempt at interpreting what might be viewed as an ersatz African experience, a musical version of its hit animated film, *The Lion King*. A supremely American effort in contrast, *Ragtime* tells the story of three families at the dawn of the twentieth century. The first of these families is a group of old-guard WASPs living in suburban New Rochelle, New York, coincidentally neither geographically nor sociologically distant from Dolly Levi's mythical Yonkers. The second family unit involves an immigrant Jew and his daughter riding steerage on a boat bound for America. The third involves the out-of-wedlock romance between the low-social-echelon black woman Sarah and successful black jazz pianist Coalhouse Walker, Jr. Members of each family find fault and conflict with the American dream, intersecting with each other at critical junctures as the plot-points progress.

In an extensive discussion of *Ragtime* in his *Deconstructing Harold Hill*, a contemporary discussion of significant moments in the canon of musical drama, Scott Miller devotes significant focus to this merging of the three families and how it shows that the American dream can be constructed and then deconstructed. Miller begins his discussion with ragtime music, the sound evoked by Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty's score, as a metaphor for the co-optation of black art forms, writing that "[r]agtime, jazz, blues, rock and roll, rhythm and blues, and now rap, all began as uniquely black musical forms that moved into the mainstream."⁶¹⁵ Shoring up the significance of this cooptation, one might surmise especially as regards the Broadway musical, Miller adds, "The history of American music would be practically nonexistent if not for

the contributions of African American musicians and composers.”⁶¹⁶ One might surmise that, especially as compared to the rock/soul score for something as recent as Charlie Smalls’ *The Wiz* discussed above, Miller might regard this “non-existence” as tacit condemnation of the white Broadway theatre composer establishment – the Kerns, Gershwins, and Porters of mid-century popularity – and their cooptation of black musical forms. This ragtime music thus becomes the aesthetic metaphor that connects the three families of *Ragtime*, and can be seen at once as something that binds the three families in a common attraction and affection, yet on the other hand represents the mis-appropriation of the African-American aesthetic interest. Miller continues, “As we see in *Ragtime*, this was the first time in American history that black men were becoming famous.”⁶¹⁷ Such fame would not only affect the trajectory of Coalhouse, a rising star in the jazz world of Harlem, but would ultimately serve as Coalhouse’s downfall. Ultimately, the cooperative focus of “star Negro” Booker T. Washington, a character in the play itself, whom Coalhouse held in such high regard would fail Coalhouse after his mistreatment on racial grounds. Yet although he notes the failure of the Washington ethic of cooperation, especially in Coalhouse’s personal situation, Miller sees the new family structure that the ultimately widowed Mother (of the WASP family) and equally widowed Tateh, the immigrant Jew, create at the end of the show as a sign of optimism. This blended family, composed of Mother’s WASP son, Tateh’s Jewish daughter, and the African-American son left behind by the dead Coalhouse and Sarah, “represent the promise of the future, the idea that with each new generation, less and less of our past prejudices and racism are passed on.”⁶¹⁸ To the extent that the Bailey *Dolly!* failed in any effort to accurately reflect an African-American experience, *Ragtime* laments this failure. Yet like the Bailey *Dolly!*, *Ragtime* offers at least a minimal glimpse of optimism as well.

Most recently at the time of the writing of this study, the 2010 Broadway season saw the advent of two musical plays of interest to African Americans, *Fela!* and *Memphis*. In an article discussing the promotion of these plays, Patrick Healy notes a decided upturn in black attendance for Broadway productions, estimating the audience for *Memphis*, the story of interracial romance at the birth of rock'n'roll in the 1950s, at 20%.⁶¹⁹ In discussing *Memphis*, Healy notes that many critics dismissed the piece as “unconventional” in its treatment of interracial romance. However, Healy notes with near-scorn how *Memphis* has succeeded using similar strategies as *The Color Purple* and other black musical productions before it, writing

[The] producers [of *Memphis*] believed that their show would become known as memorable entertainment if buzz spread among enough so-called Broadway taste-makers — who, in the case of *Memphis*, were not the usual critics, bloggers and veteran theatergoers, but instead African-American ministers, choir directors and black women.⁶²⁰

Healy quotes African-American theatre-goer Willie Anderson, a tourist from Atlanta, as saying, “I have nothing against *Mary Poppins*, but I don’t see that as a show for us like *Memphis* will be.”⁶²¹ Here, Healy identifies a new demographic – a black theatre-goer who wants to see plays that appeal directly to ethnic identity.

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, we began with a short discussion in the change in the economic, social, and political landscape that occurred during the era that followed the *Bailey Dolly!* In this section, we noted that despite any failure of African Americans to achieve greater economic parity with white America, there would transpire a significant breakdown in social barriers that enforced racism as experienced in previous time frames. Important to this breakdown of social

barriers was the way in which the *Bailey Dolly!* offered a model for cooperation among the races. It would be inappropriate to assign any causal role for the *Bailey Dolly!* in this breakdown of social barriers between the races. However, it is reasonable to say that the *Bailey Dolly!* was a threshold or flashpoint in such changes in American race relations, serving as a participant in this dynamic.

We continued with a discussion of how the treatment of race has changed in popular media and entertainment venues, paying particularly close attention to live non-musical theatre and the Wilson-Brustein debate over cross-racial casting. In film and television, we found progress was mixed with the difficulty of balancing race consciousness with race neutrality, an issue that informed the *Bailey Dolly!* In both these entertainment venues, the era that followed the *Bailey Dolly!* saw slow, steady progress, often coupled with backtracking on racial issues. With respect to cross-racial casting in live stage performance in roles previously reserved for white performers – an issue of particular importance to the cross-racially cast *Bailey Dolly!* – we found opinions at both ends of the spectrum – opinions that condemned such casting as contrary to the interests of African-American expression, as well as those that saw such casting as opportunity to add a racial dimension to the discussion of such material.

We concluded with a survey dealing with the explosion of both performance and material of interest to the African-American community that transpired in the post-*Bailey Dolly!* era in the venue of commercial American musical theatre, paying particular attention to such issues as creative control and black audience development. This survey included a discussion of the failure of the *Bailey Dolly!* redux and its inability to capture the magic of the original incarnation. The failure of the *Bailey Dolly!* redux was seen as attributable to aesthetic inferiority to the original *Bailey Dolly!* More importantly, failure of the *Bailey Dolly!* redux could be blamed on the loss of novelty of casting a black performer in a role previously reserved

for white performers. Such loss of novelty would plague David Merrick's attempt to produce an all-black version of the Gershwins' 1930s classic, *Oh, Kay!*, in 1990. In this survey, we also saw some difficulties concerning race and the Broadway musical – the Prince revival of *Show Boat* and the casting controversy surrounding *Miss Saigon*. Despite these difficulties, we saw that the new millennium would see an explosion of black-informed performance and source material in commercial American musical theatre – an explosion for which the Bailey *Dolly!* can be seen as a breakthrough.

Endnotes

⁵²⁴ Bowser, 141-142

⁵²⁵ Bowser, 142. We note that it is now twenty years past the time when Bowser's sources spoke of first-generational wealth and make no comment on whether the situation has changed in the interim. Bullard's comments that follow offer a greater glimpse into the nature of black income and wealth inequality in the post-civil-rights era.

⁵²⁶ Bullard, Robert D. *The Black Metropolis in the Twenty-first Century: Race, power, and politics of place*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007, 7

⁵²⁷ Bullard, 8

⁵²⁸ Freedman, Samuel G. "Southern White Teams Just Didn't Play Black Ones, but One Game Ended All That" in *The New York Times*, October 25, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/26/us/26florida.html>, (accessed December 19, 2010). Freedman points to a possible negative involved in such racial intermingling, writing, "The coming of integration to Southern football degraded the caliber of the black teams. Football factories like Alabama, Louisiana State and Florida State scooped up recruits who, in the past, would have gone to a Grambling or a Florida A & M." As we saw in the Bailey *Dolly!* redux and will see in the failure of "all Negro" casts for white musicals, the all-black situation on Broadway would give way to integration of casts. Unlike the football situation here, the blending of the races would *not* thin out all-black efforts.

⁵²⁹ Freedman

⁵³⁰ Bauman, Valerie. "Black conservative tea partiers take heat." http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=D9ETR1380&show_article=1 (accessed April 8, 2010)

⁵³¹ Bauman

⁵³² Bauman

⁵³³ Schlesinger, Arthur Jr. *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992, 110

⁵³⁴ Schlesinger, 110

⁵³⁵ Schlesinger, 110

⁵³⁶ Cohen, Patricia. "'Culture of Poverty' Makes a Comeback" in *The New York Times*, October 17, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/18/us/18poverty.html?_r=1&th&emc=th (accessed October 18, 2010). Sugrue (381) would seem to concur with Cohen. In noting that conservative black commentators have started to accept Moynihan's "culture of poverty" argument, Sugrue writes, "An important strain of black nationalists joined a culturally conservative politics of gender and family that continued to shape public policy well after the Moynihan report gathered dust."

⁵³⁷ McMillan, 31

⁵³⁸ McMillan, 32

⁵³⁹ McMillan, 32

⁵⁴⁰ McMillan, 34

⁵⁴¹ Woll and Miller, 79

⁵⁴² Woll and Miller, 79

⁵⁴³ Deane, Pamela S. Article on *The Jeffersons* in Newcombe, Horace, *Encyclopedia of Television*, http://books.google.com/books?id=CFXgj7a55agC&pg=PA1217&lpg=PA1217&dq=the+jeffersons+buffoon&source=bl&ots=3kCkPG-s_A&sig=e8gFJiLhzwed0bfkhl6azFd1cKs&hl=en&ei=zq8PTZn0KcKt8Aa00oGTDg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CByQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=the%20jeffersons%20buffoon&f=false, 1217 (accessed December 20, 2010)

⁵⁴⁴ Deane, 1999

⁵⁴⁵ Deane, 1012

⁵⁴⁶ New York Times News Service, "Urkel of 'Family Matters' is Now a National Matter" in *The Baltimore Sun*, April 21, 1991, http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1991-04-21/features/1991111096_1_urkel-family-matters-full-house (accessed December 21, 2010)

⁵⁴⁷ New York Times News Service (Urkel)

⁵⁴⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_black_Academy_Award_winners_and_nominees (accessed December 21, 2010)

⁵⁴⁹ It is interesting to note that also in 1989, Spike Lee's drama of life in a racially transitioning neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York, *Do the Right Thing*, would be nominated in acting categories only the supporting performance of Danny Aiello as an Italian pizzeria owner. In addition to Lee himself, *Do The Right Thing* featured noteworthy performances by Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis. Dee would be nominated but lose for Best Supporting Actress in 2007 for *American Gangster*.

⁵⁵⁰ "A Portrait of Black America on the Eve of the 2010 Census" in *The Root*, December 21, 2010, <http://www.theroot.com/views/portrait-black-america-eve-2010-census> (accessed December 21, 2010)

⁵⁵¹ It is duly noted that in other than acting and music categories – categories such as directing and writing – black participation in recognition by the Academy has been negligible. But it took until the 2009 film year for Kathryn Bigelow to become the first woman to win a Best Director Oscar. In the current era, scarcely a year goes by in which no black performer is nominated in one of the four acting categories. One would hope that in the years that follow, this situation is remedied in other categories.

