

Race, Blacksound, and the (Re)Making of Musicological Discourse

MATTHEW D. MORRISON

The artist builds his temple in the grove, in the grove where fragrance is newly revived, time and again, from freely growing flowers. The theoretician of art tills the earth; he educates the disciples to his life's task and accompanies the inspired creator as a lifelong companion. . . . One of his loveliest tasks, however, is to keep fresh the living flower garden of the earthly kingdom by arousing and furthering the necessary interest.

This florid, almost idyllic description of the “theoretician of art” is drawn from Guido Adler’s 1885 article “The Scope, Method, and Aim of Musicology.”¹ Originally published as “Umfang, Methode und Ziel der Musikwissenschaft,” it served as the introduction to the first issue of the first journal of musicology, *Vierteljahrsschrift für Musikwissenschaft*, which Adler had cofounded in Vienna with his colleagues Friedrich Chrysander and Philipp Spitta. The journal, Adler’s introduction to it, and his contributions to the developing field of musicology continue to resonate in the institutional and academic study of music in Europe and the United States.² Specifically, his division of *Musikwissenschaft* into the categories “Historische” (historical—i.e., notation, form, rules)³ and “Systematische” (systematic—i.e., theoretical, aesthetic, pedagogical)⁴ helped to lay the foundation for the division of contemporary music studies into musicology, music theory, and ethnomusicology.⁵ The seemingly inviting tone of the opening

1. Mugglestone and Adler, “Guido Adler’s ‘The Scope, Method, and Aim of Musicology,’” 16.

2. Mugglestone comments that the entry “Musicology” in the 1980 edition of the *New Grove* still follows the basic model outlined by Adler’s 1885 publication (*ibid.*, 1), and Adler continues to feature in current descriptions of the discipline’s foundation.

3. *Ibid.*, 8. Adler notes that the historical section might also include general history, history of literature, history of the mimetic (e.g., dance), and biography.

4. *Ibid.*, 10.

5. Adler mentions “comparative musicology,” or what developed into ethnomusicology, as a “new and very rewarding adjacent field of study” that “takes as its task the comparing of tonal products, in particular the folk songs of various peoples, countries, and territories, with an ethnographic purpose in mind, grouping and ordering these according to the variety of [differences] in their characteristics”: *ibid.*, 13.

epigraph does not, however, reflect the subsequent development of musicology, nor does it reflect the full complexity of the anti-Semitic, anti-immigrant, and anti-black ideologies that shaped both European and American society in the late nineteenth century as musicological discourses took shape.

In this article, I call attention to specific practices of exclusion embedded in musicology—especially in relation to race, racialized people, and race relations—in order to rupture its constructed borders and decentralize the normative systems that have come to shape the discipline, its membership, and its discourses. To be serious about justice and equity extends beyond creating a “melting pot” or “multicultural” approach within music studies to one that includes diverse methodologies, topics, and the collective efforts of both majority (white) and structurally marginalized groups (black, brown, Indigenous, and other people of color) who reflect the messiness and richness of the culture in which we exist. To this end, I draw on methodologies from performance studies, critical race studies, Black feminist theory, sound studies, and queer studies that are grounded in intersectional analyses, and I place them in direct dialogue with traditional musicological modes of study. This approach is essential to my method of historicizing the rise of American popular music, performance, and race in the nineteenth century. I adopt it in order to push beyond the dominance of Eurocentric ontologies and epistemologies that have become “so deeply embedded in contemporary society that they are seen to be ‘natural,’ rather than socially constructed throughout history,” particularly within musicology.⁶

I have developed a “race-based epistemology”⁷ that I call “Blacksound” in order to address the ways in which popular entertainment, culture, and identity have been shaped by the sonic and embodied legacy of blackface minstrelsy in and beyond the United States. Shana Almeida defines a race-based epistemology as one that “challenge[s] the epistemological practices and activities that naturalize western ways of thinking. Race-based epistemologies serve to de-center and contextualize western ways of thinking and knowing, to define their limits.”⁸ Hence, this article will carefully consider how, as the sonic legacy of blackface, Blacksound informs the way we understand the making, economics, and racialization of popular music, racial identity, intellectual property relations, and culture at large. It destabilizes *a priori* or decontextualized analyses of popular music in the United States by demonstrating how performance, (racial) identity, and (intellectual) property relations have been tethered to the function and construction of popular music and its commercialization since the early nineteenth century. Blacksound places race—its construction, performance, and material relations—at the center of musicological analysis, rather than as a peripheral consideration.