⁵⁵² Ventre, Michael. "Black stars don't mean Hollywood is color-blind." <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/35146945/ns/entertainment-movies/> (accessed December 13, 2010)

⁵⁵³ Ventre

⁵⁵⁴ Ventre

⁵⁵⁵ Ventre

⁵⁵⁶ Hare, Breeanna. "Parents: Disney's 'Princess' is a hop toward progress" in *cnn.com*, December 11, 2009, http://articles.cnn.com/2009-12-11/entertainment/princess.frog.parents_1_princess-tiana-latest-princess-poor-taste?_s=PM:SHOWBIZ (accessed December 13, 2010)

⁵⁵⁷ Hare

⁵⁵⁸ Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. "The Chitlin Circuit" in Elam and Krasner, 133

⁵⁵⁹ King, 13

⁵⁶⁰ King, 16

⁵⁶¹ King, 20-21

⁵⁶² King, 206

⁵⁶³ Isherwood, Charles. "THEATRE REVIEW: *Death of a Salesman* – Willy Loman is Lost, Still Looking for Stimulus Plan and Some Dignity" in *The New York Times*, May 5, 2009, http://theater.nytimes.com/2009/05/05/theater/reviews/05deat.html?ref=charles_s_dutton (accessed December 11, 2010). Further discussion of Wilson-Brustein debate can be found in a *Christian Science Monitor* article by Simon Saltzman and Nicole Plett, who write, "In his subsequent response to Wilson, Brustein questioned whether there shouldn't be 'some kind of statute of limitations on white guilt and white reparations.' He further berated Wilson for having 'fallen into a monotonous tone of victimization.' On the other hand, Wilson blames Brustein for failing to 'imagine a theater broad enough and secure enough in its traditions to absorb and make use of all manners and cultures of American life.'" Saltzman, Simon and Nicole Plett, "Playwright August Wilson On Race Relations and the Theater" in *Christian Science Monitor*, May 15, 1998, <http://www.csmonitor.com/durable/1998/05/15/fp54s2-csm.htm>, Please note that when access was attempted on January 2, 2011, the web-page had been dismantled.

⁵⁶⁴ Isherwood (Dutton, *Death of a Salesman*)

⁵⁶⁵ Isherwood (Dutton, *Death of a Salesman*)

⁵⁶⁶ Please see discussion of Dennehy's theatre career on http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brian_Dennehy (accessed January 1, 2011).

⁵⁶⁷ Isherwood

⁵⁶⁸ Please see “Barack and Michelle Headed to Broadway” in <http://onthehush.com/forums/showthread.php?t=25253> (accessed January 1, 2011).

⁵⁶⁹ Robertson, Campbell. “A Black ‘Cat,’ Catching an Elusive Audience” in *The New York Times*, March 20, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/20/theater/20cat.html?th&emc=th> (accessed December 12, 2010)

⁵⁷⁰ Robertson

⁵⁷¹ Robertson

⁵⁷² Robertson

⁵⁷³ Gates, 133. In an interview with Gus Edwards, Douglas Turner Ward mitigates this apparent support of cross-racial casting, complaining of how actor training programs insist that black students tackle the canon of Euro-informed drama to the near-exclusion of Afro-informed material. Edwards quotes Ward as saying, “The training of black actors today in academia and in acting schools is ass-backwards. I mean, most of the schools don’t even use black material. Could you imagine a bunch of actors going to college for four years and not even studying a piece of their own material? Not one character that might be remindful of their own experience or somebody they might know? And yet they’re asked to do everybody else’s characters. Can you imagine getting some kids out of the ghetto and they start out by doing Tennessee Williams’s *The Glass Menagerie*? Can you imagine it? That’s almost laughable. But I’ve seen it done in so many places of supposedly higher education that the laugh sort of sticks in my throat.”

⁵⁷⁴ Please see <http://ibdb.com/production.php?id=3769> (accessed January 3, 2011).

⁵⁷⁵ From the musical theatre collection at the Museum of the City of New York.

⁵⁷⁶ Barnes, Clive. ” Stage: ‘Hello, Dolly!’: Back Where She Belongs – on Broadway” in *The New York Times*, November 7, 1975, from the musical theatre collection at the Lincoln Center branch of the New York Public Library

⁵⁷⁷ Stasio, Marilyn. “Whisper ‘So Long, Dearie,’ Dolly Doesn’t Live Here An More” in *Cue*, November 22, 1975

⁵⁷⁸ Stasio

⁵⁷⁹ Gottfried, Martin. “Bailey’s ‘Hello, Dolly!’ a Lusterless Pearl” in *New York Post*, November 7, 1975, from the musical theatre collection at the Lincoln Center branch of the New York Public Library

⁵⁸⁰ Gottfried

⁵⁸¹ Gottfried

⁵⁸² Gottfried. Presumably, Daniels, a suave nightclub singer, was too smooth as Vandergelder, as compared to the more easily irascible Cab Calloway.

⁵⁸³ Feingold, Michael. “Miss Bailey Builds a Vehicle” in *Village Voice*, November 25, 1975, from the musical theatre collection at the Lincoln Center branch of the New York Public Library

⁵⁸⁴ Feingold. In the next breath, Feingold writes, “She does not need to convince the audience of anything, having gotten a standing ovation on her entrance.” Here, despite the poor quality of the production, Feingold acknowledges the equivalent of saying that Pearl Bailey could read from the Congressional Record and still please an audience.

⁵⁸⁵ Feingold

⁵⁸⁶ Feingold

⁵⁸⁷ Feingold

⁵⁸⁸ In 2008, the Tony winner for Best Musical was *In the Heights*. Though dealing with Hispanic rather than African-American concerns, *Heights* might offer even more ammunition to the idea that the Broadway musical has become a more culturally diverse enterprise in the era that followed the Bailey *Dolly!* In addition to the musical plays mentioned here, there are others, like *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (2002) and *Avenue Q* (2004), both Tony winners for Best Musical, had angles of interest to African Americans. *Millie* featured black actress Sheryl Lee Ralph as “Muzzy,” a carefree, aging, jazz-age “party girl” whom we ultimately discover is the step-parent to two of the featured characters. Humor is derived from an incident in which Muzzy announces that she is the mother of two adult white children. Muzzy quickly corrects herself by adding that she’s really the “stepmother.” Coincidentally, in the 1967 film upon which the musical play is based, Carol Channing, Broadway’s original musical *Dolly Levi*, played Muzzy in a race-free milieu. And *Avenue Q* features an actor playing black former child star Gary Coleman and a song by an Asian character entitled “Everyone’s a Little Bit Racist.”

⁵⁸⁹ Rich, Frank. “Review/Theater: David Merrick Presents ‘Oh Kay!’” in *The New York Times*, November 2, 1990, <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/11/02/theater/review-theater-david-merrick-presents-oh-kay.html> (accessed January 3, 2011)

⁵⁹⁰ Rich (*Oh, Kay!*)

⁵⁹¹ Rich (*Oh, Kay!*)

⁵⁹² Rich (*Oh, Kay!*)

⁵⁹³ Please see <http://ibdb.com/person.php?id=42457> (accessed January 4, 2011). The Internet Broadway Data Base also mentions a benefit performance on September 23, 2002, in which Goldberg performed in concert version of *Funny Girl*.

⁵⁹⁴ Please see <http://ibdb.com/person.php?id=52250> (accessed January 4, 2011).

⁵⁹⁵ Please see <http://ibdb.com/person.php?id=68335> (accessed January 4, 2011). It is interesting to note that Mitchell was a member of the cast of the ill-fated David Merrick attempt to impose an all-black cast on the aforementioned *Oh, Kay!* Furthermore, Mitchell and McDonald appeared together as Coalhouse and Sarah, respectively, in the original production of *Ragtime*, discussed later in this chapter.

⁵⁹⁶ Rose, 225

⁵⁹⁷ Rose, 225

⁵⁹⁸ Rose, 245

⁵⁹⁹ Rose, 246

⁶⁰⁰ Woll, 257

⁶⁰¹ Woll, 257

⁶⁰² Viertel, Jack. "The Wonder of *The Wiz*" in *Playbill*, July 2, 2009,

<http://www.playbill.com/features/article/130813-The-Wonder-of-The-Wiz> (accessed January 7, 2011). A similar phenomenon of black control of the creative process in commercial American musical theatre could be found in the 2006 production of the musical version of Alice Walker's novel, *The Color Purple*. On national tour at the time of the writing of this study, *Purple* would boast a score by popular African-American singer Brenda Russell as well as Oprah Winfrey as a lead producer.

⁶⁰³ Drinkard, Lauren. "Showboat's' Comin' for Chicago Run; After \$2M Campaign" in *Advertising Age*, August 7, 1995, http://adage.com/article?article_id=86133, (accessed January 7, 2011). Drinkard notes that the Jones ads were created by a Toronto-based agency. This connection to Toronto will be relevant momentarily.

⁶⁰⁴ Breon, Robin. "Show Boat: The Revival, The Racism" in *TDR*, Volume 39, Number 2, Summer 1995. Boston: MIT Press, 1995.

<http://www.jstor.org.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/stable/1146446?seq=4&Search=yes&searchText=robin&searchText=prince&searchText=breon&searchText=showboat&list=hide&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3Dbreon%2BRobin%2Bprince%2Bshowboat%26acc%3Don%26wc%3Don&prevSearch=&item=1&ttl=1&returnArticleService=showFullText&resultsServiceName=null>, (accessed January 7, 2011), 89

⁶⁰⁵ Breon, 89. Breon writes, "The Dahomey Village was part of the Chicago World's [Fair] Columbian Exposition, one of a series of 'ethnological displays' which reinforced the scientific racism of the period." Breon mentions protests by Frederick Douglass and Ida Wells against such exhibitions of "ethnology."

⁶⁰⁶ Breon, 90-91

⁶⁰⁷ Breon, 93

⁶⁰⁸ Breon, 94. Breon notes that Robeson's iconic performance of "Ol' Man River" would stop the show every night.

⁶⁰⁹ Breon, 94-95. Breon notes that Paul Robeson sang the lyric "Niggers all work on the Mississippi" in the verse of "Ol' Man River" in the original production. By the mid-1930s, Robeson started using "darkies" instead of "niggers." For the 1936 film version, Robeson would sing "There's an old man called the Mississippi." Prince and Drabinsky would use "Colored folk work on the Mississippi." Breon notes further that Robeson found fault with the stereotype of the drunken African American as depicted in the "Ol' Man River" lyric, "You get a little drunk and you land in jail." Robeson would change "drunk" to "spunk," which worked well for New York audiences. However, London audiences reacted with silence, owing to the idea that "spunk" is British slang for "semen." In England, Robeson changed "spunk" to "grit." These changes on Robeson's part would cause no shortage of consternation for lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II, whom Breon quotes as saying, "As the author of these words, I have no intention of changing them or permitting anyone else to change them. I further suggest that Paul write his own songs and leave mine alone." In addition, Breon refers to Robeson as an "outstanding anti-fascist of the period" who derived much audience acclaim because of his positions. (Breon, 95) Such electricity over a performer's political stand provides a strong comparison to Bailey and Calloway's appropriation of the enthusiasm surrounding the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

⁶¹⁰ Breon, 95-96

⁶¹¹ Breon, 96. Breon notes that the offensive Confederate flag in this advertisement would be replaced by a second American flag.

⁶¹² Breon, 92. In addition, Breon focuses on the difficulty light-skinned black actors have faced historically, writing, "[G]enuine light-skinned [black actors] found themselves unemployable – pronounced wrong for black roles because they did not 'read black' [. . .]."

⁶¹³ Kislan, 288

⁶¹⁴ “Storm over 'Saigon': Drama over 'Miss Saigon' -- Why Jonathan Pryce may not be able to reprise his role as the Engineer in the States” in *Entertainment Weekly*, September 7, 1990, <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,318089,00.html> (accessed January 5, 2011)

⁶¹⁵ Miller, Scott. *Deconstructing Harold Hill*. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann, 2000, 128

⁶¹⁶ Miller, 128

⁶¹⁷ Miller, 128. “If Scott Joplin could be famous,” writes Miller, “so could [Coalhouse].”

⁶¹⁸ Miller, 131

⁶¹⁹ Healy, Patrick. “Broadway Sees Benefits of Building Black Audiences” in *The New York Times*, June 27, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/28/theater/28diverse.html?th&emc=th> (accessed January 7, 2011). Healy further acknowledges that David Mamet’s non-musical play *Race* attracts an audience that is 40% black.

⁶²⁰ Healy

⁶²¹ Healy

CONCLUSION

In this study, we began by exploring the sociological and political underpinnings of the treatment of race in America, especially with respect to the *Bailey Dolly!* We then turned our attention to the treatment of race in popular entertainment, with special focus on the connection between commercial American musical theatre and minstrelsy. All of these threads led to a full discussion of the production itself and its aftermath.

Let us take this opportunity to review all of these aspects that contributed to the success and import of the *Bailey Dolly!*

Sociological Issues

Much of our discussion concerning sociological issues and the *Bailey Dolly!* has concerned itself with vertical/social versus horizontal/economic class structures. We recall that in this discussion, we dealt with a model as described by Bowser of a vertical class structure as envisioned by Weber. In such a class structure based on race, commonality between blacks and whites based on any horizontal/economic commonality was trumped by the elevation of the individual's status based on membership in the Caucasian vertical race band. The prestige and privilege of whiteness prevented such an economically-based revolution from occurring, not only in the south but later when blacks migrated north during the era of industrialization that surrounded the fact set of *Hello, Dolly!*

In this light, a commentator like McDermott, for example, would seek to separate race from economics when considering class analysis, a task that at least metaphorically David Merrick would seem to have considered in his attempt to redefine race on Broadway by

promoting the Bailey *Dolly!* For at the heart of any discussion of the Pearl Bailey-led production of *Hello, Dolly!* lies a difficulty that arises from any such analysis – that any attempt to place a black cast into a Euro-centrally informed story line like *Dolly!* runs into a vast array of sociological issues that explain themselves fully neither by economics *nor* by race. These issue would include the positives and negatives of attempts at bourgeois entrée, as well as redress for past mistreatment of African Americans. Such an apparent contradiction is especially germane to the discussion of the Bailey *Dolly!* given that the economic success for this production, as well as the overwhelming majority of productions on Broadway, depends on the good graces of middle-class, especially *white* middle-class, ticket buyers.

Bowser’s discussion of vertical versus horizontal modes of oppression parallels the central race conundrum of the Bailey *Dolly!* – this placement of black actors into a Euro-centric middle class venue. In this light, Bowser would seem to stress the need to look at both the commonality of a white and black experience while at the same time needing to isolate the dynamics of any stand-alone black experience. In the Broadway theatre venue, it is therefore important to find both points of comparison and points of contrast in the experience of allowing African Americans into the experience.

Knowles offers the particularly germane point that much of what we call “race” is performative in nature. In this light, the Bailey *Dolly!* must be seen as having offered an important salvo in the dismantling of the vertical class structure of race via its challenge to previously held beliefs on race and culturally-based behavior. In its conquest of commercial American musical theatre, the Bailey *Dolly!* brings into question any failure of black and white Americans to see the possibility of shared inter-racial cultural norms, again in the style of Weber. With this contribution to the improvement of African American lives, it might be reasonable to assert that this success at breaking down vertical race-based class divisions trumps any failure of

the Bailey *Dolly!* to deal with the harsh realities of recalcitrant African-American poverty. This assertion can be made because, as we have seen, economic stratification would not seem to be the only issue in the creation and maintenance of racial divides in America. Just as important, if not more so, is the idea of shared cultural norms that re-enforce barriers based on race. The Bailey *Dolly!*, in its simplicity, might make these previously shared cultural norms on race separation irrelevant and no longer necessary. For this, the Bailey *Dolly* takes its place as an important landmark of the struggle for fair treatment of African Americans.

By taking an all-black production of *Hello, Dolly!* to Broadway, Pearl Bailey negotiated on behalf of the mass of black people to gain a share of the privilege whites have enjoyed for centuries. Here, that privilege involves an essential assumption – that only a white woman is appropriately equipped to play a role as legendary in the annals of commercial American musical theatre as Dolly Levi. In this instance, both producer David Merrick and white audiences acted in the role of powerful, if benign, gatekeeper to a promised land of privilege. By knocking at the gate and getting it to open, it is as if Pearl Bailey sought to change the constitution, import, and meaning of this shared assumption of white privilege. If successful, Bailey (and by extension all African Americans) would stand to gain by narrowing the privilege differential, perhaps to some extent at the expense of white people. Yet there exist other possibilities – that white people have something to gain in any transaction that grants black people more privilege, and that the black people who seek to gain privilege bargain away something of value in the process of gaining privilege from whites.

It thus became necessary, in Chapter I, to discuss both the nature of white privilege in America and how this relates to the Bailey *Dolly!* in terms of constructing and transacting new, perhaps glacially revolutionary negotiations to previously held assumptions. As concerns the Bailey *Dolly!*, what we have here is a matter of a group on one side of this divide having been

historically prevented from enjoying what Knowles describes as a valuable, empirically measurable “badge of [racial] privilege.”⁶²² Despite the existence of positive white role models on the issue of race such as Eleanor Roosevelt,⁶²³ Wendel Wilkie, and Philip Rose, much of the race privilege the African American encountered in the epoch preceding the *Bailey Dolly!* involved condescension and mistreatment on the part of the socially superior white hegemony.

In terms of this white privilege, Lewis spoke of “inherited abolitionism, Christian charity and guilt, social manipulation, political eccentricity, and a certain amount of persiflage”⁶²⁴ as possible explanations and motifs for such behavior on the part of white people exercising their privilege. There is no denial that at least some of David Merrick’s motivations for producing the *Bailey Dolly!* could have come from this list. In the bargain, perhaps African-American agents involved in negotiating for advances with the likes of Merrick would end up suffering from condescension, both as individuals and as a group. Whether or not this is true – that the *Bailey Dolly!* involved any condescension, or ultimately showed respect for the African American performer, or perhaps a combination of the two – one must consider whether African Americans, those involved in commercial American musical theatre in particular, ultimately benefited in prestige and economic improvement that resulted from the *Bailey Dolly!* or perhaps suffered from condescension or loss of group identity in the process. Even considering the material and social benefits to black people that might have resulted from the *Bailey Dolly!*, one must consider a possibly condescending mentality that accompanied the benefit. Thus, a reasonable argument can be made that despite the potential benefit, the fact that African Americans were substantially involved in the *Bailey Dolly!* only at the level of performance haunts the effort.

And yet there exists evidence to confirm that the *Bailey Dolly!* was effective in breaking down vertical barriers based on race. We start with what might be the most trivial and obvious of such evidence, the issue of skin color and appearance. In Chapter I, Amy Robinson’s

discussed the landmark Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson* and the issue of relative shades of skin color and “passing” for white. In the role of Dolly Levi, the very black Pearl Bailey presented a striking visual contrast to the platinum-blonde, pale-skinned Carol Channing, especially in the time frame of the civil right movement. On a physical level, Bailey’s presence in the cast of the previously all-white *Hello, Dolly!* demonstrated incontrovertible evidence of a black presence in an enterprise once proscribed by white privilege. While Pearl Bailey might have been, in twenty-twenty hindsight, perfectly suited to play Dolly Levi in for the opening performance of *Hello, Dolly!* in 1964 (not to mention suitable for subsequent replacement casts that featured white actresses such as Ginger Rogers, Martha Raye, and Betty Grable), such casting of Bailey would not have happened simply on the basis of race and skin color until Merrick’s shrewd gamble in 1967. Channing, Rodgers, Grable, and Raye possessed the valuable and negotiable commodity of whiteness; Bailey did not. Thus, it is reasonable to consider the issue of skin color when considering attempts to break down race-based barriers in casting in commercial American musical theatre.

In taking skin-color into account in the Bailey *Dolly!*, one must acknowledge that Pearl Bailey is a black woman whose rich skin tone could never be called into question as “passing” as white. And despite Cab Calloway’s processed hair reminiscent of his persona as the essence of 1940s hipster, no effort was made on the part of Bailey *Dolly!* design personnel to hide the wooliness of African American hair in men’s hairstyles beyond the constraints of maintaining a fictional reality that takes place in the 1890s.⁶²⁵ These performers *looked black* and no effort was made to hide this fact. One might extrapolate this success to include the Afro-positive look of the Bailey *Dolly!* as a net gain for black people in the transaction of breaking down race barriers.

More important to the breakdown of vertical race barriers is the issue of treatment of black entertainment personnel. The cast of the Bailey *Dolly!* can be seen as breaking down this kind of racial privilege – the reality, in the period that preceded *Dolly!*, of separate but decidedly *unequal* accommodations for black performing talent.⁶²⁶ If David Merrick was “tough on (these) black asses,” the issue was *not* race – it was the fact that Merrick was possessed of what the Eagles rock’n’roll band later might have called, in their lyric for the song “Life in the Fast Lane,” “a nasty reputation as a cruel dude”;⁶²⁷ Merrick didn’t treat *anyone* with particular deference.

In fact, the Bailey *Dolly!* cast received the kind of star treatment often reserved on Broadway for the stars of mega-hits like *South Pacific* or *My Fair Lady*. It would seem that the only other alternative for parity in this situation – the only other way to even up the score between black and white performers – would have been to deny top-flight white performers, of an echelon shared with Bailey and Calloway, star treatment, i.e., to be “tough on *white* asses.” Rather than solve the privilege imbalance, however, such a solution would serve merely to make *everyone’s* life difficult.

As important to the success of the Bailey *Dolly!* was a sense it gave to African Americans of full adult citizenship. As described in the Moon volume, such treatment was a major aspiration for African Americans in the twentieth century. The Pearl Bailey production of *Hello, Dolly!* may have offered a metaphoric version of such citizenship – the then-novel opportunity for both black and white America to envision a world in which the African American engages with American society on a fully-realized basis.

In each story in Moon’s collection, we find either a situation that simply would not happen in the race-free Bailey *Dolly!*-world or a scenario that begs improvement in a manner that the Bailey *Dolly!* offers. By presenting fictional versions of the race problems faced by

African Americans in the post-World War II era, Moon demonstrates the nature of the problems of race and social connection that the Bailey *Dolly!* seemed designed to resolve, or at least attempt to resolve.

Jackson's "Alphonse" story in the Moon volume reflects remarkably on the Bailey *Dolly!*, a production that presents a world in which the black people are equally clever as the white people like Carol Channing who appeared in the play in the previous incarnation. In Bailey *Dolly!*-world, the fact that a black man is foreman at the local factory is a real possibility. Despite the all-black nature of the Bailey production, two children of different races playing with each other would seem to be a non-issue as well. Perhaps most importantly, Dolly Levi and her cohorts would seem in absolutely no need of pity or charity as Mrs. Wilson showed to young Boyd. The story line in Stewart and Herman's play, to the good fortune of Bailey, Calloway, and company, is possessed of no inherent racial underpinning. The cast of characters in the Bailey *Dolly!* play out what Jackson seeks in her "Alphonse" story – a pure and simple equality of the races. As this study has considered elsewhere, any attempt at envisioning equality among the races must take into account the ubiquitous presence of white privilege and condescension toward African Americans. However, at the same time, the kind of equality Jackson demonstrates in her story begs the idea that it is possible to envision African Americans being treated fully as citizens and adults in the great American social scheme.