6. Almeida, “Race-Based Epistemologies,” 83.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*, 85.

Because blackface began most obviously as an attempt to construct and perform blackness in contradistinction to the making of whiteness, Blacksound interrogates the black/white binary and its construction in order to consider how notions of racial authenticity were fabricated through aesthetics over the course of the nineteenth century. An intersectional and performance-based analysis of race is at the core of my interpretation of the blackface origins and development of American popular music. Critical race theorist and legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw developed intersectionality as an analytical tool for deconstructing the layers of structural oppression experienced by marginalized people, and by black women in particular. This concept is central to my analysis of race, in that other forms of identity—gender, sexuality, class, ability, and so on—function collectively in the lived experiences of marginalized people rather than as separate categories.⁹

Blacksound is a way of uncovering the political implications of embodying, making, and commercializing popular music in the United States, from its origins in blackface to the present. I am mindful of Alejandro L. Madrid's point that the black/white paradigm has come to dominate the discussion of "American" music in music studies, often to the exclusion of other marginalized people and ethnic groups in the United States and the Americas at large.¹⁰ Blacksound might at first appear to speak to race only through blackness and whiteness, but it in fact challenges notions of racial authenticity in general by facilitating an analysis of the ways in which popular aesthetics that developed out of blackface have been internalized and continue to resonate. Blacksound seeks not to erase other ethnic and racial groups from the process of popular music making in the United States, but rather to put blackness—as the aesthetic basis of American popular music since its founding in blackface—at the center of considering what is at stake as varied communities engage in popular music making on their own terms and in relation to one another within society's complex and often unequal structures. Blackface was the first popular entertainment export from the United States to travel internationally, as troupes were touring in western Europe, Australia, and as far as Japan by the mid-nineteenth century.¹¹ Performance often included the burlesquing of ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and class categories that extended beyond the black/white paradigm, especially since it was often

9. Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins." My intersectional analysis is also informed by Ellie Hisama's work on race/gender/sexuality, particularly my formal reading of blackface sheet music, which employs "a theoretical framework that interprets formal structures through a subjectivity of difference more generally": Hisama, "Divining into the Earth," 263.

10. Madrid, "American Music in Times of Postnationality."

11. For example, blackface became a soundtrack for manifest destiny, and as Chinese immigrants came to be a target of white supremacy in San Francisco in the mid-nineteenth century, blackface and "yellowface" (a stereotyped performance by mostly white actors that attempted to physically represent Asian identity) became performance mediums through which Asian identity was constructed on and beyond the popular stage.

adapted to the context of the community in which it took place.¹² The US popular music industry, which developed out of blackface, has remained one of the most influential markets of popular music worldwide, and Blacksound allows for an analysis of the myriad ways in which the contemporary music industry is built upon this foundation.

Blacksound especially considers the relationships between intellectual property and copyright law, race, performance (both sounded and embodied), and politics. Tracing the aesthetics of Blacksound through musical analysis—written, sounded, and performed—that is historicized within critical studies of race and identity reveals how these phenomena are bound together in the racist regimes of capitalism on which European and American societies are constructed. In this article, I define Blacksound, consider its development alongside that of musicology in the late nineteenth century, and highlight the ways in which Blacksound covertly shaped the subjects and methods that systematically became the basis of music studies. I continue by situating Blacksound within methods and critical approaches that highlight marginalized people in order to show how the history, legacy, and performance practices of early blackface minstrelsy created embodied epistemologies of race and its performance. I also analyze the ways in which racial identity and structural hierarchies are shaped by the embodiment of blackface aesthetics, while defining an ontology of intellectual (performance) property under nineteenth-century copyright laws through Blacksound.

Black Music Historiography and Redressing the Discourse of Musicology

In an article of 2014 titled “Evolutionary Categories and Musical Style from Adler to America,” Rachel Mundy examined the biological basis of musicology and tracked its impact on the field’s methods, topics, and discourses. Through interrogating Adler’s discussions of organisms in his foundational writings, Mundy alerted musicologists that the development of “style criticism” was tethered directly to evolutionary discourses, and that these modes of analysis are grounded in racist, ethnicist, and sexist determinations heavily influenced by Charles Darwin’s theories of biological determinism and evolution.¹³ Adler’s adoption of an evolutionary approach to the study of music, with its organization into epochs, as opposed to a composer-centered approach was part of an “evolutionary perspective” that “adopted a set of assumptions

12. On blackface beyond the United States, see Waterhouse, *From Minstrel Show to Vaudeville*; Lane, *Blackface Cuba*; Thomas, *Cuban Zarzuela*; Wirtz, *Performing Afro-Cuba*; Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain*; Thelwell, “Toward a ‘Modernizing’ Hybridity”; Roper, “Inca Drag Queens and Hemispheric Blackface”; Howard, “On the Back of Blackness”; and Ho, “Consuming Women in Blackface.”