Robinson's story of the black dock workers looking for cigarettes and tea in the Moon volume resonates with the Bailey *Dolly!* as well. In *Hello, Dolly!* itself, Herman has Dolly Levi sing the lyric that expresses a desire, albeit a disingenuous desire, to leave Horace Vandergelder and immerse herself in the "lights of Fourteenth Street." In the song "So Long Dearie," Dolly Levi sings, "I'm gonna learn to dance and drink and smoke a cigarette."⁶²⁸ Presumably, if the restaurant at which the counterwoman worked – presciently named "The Ideal" – existed in the

gilded age timeframe of *Hello, Dolly!*, Mrs. Levi would have had no difficulty making her purchase of smoking materials, at least as might concern any racial divide. Pearl Bailey as Dolly Levi would not have encountered the humiliation faced by Charley Oakes.

Like the stories of Jackson and Robinson in the Moon volume, the Bailey *Dolly!* seemed to be about adult treatment of African Americans. This adult treatment would be the central issue of the small victories charted by the civil rights movement in the era immediately following World War II. Such small victories unfortunately begged the question of tokenism. In this light, we must thus consider whether the Bailey *Dolly!* was a true break though, mere tokenism, or perhaps some combination of both. Such a combination could be found in Jackie “Moms” Mabley’s “cheesecake” incident at the fancy restaurant in Philadelphia in the early 1960s. Like the Bailey herself, Mabley expressed a desire to de-politicize – or at least make less political – a highly politicized situation through light-heartedness and humor. How successful this kind of an effort might be would become important during the height of the civil rights era that would follow in the 1960s and reflect on the success or failure of the Bailey *Dolly!* to affect change in American racial attitudes.

In turn, one might be correct in accusing the Bailey *Dolly!* of minimizing the issue of racism – of glossing over a more militant response. A comparison here would exist between the Bailey *Dolly!* and the Claudette Colvin affair, in which a black woman who might have pushed the envelope of comfort among white people was passed over for the more comfort-inducing Rosa Parks in the effort to de-segregate public transportation in the south. Fair or not, perhaps we need to address a similar criticism directed at the Bailey *Dolly!* – that it only went as far in its portrayal of African American life as a white audience would allow – in the context of Colvin’s tale of having been passed over for fame. If in fact Pearl Bailey fit the description of “mouthy,” “emotional,” or “feisty,” this was concurrent with Bailey’s sassy sense of charm, and equally in

turn organic to the character of Dolly Levi, the lovably meddling matchmaker. While Colvin was a real-life pushy black woman, Bailey's Dolly Levi was a fictional creation, and thus circumscribed in time and space. Furthermore, Dolly Levi's pushiness was presented in a controlled, fictional context, the handmaiden of romance and happy endings. Once a white patron left the theatre, the pushy black woman was no longer any kind of threat, if any threat existed to begin with. Colvin, on the other hand, was "real life," the revolution televised. Had she been chosen as the trailblazer instead of the more composed Parks, Colvin might have remained a constant, unpleasant reminder of white complicity in black misery – a threat to white people, and perhaps too much of a powerful, unrepentant role model for black people.

Another issue involved in parsing the Bailey *Dolly!* in terms of racial impact is the conundrum between optimistic fantasy, as would seem to have been David Merrick's intent, when compared with "street reality." Because of its bourgeois surroundings, the Bailey *Dolly!* could come under criticism as presenting a situation lacking in genuine resonance for African Americans. In the all-black *Dolly!*, Pearl Bailey, Cab Calloway, and their cohort performers found themselves as African Americans immersed in a vision of New York City and its environs resplendent in 1890s opulence. Of course it would have been possible to have found the atypical example of African Americans living in such a rarefied situation in this time frame. But such an example from the 1890s would have been highly exceptional as well as counter-intuitive to the common perception of the mostly dismal situation faced by African Americans in the period. The plot machinations of *Hello, Dolly!* may have taken place in what may have been a "gilded age" for many white people, but this era also saw what may have been the height of post-Civil War mistreatment for black people, especially in southern venues such as Atlanta.

David Merrick's arguably artificial placement of black people into the "gay 90s" whirl of *Hello, Dolly!* created an optimistic fantasy, a vision of what life might have been like for African

Americans had slavery and/or Jim Crow never happened. This fantasy at once reasonably empowered the aspirations of African Americans of the 1960s civil-rights-era generation – aspirations similar to those of the denizens of Wiese’s west-suburban Atlanta – *and* showed perhaps an attempt at benign ignorance to the often ugly realities for this Jim Crow generation of African Americans, realities that resulted from the often cruel racial practices of the era described in *Dolly!* itself. Knowles writes, “How *do* [italics sic] we come to terms with our eternal past of racially organized brutality and face the future? These are not just matters of living with white liberal guilt, but of acknowledging responsibility for the past, a reckoning with the past, as part of an understanding of the present.”⁶²⁹ The question is begged as to the implications of envisioning a middle-class black milieu – a promised land, like the one found in the Bailey *Dolly!* While certainly optimistic, such a vision perhaps side-steps the endemic racism directed at African Americans during late-nineteenth/early-twentieth-century America and beyond and its socio-economic consequences.

To be sure, there existed in the time frame of *Hello, Dolly!* a small if substantial group of middle- to upper-middle-class African Americans. This group might have included the likes of Irene Malloy, with her skill at hat-making, and Cornelius Hackl, who managed the day-to-day operations of Horace Vanergelder’s grain and feed business. The fantasy-imbued explanation here concerning a *Hello, Dolly!* populated by black people – the subtext – might be that the African-American denizens of Stewart and Herman’s fictional Yonkers were former slaves who found success in the north based on skills they picked up as a result of slavery. Thus, if one reflexively attempts to criticize the Bailey *Dolly!* as not being in touch with the “true” concerns of black culture because it presents black people in a bourgeois venue, one is failing to take into account the rich history of African-American middle class interests as presented by Bowser and his ilk.

In Chapter I, Knowles discussed the example of the former slave quarters in Ghana that in the twentieth century had been re-fashioned into a nightclub. With its “lights of 14th Street,” the *Bailey Dolly!* can be seen perhaps as engaging in a similarly insensitive ignorance of history. One reasonable interpretation of the *Bailey Dolly!*, therefore, is one of ignorance of the pain of African-American subjugation. While harsh, such an interpretation cannot be ignored. However, such an interpretation fails to take into account the issue of how bourgeois entrée might be achieved by former African-American slaves. Langston Hughes spoke of African Americans being allowed to inhabit nicer neighborhoods as a goal. Perhaps one of the intended outcomes of the *Bailey Dolly!* was to finally *allow* black people into that nice neighborhood, at least as a theatrical metaphor. As Wiese may have implied, the issue of who controls entry into this nice neighborhood, blacks or whites, comes to the fore. In this light, we were able to find parallels between the struggle for open housing for African Americans in the civil rights era and the struggle to integrate commercial American musical theatre, as endeavored by Bailey and company.

It is in these discussions of breaking down race barriers in housing and public accommodations that the *Bailey Dolly!* makes a strong, solid claim to legitimacy in the realm of social justice. The ethic of the post-World-War-II civil rights movement argued that blacks were entitled, no questions asked, to the *same* level of material treatment as white. Likewise, the *Bailey Dolly!* seemed to be making a similar argument: that having dinner at the Harmonia Gardens and similar activities in Stewart, Herman, and Wilder’s whirlwind of *fin de siècle* opulence is a sign of redemption from slavery and Jim Crow, if only in an attempt to sell the myth of hard work and individualism leading to consumer freedom as the universal American redemptive ethic.

As we saw in Chapter IV, previous to the Bailey *Dolly!*, black casting in Broadway musicals beyond “exotic” and specific “race” roles was nearly non-existent. Thus, though they may have differed from the mother in Philadelphia that Wiese describes and her very real fear of violence, blacks attempting to scale the walls of racism in Broadway musical casting practices faced racist cruelties and benign ignorance similar to what Sugrue describes. Thus, Merrick’s band of black Yonkers denizens in his optimistic realization of an all-black *Dolly!* can be seen as having exhibited the kind of bravery that energized the King-era of the civil right movement, and did so in a way that served as a counter-example to the invisibility of which Sugrue complains. For this, everyone involved in the Bailey *Dolly!* *must* be celebrated and remembered. Perhaps the Bailey *Dolly!* is the metaphoric cousin to the fair-housing policy struggle Wiese describes, the civil-rights generation’s appropriate response to Broadway’s historic role as gate-keeper against (here inter-racial) interlopers. Specifically, we are concerned here with the failure to include African-American in commercial American musical theatre, at least at the casting and star-performance level, before the Bailey *Dolly!*

One need not trivialize the counter-argument here. Such is the conundrum of the discussion of the Bailey *Dolly!* – whether the attempt to gain entrée to the previously unavailable venue of commercial American musical theatre may have led to the sanitizing of racial difficulties that abounded in America’s past and plagued its present and future. In any production of *Hello, Dolly!*, gilded-age conspicuous consumption must be considered at least as the wall-paper surrounding the romantic hi-jinks of Dolly and Horace, Irene and Cornelius, and Minnie Fay and Barnaby. Such opulence would seem to be in keeping with the vision of a presumably pro-consumer-ethic David Merrick, who like his predecessor in spectacle, Florenz Ziegfeld, spared no expense in any of the *Dolly!* incarnations to make sure that all that appeared on stage was of the highest extravagance. (Part of the failure of the Bailey *Dolly!* redux could be

attributed to its unwillingness to spare no expense, leading to second-rate production values.) And what an opportunity *Dolly!* provided for Merrick and his designers. This was, contrary to what luxury-besotted Joanne in Stephen Sondheim's *Company* warns us, a time when "anybody" who even pretended to middle-class standing "still" wore a hat, not to mention other vivid accoutrements of wealth and refinement, to the ample profit of milliner Irene and, subordinately, Minnie Fay. We might even consider *Company*'s Joanne as the spiritual great-granddaughter of Dolly and Horace's 14th Street high life.⁶³⁰

Merrick and company did not so much argue that wealth and opulence was necessarily a good thing. In the context of *Hello, Dolly!*, Merrick would seem to have taken the wealth and opulence simply as a given. The Bailey cast's participation in such wealth and opulence would seem more acquiescence in the reality of *Dolly!* than any kind of active endorsement of any ignorance of black mistreatment during the Jim-Crow era – no more than participation in a production of *Oliver!* could be seen as an endorsement of Dickensian anti-Semitism.

Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to conclude that West regards the kind of bourgeois assimilation for black people – the kind we see in the Bailey *Dolly!* – as a situation fraught with as many pitfalls as benefits. West's fear must be seen as going well beyond spiritual great-grand-daughter Joanne's bourgeois angst, her sense of meaninglessness in a world designed to pamper her every need.

There is of course a counter-argument to West's fear of bourgeois assimilation among blacks. That side is presented in the "manure" argument of the play *Hello, Dolly!* (via Wilder's *The Matchmaker*) itself, in which Dolly, remembering her late husband Ephraim, encourages Horace to "spread money like manure" in order to "make little things grow." Stewart and Herman portray Horace Vandergelder, the object of Dolly Levi's attentions, as dedicated to hard work and self-improvement, if not spiritually then at least materially. The happy ending of

Hello, Dolly! comes when Dolly is able to convince Horace of the joys of inter-mingling his work ethic with a sense of joy for his fellow human being. One assumes that in the story that lies beyond the timeline of *Hello, Dolly!*, Horace, encouraged by Dolly, will be spreading his wealth as described agriculturally. This would seem not to be so much conspicuous consumption as a cure to Horace's tightness with a penny and of reasonable, not ridiculous, proportion. Dolly's objective is not to live like an Astor. Rather, she would seek for Horace and herself to use money with reasonable prudence to connect to their fellow human beings. There is a purpose to Dolly's use of wealth beyond self-aggrandizement.

There would seem then to be a difficult choice between West's desire for a more spiritually centered black leadership and the ethic of the Bailey *Dolly!*, one in which measured assimilation into the consumer ethic leads not only to creature comfort but to happier human beings. Yet there would seem to be another side of the argument. In short, the observer would have to wonder if entry into the middle class is such a morally bereft alternative as West would argue, then what option is there that does not sustain through inertia the cycle of recalcitrant poverty among many African Americans – an inertia perhaps cured in civil-rights-era attempts for, among other remedies, equal access to bourgeois housing stock? Such is the very complex situation that informs the entire discussion surrounding the Bailey *Dolly!*, especially from the point of view of performing personnel. On the one hand, the performer is, as Edris Cooper-Anifowoshe asserts, “reifying” Euro-centric norms, thus buying into West's model of morally bereft leadership.⁶³¹ On the other, the Bailey *Dolly!* cast member is blazing new trails of opportunity for African Americans, affirming civil-rights-era aspirations of inclusion and citizenship.

This leaves us with a bifurcated interpretation of the significance of the Bailey *Dolly!* As Knowles acknowledges, “In modernity's combination of ‘benefits and disaster,’ race and

ethnicity have become a major force: a cause of conflict and a reason for celebration (Riggs, 1998: 269-70). [. . .]”⁶³² At once, the *Bailey Dolly!* reflects the extent, in 1967, to which the white hegemony could and would recognize the presence and needs of African Americans with bourgeois aspirations. In turn, this production represents a small if significant instance that follows in the rich tradition of African American desire to occupy places and spaces one barred to them. The benefits – a desired end to recalcitrant poverty and entrée into full citizenship on the part of aspiring African Americans. The disaster – Cooper-Anifowoshe’s “re-ification” of Euro-centric norms and West’s fear of a morally bereft African-American leadership.

Consideration of these “benefits” and “disasters” are both equally important. More to the point, one does not necessarily contradict the other’s existence. Rather, and especially with respect to the *Bailey Dolly!*, one can see a venue in which America perhaps sanitized lingering racial divides while at the same time celebrating the victories of the civil rights era.

The Political Landscape

The era surrounding the *Bailey Dolly!* offers a political landscape of powerful and varying extremes on a continuum of cooperation versus confrontation in regard to race politics. We began our discussion of the politics of civil rights with a comment from an exponent of the confrontational point of view.

In his analysis of “pet” treatment by white people, Malcolm X raises an issue that will resonate at all points along the cooperation/confrontation continuum – the treatment of African Americans as full adult citizens, an issue we have already explored via the stories in the *Moon* volume. Malcolm broaches in this sentiment an issue that lies at the heart of the all-black

production of *Hello, Dolly!* – whether it is possible for any black/white interaction to avoid the taint of condescension or, worse yet, subjugation of the African American.

This issue of the possibility of black/white cooperation found special importance in the era immediately following World War II. This disappointment endured by African Americans in the wake of a war fought at least in part to eradicate ethnic prejudice points perhaps to a level of cynicism when it comes to analyzing the ultimate import of the Bailey *Dolly!* In exploring race relations in the post-World War II era, the observer does not need to make a great leap of faith to connect the disappointment faced by African American seeking self-empowerment after the war with the desire, whether tacit or direct, by the Bailey *Dolly!* production to provide respite to this disappointment.

And yet the Bailey *Dolly!* was never in a position satisfy more militant advocates involved in the struggle for black empowerment. We return to Cleaver's "Novocain" remark, an especially evocative metaphor, especially when considered in the light of the Bailey *Dolly!* One of the central arguments that might be fashioned against this production of *Dolly!* was that it possibly coddled white audiences into a state of false state of painlessness. Cleaver and his ilk would likely interpret the Bailey *Dolly!* as a quick dose of metaphoric "Novocain," and eschew this production as not presenting the reality of black America in 1967.

Cleaver's remarks here reflect amply on David Merrick's attempt to bring "color" to Broadway. This attempt would seem to parallel Cleaver's description of a "craving for social stability." For as Pearl Bailey played nightly on Broadway in *Hello, Dolly!* to sold-out houses filled with enthralled bourgeois theatre-goers, another reality existed on the streets of America's great cities. These theatre-goers realities existed far from these streets, where African Americans were no longer content with segregation or existence at the lowest economic stratum. The summer of 1967 saw America's black ghettos explode in spasms of violence. Both politics and

artistic expression would experience profound changes during the period preceding and contemporaneous with the Bailey *Dolly!*

No expectation has been made in this study that the Bailey *Dolly!* made an effort, conscious or otherwise, to deal with this harsh reality of life in black America in the 1960s. David Merrick may well have been aware of the cruelty of discrimination and race barriers. But such awareness was not necessarily Merrick's motivation in producing the Bailey *Dolly!* Among other objectives, a significant purpose of the Bailey *Dolly!* was to imagine an alternative reality. Whether such imagination had the effect of air-brushing harsh reality or the effect of imagining a world in which race no longer determined economic or social status is a matter of interpretation. Most likely, the real effect lay somewhere in between. Discussion of the issue of "optimistic fantasy" versus "street reality," therefore, served in this study as an attempt to define the Bailey *Dolly!* via contrast – what the Bailey *Dolly!* was *not*, i.e., an attempt to deal with harsh racial realities. It is also an attempt to present a fair appraisal of that variety of black politics and art in the 1960s that refused to sell out to commercial interests in order to soothe the fears of white audiences.

The discussion of "fantasy" versus "street" furthermore begs the issue of positive construction of black identity, as reflected in the writings of Michael Eric Dyson. The "construction of identity around whiteness" of which Dyson speaks goes directly to the very audiences that would go to see Pearl Bailey and Cab Calloway as an entertaining pastime – not necessarily rich, not necessarily enabled with any kind of serious economic power, but benefiting, at least passively, from a system that rewarded one's skin color. A white audience member partaking in the momentary pleasure of Bailey and Calloway's performances could perhaps be seen as part of a larger construct that kept blacks "in their place." Such an audience member, also passively, could be seen as complicit in maintaining a power structure that

prevented a system that promoted and rewarded, if not some orthodox view of true black artistic expression, then at least artistic expression controlled by African Americans, the profit for which benefiting African Americans directly.

Earlier, we discussed the physical features of race as reflected in the writings of Amy Robinson concerning the life of Homer Plessy. What would seem like a trivial subset of this issue as reflected in the Bailey *Dolly!* – African American hairstyles – would seem to take on greater importance given the opulence of the production. Malcolm X had a seminal moment over the issue of processed hair. Similarly, the issue of men, in particular, processing their hair is germane to any discussion of the all-black *Dolly*. The Bailey *Dolly!* presented black people looking beautiful in a milieu that, as discussed earlier, could at best be seen as an optimist’s fantasy and bearing little or no resemblance to African American reality, either in the time-frame of the play itself *or* in the 1960s. Yet in a Malcolm X mindset, it is reasonable to conclude that such “looking beautiful” is being done in a white – a *privileged* white – context. Blacks looking beautiful in *Hello, Dolly!* would be interpreted in this confrontational ethic as being equally humiliating as men having to process their hair in order to get white approval.

It may have been Merrick’s intent to provide a venue for fair and equal treatment of African-American performers like Bailey and Calloway. To Malcolm, Merrick’s providing such a venue is the equivalent of Harrah’s telling the compulsive gambler to come to one of their casinos and the gambler will get a fair chance to beat the house. Such serendipity just doesn’t happen in Malcolm-world. The irony in David Merrick’s choice of the phrase “all Negro” to describe the Bailey *Dolly!* in promotional material goes without saying.

As compared to Malcolm, Cleaver, and even Dyson, Lyndon Johnson’s “Great Society” provides another aspect of the political climate surrounding the Bailey *Dolly!* Given Johnson’s prescient prediction as to the success of what would become known as the “southern strategy”

during the Nixon years, one would have to surmise that LBJ derived at least some pleasure in knowing that his political agenda on civil rights had been paralleled, whether consciously or otherwise, by David Merrick and his cohorts on Broadway. One can only imagine that the success of the Bailey *Dolly!* brought solace to this otherwise failed president, Lyndon Baines Johnson. The Broadway musical, after all, was a *northern* phenomenon, and the north supported Johnson against Goldwater overwhelmingly in the 1964 presidential election. This election was, at once, a reconciliation of the American people with the assassination of JFK *and* a referendum on civil rights. The Bailey *Dolly!* would seem to have provided a soundtrack to this reconciliation.

As we discovered, Johnson's Great Society would run into roadblocks, including the Moynihan and Kerner reports. In particular and as a result of the Kerner report, John Lindsay would emerge as Johnson's liberal nemesis on race. The Great Society may have been Lyndon Johnson's brainchild. But it was John Lindsay who was able to lend credibility and street smarts to the idea. In the process, it would seem that Lindsay created a city in which any white promise to redress past racial inequities could be taken seriously by black people. Thus, the Bailey *Dolly!* benefited twice from the Great Society paradigm – from Johnson's personal association with the production, and, despite Johnson's failings, being located in a city in which the mayor made serious attempts to make good on the promise of racial reconciliation. Though perhaps not direct, the benefits of Lindsay's ability to assimilate the realities of racial unrest in 1967 would provide a New York City that served as a tenable venue for the Bailey *Dolly!*

By the 1960s, people of good will in America sought to correct previous treatment of African Americans as less than first-class, adult citizens. The Bailey *Dolly!* did *not* deal, at least directly, with the confrontational politics of those who supported the Black Arts Movement in

attempting such correction. It did, however, serve as a significant reflection of the Great Society politics of the Johnson administration that surrounded and informed it.

Ordinary Entertainment

Though perhaps a trivial exercise, we need to consider the ultimate aesthetic value of Stewart and Herman's *Hello, Dolly!* in light of Murphree's definition of a "poor" play. Certainly, it would be difficult to classify *Hello, Dolly!* as a "bad" piece of work. *Hello, Dolly!*, despite any possible academic mistrust for any work of theatre that displays economic viability (and let us not be coy), caused enthusiasm among the New York critics establishment, both in 1964 for Carol Channing and in 1967 for Pearl Bailey. No one has attempted to mount the play on Broadway since the heyday of Bailey and Channing, but no matter – the play is still very popular in the "hinterlands," still commanding significant numbers of community theatre revivals to this day. Nevertheless, it would be equally hard to classify *Hello, Dolly!* as a "masterpiece" that is, as Murphree suggests, "valued by posterity for the insights it gives into human nature and/or for its stylistic achievements and innovations." *Hello, Dolly!* would seem to fall into a middle ground – certainly a competently written and well-staged production that "effectively sustains the interest of its intended audience but without taking risks that might alienate that audience." Thus, by Murphree's definition, it is not unreasonable to call *Hello, Dolly!* a "poor" play.

In this lack of innovation inherent in the original piece as written by Stewart and Herman lies the charm that accompanies any study of the significance of *Hello, Dolly!* The Bailey *Dolly!* did not change attitudes on race based on its aesthetic pedigree. Rather, at least in its Bailey incarnation, *Dolly!* sought to change attitudes on racial interaction based on cultural and political

circumstances. Production context and production choices for the Bailey *Dolly!* played a greater role than the quality of the source text itself. These circumstances, rather than the text itself, are exactly the tenets to which Murphree points to defend the cultural significance, at least for his “poor” plays.

In this distinction between simple reflection of culture and social utility, the Bailey *Dolly!* would seem to be suspended between two paradigms. At once, the Bailey *Dolly!* serves as a flashpoint for the discussion of race in America in general and in commercial American musical theatre in particular. At the same time, at least implicitly, those involved in the production seemed motivated by social utility in an effort to improve the nature of American race relations. Thus, the Bailey *Dolly!* would seem to have offered the ancillary reverse to the Barnett/Allen/Bourdieu argument of high/middle-brow culture as a device of social control. Rather than allowing a privileged elite to decide the value of the piece, the Bailey *Dolly!* succeeded in privileging a middling piece of popular performance material as a means of democratizing race relations. The Bailey *Dolly!*, indeed, would seem to occupy a unique space at the intersection of race relations and performance.

To those who champion the politics of racial confrontation above racial conciliation, the Bailey *Dolly!* might serve as a glaring example of mis-appropriation of a black performative identity because it casts such an identity in nearly completely Euro-centric terms. After all, this story of the middle-aged romance of Dolly Levi and Horace Vandergelder went through at least two previous generations of development – Oxenford/Nestroy and both Wilder efforts – envisioned in an environment that, if not unrepentantly Euro-centric, at least tacitly maintained a Euro-centered cultural hegemony. It would seem apparent that such a story would contain nothing inherently African *or* African-American in nature. To be sure, this observation is based on the assumption that light domestic comedy is something that is primarily European in origin.

There is no need to cite any proof that light domestic comedy similar to that presented in Stewart and Herman's *Hello, Dolly!* has a long tradition among European cultures. From Menander to Moliere, from Shakespeare to Shaw, light domestic comedy has been a staple of the European dramatic cannon for millennia. Stewart and Herman's *Hello, Dolly!* finds its roots in this long, rich history.

The question remains if it is possible to relate such a legacy to an Afro-centric experience. Furthermore, critical to this idea of Stewart and Herman's *Hello, Dolly!* as a counter-example to full black artistic expression is that there might be something un-African, even anti-African, about light domestic comedy in general. The romantic hijinks of Dolly Levi and friends in gilded-age Yonkers, New York, may lack "street" credentials in a late twentieth-century urban black sense. It is nonetheless difficult to deny a universal connection between the tomfoolery surrounding the Vandergelder Grain and Seed Company and Brink's agrarian stereotypes as described by Kerr in Chapter III. The differences between such African-informed hijinks and those found in Stewart and Herman's *Hello, Dolly!* only can be seen as glaringly minimal. Comic plotlines would seem to have similarities across cultures, and comedy in most cultures has to potential to be critical and even subversive. Such an argument serves to exonerate the Bailey *Dolly!* from any guilt by association with anything Euro-centric. It is therefore not that great a stretch to say that the Bailey *Dolly!* is a reasonable, not insensitive attempt to re-appropriate light romantic comedy for African Americans to perform and enjoy as members of the audience. While it may legitimate to disagree with this approach, it should *not* legitimate to be so beholden to any political or social orthodoxy to deny the possibility of this approach. Regardless of one's orthodoxy or lack thereof, one must at minimum acknowledge that the Bailey *Dolly!* opened avenues of expression for black performers in commercial

American musical theatre that previously had not been available, thus coming closer to the parity of opportunity that might exist in a perfect world.

In the Bailey *Dolly!*, we have the conundrum of members of marginalized populations trying to enter the mainstream in a manner reminiscent of Booker's description. Having been on the sidelines for so long, the member of the marginalized population seeks validation through the heroic actions of a stand-in of sorts, a role model whose courage and valor (or simple presence of being) erases previous erroneous and negative stereotypes associated with membership in the marginalized population. Whether such achievement has real value is, of course, a matter of debate and personal and political outlook. Nevertheless, it is hard to ignore the sense among black audiences that Pearl Bailey and Cab Calloway were acting as stand-ins for them. The heroism involved in such a substitution was borne of a simple desire on the part of the marginalized to be taken seriously as adults – not as children or exotics, not as something only deserving condescension, but *as adults* and fully participating citizens. For the Bailey *Dolly!*, the actress who would have been cast in an earlier epoch as a charwoman or a hothouse flower gets cast as the suburban matron. The actor who would have been cast in an earlier epoch as a Pullman porter becomes the noted “half a millionaire.” The visceral reaction by black audiences, who cheered the entrée as something to which they could aspire, and white audiences, who wanted to be part of a solution to endemic racism (as evidenced by the jubilation of the presumably all-white dramatic critics establishment among New York City journalists), was a natural result of Bailey and Calloway's efforts.

With respect to the Bailey *Dolly!*, Dolly and Horace *have* arrived in a neutered, un-exotic Bali H'ai. Though not as exciting as a “special island” in the south Pacific, the Yonkers and 14th Street of *Hello, Dolly!* provide a venue where race-hatred is immaterial. Again, audiences for the Bailey *Dolly!* responded with great enthusiasm to this triumph over previously ugly

circumstance. In dealing with the Bailey *Dolly!*, we see the performance of a play in which the Jordan *has* been crossed by members of the marginalized population. The promotional material for the Bailey *Dolly!* took pride in the idea that not one word of Jerry Herman's lyrics or Michael Stewart's book had to be changed. This offered *de facto* admission to the land of bourgeois nicety for our black Dolly and Horace.

Our discussion of blacks in early-twentieth-century comic strips raised the issue of the great blood libel against blacks, i.e., that black skin indicated a perpetual state of uncleanness. Pearl Bailey and her all-African-American cast of *Hello, Dolly!* provided a stark contrast to this cruel stereotype. In the *Dolly!* environment, all is bright and beautiful. Despite the low-brow "trap door" shenanigans of the Stewart/Herman book, none of the hi-jinks involves the physical sully of one's person. With all the glorious food at the Harmonia Gracens, one might at least expect some of it to fall on the clothing of the participants, especially given the propensity of this piece for physical comedy. Not in *Dolly!*-world. One cannot even think of this cast, possessed of "elegance" as it is, of letting a day pass without bathing. Implicitly at least, this all-black cast of *Hello, Dolly!* has struck down a horrifying stereotype. As concerns the Bailey *Dolly!*, any effort to counter such invisibility in a positive manner in popular culture could and perhaps should be seen as a breakthrough for African Americans.

Thus, the Bailey *Dolly!* offered a venue in which black performers were not only visible but visible in a positive, if non-threatening, manner. It is this "non-threatening" aspect that supplies the rub in this situation. Like the Bailey *Dolly!*, therefore, we have a case in which the erasure of a stereotype – or reversal here, the expectation of the supposed incapability of a non-white person like cartoonist Herriman to perform at the same level as a similarly situated white person – is balanced by continued troublesome aspects.

Nevertheless, if nothing else, none of the portrayals in the Bailey *Dolly!* came even close to the insulting stereotype of McQueen's "Prissy" character, noted for her "birthin' no babies" speech in the film version of *Gone With the Wind*. If any character played a subservient role to any other character in the Bailey *Dolly!* (perhaps like Cornelius Hackl to Horace Vandergelder), the subservience was not borne of racial subjugation. Rather, it derived organically from the text. No argument should be made that the *Dolly!* milieu presented a democratic model of how members of a community should interact, as race-informed criticism of Hitchcock's *Lifeboat* would seem to imply. But again, any lack of democracy, again perhaps as concerns the *Dolly!* characters Hackl and Vandergelder, rises organically from the text and is not the result of racial subjugation.

Such lack of democracy as seen in *Gone With the Wind* or *Lifeboat* would need to be considered in the light of unfair stereotypes against African Americans that enforce the lack of democracy, much in the way Weber (via Bowser) described the use of vertical/social barriers to enforce horizontal/economic barriers. The closest the Bailey *Dolly!* came to exploiting the "lazy and shiftless" stereotype of black men was in Cornelius and Barnaby's decision to ditch work in favor of finding adventure in the wilds of New York City. Cornelius and Barnaby's decision, however, results from the unfair labor practice of Vandergelder never giving the two any days off. Their decision to take one can only be seen as an attempt at economic liberation – again, not race based. Equally important is the idea that Cornelius and Barnaby's adventure in New York City, in keeping with the polite tone of both Wilder and his predecessors, was "boy scout" innocent, with the intent of finding the two shop clerks innocent dalliances in which they vow not to "come home until [they've] kissed a girl" rather than placing them in any grossly morally indefensible pose.

The flipside of the coin of derailing stereotypes like the “uncleanliness” canard would like in the issue of over-sanitization of the African-American situation. Like the career of Sidney Poitier, the Bailey *Dolly!* can be accused of presenting an image of African Americans so devoid of any threat to the white hegemony as to lack any redeeming value. In this context, it is interesting to note Miller and Woll’s description of Poitier’s defense of his own career.

Poitier defended himself from charges of cozying up to whites by asserting that his roles served black interests, in that they suggested the possibility of meaningful black-white interaction and racial integration. He added that the absence of other blacks and of black roles in film showed how little the industry would tolerate anyway. At least he was working. He also marked progress by being selected to star in a movie in which race was not a factor at all (*The Bedford Incident* (1965)).⁶³³

This issue of race not being a factor in a black actor’s performance is especially relevant in any discussion of the Bailey *Dolly!* There are, of course, two sides to this discussion. On the one hand, one must consider the idea that if one does not take into account the race of the performer, one ignores the larger issues of recalcitrant racism that continue to confront African Americans. On the other, one must consider both the political efficacy *and* the economic fairness of forcing a black performer, especially one trying to enter the mainstream in the still highly race-restricted environment of the Hollywood film-making industry that followed World War II, to turn down non-race-based roles in favor of what the more practical minded might consider some obscure political ideal. Woll and Miller deal with the latter interpretation implicitly in describing black reaction to Poitier’s career.

Black critics who once viewed Poitier’s success as a milestone were unconvinced. They tagged Poitier as a “showcase nigger.” In 1970 [New York Times] film critic Vincent Canby added that Poitier’s milestone had become a millstone because Poitier’s blackness was “invisible.”⁶³⁴

This attitude toward the career of Sidney Poitier crystallizes one of the central complaints perhaps envisioned by Black-Arts advocates concerning the 1967 all-black cast of *Hello, Dolly!* Those involved in the Bailey *Dolly!* seem to have had it both ways. On the one hand, while on stage, the blackness of the cast while performing was a non-issue, giving rise to accusations of Sidney Poitier-like invisibility as concerns race. On the other hand, the entire Bailey *Dolly!* production was so surrounded in the excitement and interest in the contemporaneous civil rights movement that there was no way to avoid “black” being an issue. To a great extent, such excitement and interest may have been true for Poitier as well, especially in 1964 when Poitier became the first black actor (and first black performer since 1939 with Hattie McDaniel and *Gone With the Wind*) to win an academy award for his performance in *Lillies of the Field* (1963).

The upside of the over-sanitization issue is the positive contribution made by any such production in terms of correcting past injustices. The Bailey *Dolly!* sought to replace the *Amos ‘n’ Andy*-style stereotypes with positive characterizations of African Americans. An important comparison between the Bailey *Dolly!* and *Amos ‘n’ Andy* lay in the portrayal of African Americans as a community. In *Amos ‘n’ Andy*, black-world was filled with, as Woll and Miller note, “clowns and crooks.”⁶³⁵ In the Bailey *Dolly!*, black-world is filled with bourgeois matrons and “half-a-millionaire”s. Each world provides a fantasy vision of what the black community might look like using a set of given assumptions. The assumptions made by the creators of *Amos ‘n’ Andy* cast black life in a clearly, quantifiably negative milieu.

In contrast, the assumptions made by David Merrick and cohorts concerning the Bailey *Dolly!* cast black life in *exactly the same* light as any cast led by any of the white actresses who portrayed Dolly Gallagher Levi before Pearl Bailey. *Amos ‘n’ Andy* argued that black life was inherently different *and* inferior to white life. The Bailey *Dolly!* argued that black life could be exactly the same as white life. At least in this guileless vein, the Bailey *Dolly!* can be seen

therefore as an improvement over much black-oriented entertainment that preceded it. Thus, in contrast to previous insulting stereotypes in the depiction of African Americans, the Bailey *Dolly!* offered a revolutionary concept to audiences of all races in the venue of musical theatre – black people as responsible adults, capable of making positive contributions to society.

The Bailey *Dolly!* can also be seen as having kept pace with improvements in the general presentation of African Americans in various entertainment venues during the civil rights era, as we saw in the Chapter III discussion of the *I Spy* television show. Unlike the Bailey *Dolly!*, *I Spy* was not an all-black affair, basing much of its appeal on the social equality of its two principals, the white Robert Culp and the black Bill Cosby. However, there are great parallels between Bill Cosby, the first black man to win a Best Actor award at the Emmys,⁶³⁶ and Pearl Bailey in *Hello, Dolly!* Producer David Merrick intended to have the Bailey *Dolly!* as a showcase for black performing talent in a race-neutral environment.

With the Bailey *Dolly!*, a number of the white artists associated with the production had already made significant partnerships and friendships with black artists in the post-World War II civil rights environment, including director/choreographer Gower Champion's partnership with Harry Belafonte. Robert Culp's pre-*I-Spy* friendship with Sammy Davis, Jr. provides a similar comparison. These friendships would seem to demonstrate that inherent in a discussion of the genesis of *I Spy* – especially when compared to the Bailey *Dolly!* – is a sense of desire on the part of the artists involved to find a way for members of different races to cooperate in an artistic venture. Such cooperation is critical to the tone set by the Bailey *Dolly!* This ethic of cooperation shared by *I Spy* and the Bailey *Dolly!* is based on the possibility of true equality among the races – something that can be seen as a noble endeavor.

Broadway and Minstrelsy

A comparison can be made between Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* and racism rampant in American film lies in the connection between commercial American musical theatre and minstrelsy, an issue, as raised by Jack Kroll of *Newsweek*, that haunts the Pearl Bailey-led production of *Hello, Dolly!* For both commercial American musical theatre and *The Birth of a Nation* raise the perilous issue of nostalgia for racist southern agrarian stereotypes used to demean the African American. Such nostalgia for the southern agrarian stereotype endured by African Americans would seem to parallel criticism lodged, fairly or otherwise, at the Bailey *Dolly!* – that the Bailey *Dolly!* avoided the provocation of what Kislán described as “anxiety” and “danger” concerning race. However, this same nostalgia derived from minstrelsy, in turn, invites comparison with the best of what the Bailey *Dolly!* offered. In this comparison, the Bailey *Dolly!* would seem to shine. For in the time-frame of minstrelsy, the mid-to-late nineteenth century, African Americans, either through slavery or Jim-Crow-era share cropping, led lives apart from the promise of American prosperity. In contrast, it is possible to conceive that the Bailey *Dolly!* displayed what African-American life in this era might have been like had such segregation never existed. Where minstrelsy's fantasy was, in retrospect, grim and unrelentingly oppressive, the Bailey *Dolly!* offered a fantasy, especially in a “Great Society” context, that was hopeful.

In contrast to minstrelsy, one might conclude reasonably that the portrayal of bourgeois African Americans in the Bailey *Dolly!* did *not* engage in presenting the African American as someone who did not belong in polite society. In defense of the Bailey *Dolly!*, no African American member of that cast was asked to engage in anything close to the racial horror described by Kislán, Knapp, and Jones concerning minstrelsy and its stereotypes. On the

contrary, and as already discussed, the *Bailey Dolly!* encouraged a “black is beautiful” personal aesthetic among its cast members, especially male cast members.

There is little overtly subversive about the *Bailey Dolly!* – with the possible and distinct exception of its very ordinariness. For it is perhaps in this exact middle-of-the-road track that the *Bailey Dolly!* shows its great subversion of previous attempts to portray blackness on the commercial musical stage. Thus, this *Bailey Dolly!* might represent a central conundrum of the mainstream civil rights movement. At once, the *Bailey Dolly!* was hopelessly “inside the box,” an old fashioned musical devoid of any revolutionary intent. Yet at the same time, in terms of quantitative *and* qualitative change in attitudes on race, the *Bailey Dolly!* might have been more revolutionary than those productions that sought to confront white racism more directly.

Cooperation would seem to have by-word among those involved creating the *Bailey Dolly!* Perhaps no greater tenet of such cooperation could be seen among these creators than the harmony that existed between blacks and Jews in this production. The connection between the Jewish David Merrick and Jerry Herman, central players in the *Bailey Dolly!* saga, and black performers such as Pearl Bailey and Cab Calloway and their cohorts would seem to have been based, at least in theory, in the compact described by Lewis in Chapter IV, that of “what’s good for the ‘Negro’ is good for the Jew” and vice versa. This cooperative point of view evident in much of the activity surrounding the *Bailey Dolly!* displayed the hope for an effort mutually beneficial to both blacks and Jews. Yet West would provide an underlying paradigm by which such cooperation could be held in mistrust, especially as concerns the argument that offers that Jews benefited from a sense of “nepotism” that blacks did not. Such an underlying blanket rejection of white cooperation as described by West provides a reasonable explanation as the source of those who would mistrust David Merrick’s motivations in creating the all-black *Dolly!* both from Merrick’s position as a white man and especially from Merrick’s position as a Jew.

The reality of David Merrick's biography might fly in the face of any resentment by black people of Merrick as benefiting from white privilege or Jewish nepotism. In fact, Merrick's Judaism prevented him from becoming part of the theatrical production establishment in his native St. Louis. Yes, there was a Jew-friendly New York City to which Merrick could escape. Such an option would not have been available to a similarly situated African American previous to the civil-rights revolution of the 1960s. It is still unfair to reduce Merrick's efforts to a simplistic interpretation of "favoritism and nepotism."

On the subject of Jewish and black interaction in commercial American musical theatre, certainly there were attempts at cooperation. However, as shown in the examples cited above, there was enough mistrust over both implicit and overt racism by Jews towards African Americans that it is not unreasonable to come to a conclusion of mistrust toward David Merrick and his efforts to promote an all-black *Hello, Dolly!* Such mistrust might have been reasonable at first blush, but one must also ask if such mistrust was fair.

One is also reminded of the self-invention issue of Dolly Gallagher Levi herself, as a lower-east-side Irish-woman married to a Jew. Pearl Bailey seemed to have avoided this issue in her interpretation of the role, underscoring the idea of social self-re-invention. Furthermore, Bailey's avoidance of the issue helps to confirm the idea that performance of European ethnicity is often a matter of choice, where performance of blackness more often is not.

Blacks performing blackness, even at the skin-deep level, would seem to be an unavoidable consequence of any performance by an African-American stage performer. In contrast lies the African American who attempts creative input into the enterprise of musical theatre. Here, there exists a parallel between the Bailey *Dolly!* and black-created efforts from the early twentieth century such as *In Dahomey* and *Abyssinia*. Criticism of these productions held to the tenet that if one attempted to present African Americans in a dignified light, one ran the

risk of being accused of presenting a white view of black reality. Such expectation of a pure “black reality,” no matter who defines it, can be seen reasonably as an unfair burden for such theatrical efforts to carry.

White-created efforts at reform of non-white stage portrayals in musical theatre in the era that followed *mistrelsy* would not have to contend to the same extent with the albatross of presenting marginalized populations in too “white” a light, and thus may have had more latitude. A good example of this tenet can be observed in the the plot-line of *Carmen Jones*, a much more serious effort than the *Bailey Dolly!* And like the *Bailey Dolly!*, *Carmen Jones* was at once a commercial and critical success *and* a political focal point. Similarly, and much like the *Bailey Dolly!*, *South Pacific* entertained yet provided serious consideration of race issues.

Significant negatives accompanied the *Bailey Dolly!*, including redolence of condescension and failure to acknowledge “street” realities affecting rank and file African Americans in the mid-1960s. Nevertheless, the *Bailey Dolly!* offered significant positives in return, including a model for black bourgeois entrée and a model for adult treatment of African Americans, not to mention an opportunity to celebrate the gains made by the post-World-War-II civil rights movement. And as we saw in Chapter VII, the *Bailey Dolly!* would serve as a flashpoint with respect to an influx of black inclusion in commercial American musical theatre.

The Production

In Chapters V and VI, we discussed the colossal success of the 1967 *Bailey Dolly!* We began with a survey of the fortuitous circumstances involved in the coming-together of the team of creators and performers involved in this production. Each of the five principals – director/choreographer Gower Champion, composer/lyricist Jerry Herman, performers Pearl

Bailey and Cab Calloway, and producer David Merrick – made a significant contribution to the effort. Much like the lingering effect of the Bailey *Dolly!* on issues of race, this combination of formidable talents worked both cooperatively and in opposition to create what would become a legendary event. Via direction and choreography, Gower Champion created a seminal example of what Murphree called “poor theatre” – not a particularly challenging piece, but a well-wrought entertainment capable of absorbing the metamorphosis involved in switching from an all-white to an all-black cast. Despite yet in tandem with his Jewish background, Jerry Herman was able to craft a score that complemented Champion’s vision of a middle-brow entertainment. The differences between Pearl Bailey and Cab Calloway, both professionally and with respect to their attitudes on race, created a fortuitous tension that translated into marvelous stage chemistry. (Bailey would not enjoy such fortuitous tension with her co-star in the redux, Billy Daniels.) Putting this all together was producer David Merrick, at once noted for his curmudgeon-like persona, his private sensitivity to issues of race, and his willingness to take risks for the sake of a successful production.

Though the all-African-American *Dolly!* displayed a near-ignorance of race in performance – with the possible exception of Bailey’s black-informed ad libs – the production took place in a meta-theatrical environment in which race issues found themselves at the forefront. Once the Bailey cast opened, one issue in particular ultimately became moot – the issue of whether this all-black cast could be seen as “segregated” in a demeaning way. Merrick’s choice to disregard the New York State human rights apparatus in this regard turned out to be a successful gamble. Ultimately, media critics, even those with a bias against such an all-black production for reasons in line with a liberal interpretation of race relations, and audiences embraced this celebration of racial harmony, as evidenced by the sparkling advance press this production received. Such advance press included long, lavish spreads in both *Life* and *Ebony*

magazines in what must have been a rare occurrence of these magazines giving similar coverage to the same event. Similar positive press came from such quarters as senior *New York Times* drama critic Walter Kerr and New York City's black-community newspaper, the *Amsterdam News*. Additional accolades for Bailey and cast included the singular event of a replacement cast recording a new cast album and honors for Bailey that included receiving *Cue* magazine's "Entertainer of the Year" award and a special Tony. Yet despite these achievements, as well as a virtually unanimous New York City drama-critic establishment turning summersaults in the attempt to outdo each other with praise for the Bailey company, the musical-theatre scholar establishment, for the most part, as much as ignored this production in the years since it appeared on Broadway. (Please note that any further restatement of the glowing reviews this production garnered would be belaboring the obvious.)

In short, the Bailey *Dolly!* was nothing short of a smash, an unqualified success in terms of commerce, artistic acumen, as well serving as a quality reflection of an ethic that valued the reconciliation of the races.

Aftermath

The era that followed the Bailey *Dolly!* ushered in significant changes in the sociology and politics of race. Such changes cascaded into change for the entertainment industry in general, as well as commercial American musical theatre in particular.

Let us first consider changes to vertical and horizontal social structures in this era. Bowser's model, based on Weber in its most ideal state, held that if cultural barriers were overcome, then economic barriers would fall to the wayside as a result. Economic opportunities for African Americans In the era that followed the Bailey *Dolly!* increased significantly.

However, Bowser indicates that any permanent change in economic status must be measured in accumulated wealth rather than immediate income. By this standard, African Americans have yet to narrow any gap. Yet despite this failure to eradicate economic disparity, the aftermath of the Bailey *Dolly!* would see changes in social interaction between blacks and whites in entertainment venues, perhaps as envisioned by the likes of *I Spy* and the Bailey *Dolly!* itself. We will return to this thread of thought momentarily.

In the arena of politics, America would see the gap between black and white at times disappear, as in the election of Barack Obama as president in 2008. More disturbing was the advent of more polarized attitudes on race among Americans, including the likely racist attempts to prove that Obama was not born in the United States or flip, random assertions of racism like those leveled against Elvis Presley. In more formal political thought, this era also gave way to the disowning of multi-culturalism by a significant supporter of Great Society tropes on race, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and the advent of the so-called “black neo-con” movement among politically conservative African Americans. As we saw, each of these paradigms paralleled the homespun if naïve political leanings of Pearl Bailey herself, who advocated the kind of race neutrality evident in her performance as Dolly Levi in 1967.

In popular entertainment, as compared to the polarizing tenets of politics we saw, mass media saw exponential expansion of the role of African Americans, especially in the performance venue. Lingering tokenism, such as the “Franklin” character in Charles M. Schultz’s *Peanuts* cartoon strip, continued to plague the entertainment industry to some extent. Yet at the same time, manifold expansion of opportunity for African-American performers took place in both film and television. While much of the early effort to expand such opportunity was of the “J.J. – Kid Dy-no-mite!” variety of buffoonery, later efforts saw a more mature presentation of the African American in popular entertainment.

In commercial American musical theatre in particular, the era that followed the Bailey *Dolly!* witnessed an explosion of opportunity for both the black performer and the black creator. Small successes like *Purlie* and *The Wiz* in the immediate aftermath of the Bailey *Dolly!* gave way to greater participation on the part of black artists in musical theatre. In non-musical theatre, the Wilson-Brustein debate would give voice to the conundrum between opposing views on black casting in Euro-centric material – whether such casting was indicative of racial insensitivity or a natural, even perhaps healthy expansion of black participation in commercial theatre. Musical theatre would have one major difficult incident in this regard – the casting of white actor Jonathan Pryce as a Eurasian pimp in *Miss Saigon*. However, the careers of the likes of Brian Stokes Mitchell and Audra McDonald pointed to greater latitude in cross-racial casting in musical theatre.

The Bailey *Dolly!* redux in 1975 would indicate the beginning of the end of all-black casts, in the style of the 1967 Bailey *Dolly!*, inhabiting material previously reserved for white (or minimally integrated) casts only. Even attempts at racially sensitive interpretations of race-informed material from earlier epochs, like Harold Prince's commercially successful yet race-issue confused revival of *Showboat* in the 1990s, would experience difficulty in the new racial landscape. Instead, commercial American musical theatre successfully turned its attention to material that was directly black-informed, whether written by black artists (*The Wiz*, *The Color Purple*) or white artists (*Ragtime*, *Caroline, or Change*). If the Bailey *Dolly!* did not directly cause such a change in focus, it certainly served as a flashpoint beyond which a change in attitude on race would occur in commercial American musical theatre.

A Final Word

Early in the creation of this study, the title “The Answer is ‘Yes’” was bandied about between the author and PhD advisor Les Wade. This title was intended to illustrate the various conundrums raised by the Bailey *Dolly!*

Was the Bailey *Dolly!* a throwback to racially insensitive musical-theatre material from a bygone era? Yes.

Did the Bailey *Dolly!* studiously avoid any sense of “street” reality in favor of candy-coating the black experience? Yes.

Was David Merrick more motivated by capitalist greed than any sense of social justice? Yes.

However, . . .

Did the Bailey *Dolly!* indicate a desire on the part of the Broadway musical establishment to expand opportunity for the African-American performer, thus providing a redress of past grievances in both commercial American musical theatre *and* the entertainment industry in general? Yes.

Was the Bailey *Dolly!* a celebration of victories achieved by African Americans during the civil rights era? Yes.

Did the Bailey *Dolly!* provide a blueprint for bourgeois entrée for African Americans into mainstream American society and in the process attempt the culturally universal medium of light romantic comedy for African Americans? Yes.

That we are able to answer “yes” to all of these often opposing questions gives tribute to the complexity of the Bailey *Dolly!* phenomenon. In the end, and despite any negatives, the

Bailey *Dolly!* would seem to have achieved a legacy as a progressive agent in any attempt to achieve social parity for African Americans.

For this, it will be remembered.

Endnotes

⁶²² Knowles, 173

⁶²³ Eleanor Roosevelt's break with the DAR over Marian Anderson neatly parallels the Bailey *Dolly!*, offering a similar situation in which white sponsorship of a black performance in a previously whites-only venue becomes a valuable and valued performative commodity among African Americans.

⁶²⁴ Lewis, 99. www.dictionary.com (accessed 28 Feb 10) defines "persiflage" as "frivolity."

⁶²⁵ For visual examples of the very "black is beautiful" look of the Bailey *Dolly!* cast, please see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=84cXRXaCpg> (accessed 1 Mar 10). As black women still process their hair on a regular basis in the new millennium, it does not seem fair to hold the designers of the Bailey *Dolly!* to any Afro-positive standard in women's hair design. Concerning Cab Calloway's processed hair, one interpretation of this is that this hairstyle made Calloway look older – perhaps more "old fashioned" -- than the younger male cast members. Thus, Calloway's hairstyle makes sense both in terms of the history of the performer himself *and* the story line of *Hello, Dolly!*

⁶²⁶ In Sugrue (141), Langston Hughes comments, "'For many years, I have been puzzled as to where and how America expects Negro travelers to eat [. . .] At least a hundred times (making a conservative estimate) I have been refused service in public restaurants in strange cities.'"

⁶²⁷ <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/eagles/lifeinthefastlane.html> (accessed 1 Mar 10). For a more serious discussion of Merrick's difficulty with creative talent, please see the discussion of the production of the musical *Promises, Promises* in Neil Simon's autobiographical *Rewrites: A Memoir* (New York: Touchstone, 1996, 293-296). The most financially successful "straight" (i.e., non-musical) playwright in Broadway history, Simon served as book writer for this musical adaptation of Billy Wilder's 1960 film, *The Apartment*, which Merrick produced in 1969.

⁶²⁸ Herman, Jerry, Jerome Lawrence, and Robert E. Lee. *Mame* (Original Cast CD). New York: Columbia Records, 1966, track 8

⁶²⁹ Knowles, 205

⁶³⁰ In fairness to Horace, during the timeline of the play itself, he treats the opulence of the Harmonia Gardens as a means to the end of finding a suitable mate. Once he succumbs to Dolly's charms, however, it might be reasonable to conclude that Horace will, like the oft-described manure, spread the wealth around to keep up with Dolly's bourgeois pretenses.

⁶³¹ From e-mails that resulted from the author's participation, Summer 2008, in Mini-conference on Black Theatre at Indiana University, organized by Cooper-Anifowoshe, a member of the theatre faculty at Indiana University.

⁶³² Knowles, 7

⁶³³ Woll and Miller, 58

⁶³⁴ Woll and Miller, 58

⁶³⁵ Woll and Miller, 71

⁶³⁶ Cushman and LaRosa, 4-5

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VITA

During the 1980 election campaign, a poster appeared in the hallways of the Law School at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington, advertising the virtues of candidate George H.W. Bush for the Republican nomination for President of the United States. This poster listed the elder Bush's prodigious lifetime accomplishments, including serving in the military in World War II, in Congress, as United Nations Ambassador, and as head of the Central Intelligence Agency. Some wiseacre scribbled a note on the poster. Paraphrased, the note read, "See? This guy can't hold a job!"

Perhaps the same could be said for the diverse career of Charles Eliot ("Charlie") Mehler.

Graduating high school in 1970, Mehler enrolled as an undergraduate at Northwestern University as a theatre major with the intent of becoming the next great actor/writer/director on the American stage. Mehler dropped out about two years into this effort and returned to his native Queens, New York, where he involved himself in local political campaigns and spent time at his first love, writing musical theatre. It was during these years that the seeds for what would become Mehler's first full-length musical play, *Poster Children*, were sown.

Mehler returned to Northwestern in the winter of 1978, this time majoring in political science with the intent of going to law school. Earning a Bachelor of Arts from Northwestern University in August, 1979, Mehler immediately entered the law school at the University of Puget Sound, only to discover that he *hated* the study of law. Mehler would return to school at Western Washington University in Bellingham, Washington, where in 1983 he earned a Bachelor Arts in Education, focusing on secondary mathematics education. Soon after, Mehler found himself teaching middle-school mathematics in Denver, Colorado, only to discover that he

hated teaching young people. Mehler returned to school at the University of Colorado at Denver, where, in 1987, he earned an Master of Science. in applied mathematics.

After some adjunct college teaching, Mehler found employment as a course developer at Applied Learning, an educational software company in Naperville, Illinois. Mehler would be laid off from Applied Learning in 1991, and was fortunate to find very satisfying employment teaching developmental and lower-level college mathematics as a visiting faculty member at Indiana University Northwest in Gary, Indiana. This job ended in 1995.

After a year and a half teaching math in public and private schools in the Chicago area, Mehler settled in on an existence of adjunct college math and computer-operations instruction at various Chicago colleges. It was during this period that Mehler made two important connections. First, he began to teach gifted pre-college students as part of the faculty of the Center for Talent Development at Northwestern University. Mehler remains connected with C.T.D. as an instructor for their online Gifted LearningLinks program, teaching Algebra II/Trigonometry, Pre-calculus, AP ® Calculus AB and BC, Trigonometry Honors, World Theatre, and Playwriting 101.

The second connection Mehler made during this period was as an adjunct instructor at Columbia College Chicago, where he took courses in theatre and television. These academic efforts at Columbia College sparked Mehler's desire to return to school full time to study theatre with a specialization in musical theatre. In the fall of 2002, Mehler enrolled in the Master of Arts program in theatre at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas. During his tenure at Kansas State, Mehler would complete *Wealth, and How Not to Avoid It*, a musical version of George Bernard Shaw's *Major Barbara*.

After earning his Master of Arts in theatre at Kansas State in May, 2004, Mehler enrolled in the Theatre Doctor of Philosophy program at Louisiana State University. Mehler will receive

his Doctor of Philosophy in theatre in December, 2011. In addition to work-shopping both *Poster Children* and *Wealth* and writing the dissertation at hand, Mehler distinguished himself as a doctoral student in the Louisiana State theatre department by presenting at numerous scholarly conferences and getting numerous articles published in various journals and anthologies.

Mehler successfully defended his dissertation on July 1, 2011, only to suffer an attack of congestive heart failure on July 23, 2011. After spending at least another six months recuperating, Mehler plans to find his dream job – creating a musical theatre writing program somewhere outside the New York City area.