13. Mundy, “Evolutionary Categories and Musical Style,” 740.

that placed Western music at the top of a biocultural hierarchy.”¹⁴ Adler and his contemporaries avoided questions of race and ethnicity and helped to establish a discourse in which it seemed “natural” to privilege the “evolution” of European-based “Western art music” through methodologies, selected topics, and analyses grounded in ideals of evolution or an innate progression of musical development. This approach assisted in the general exclusion of racialized communities and their cultural production from historical musicology and music theory throughout much of the twentieth century, as well as in the construction of race as a method of analysis within these fields.¹⁵ The music of white European composers, mostly male, became the basis of the field’s discourse through the process of epistemic exclusion.¹⁶ Mundy’s pointed discussion highlights the field’s continued development through exclusion, noting that twentieth-century scholars such as Donald J. Grout rejected any “biological” considerations that seemed to shape early musicology by focusing on “the music itself.”¹⁷ This positivist turn toward “the music itself,” however, belies the fact that the field was grounded in biological determinisms that placed white men and their cultural products at the top of society’s developing racial hierarchy.

These racist and racialized systems were developed through the transatlantic slave trade and the making of western European nations and the United States as colonial and imperial powers. Importantly, this racialized system of economic and social exploitation—what historian Cedric J. Robinson refers to as “racial capitalism”—was the economic and social foundation of modern western Europe and the Americas, yet the African-descended and Indigenous populations whose labor and bodies were the actual basis of these systems were often structurally erased from or commodified within capital and cultural productions.¹⁸ In musicology, this economic exploitation and sociopolitical erasure resulted in the exclusion of art by women and people of color as the field developed in the twentieth century. As Mundy notes, critiques that valued style over evolution created a “history of music that rejected racial politics by abstention, focusing musicological attention on music’s formal elements instead of its national or ethnic features.”¹⁹ While this might at first seem to be an “objective” approach, it ignores the racial

14. *Ibid.*, 742.

15. An early exception is Henry Krehbiel’s *Afro-American Folksongs: A Study in Racial and National Music* of 1914.

16. Kristie Dotson defines “epistemic exclusion” as “a persistent and unwarranted infringement on the ability to utilize persuasively shared epistemic resources that hinder one’s contribution to knowledge production”: Dotson, “Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression,” 115–16.

17. Mundy, “Evolutionary Categories and Musical Style,” 749.

18. Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 2. On the development of these capitalist systems of racial and ethnic exploitation outside of the United States, see Quijano, “Coloniality of Power”; Cheng, “Strategic Orientalism”; Cloete, “Neville Alexander”; and Jalata, “Indigenous Peoples.”

19. Mundy, “Evolutionary Categories and Musical Style,” 750.

hierarchies that place whiteness as a default or “natural” category without racialized politics, while automatically racializing and therefore ignoring the creative expressions of people of color so as to avoid a “subjective” analysis. All analyses, however, are subjective, in that analyzers bring their own set of experiences and assumptions to the work at hand, and the work itself bears the mark of its creator’s experiences.

By 1885, the year of Adler’s “The Scope, Aim, and Method of Musicology,” blackface minstrelsy had dominated the American musical landscape for over half a century. Blackface performance emerged in the 1820s with white men (mostly Irish and/or working class) donning blackface and performing popular tunes according to stereotypical notions of black dialect and movement. This music-theatrical form laid the foundation both for popular entertainment in the nation and for the circulation, embodiment, and construction of racial and racist ideologies in quotidian and commercialized styles. Although blackface began during antebellum slavery, it shaped American popular culture through the mid-twentieth century and is still in circulation today. Significantly, Adler’s inaugural article came just twenty years after slavery was abolished in the United States through the thirteenth amendment, and in the wake of the “Redemption” era in which white supremacists and “Jim Crow” segregation laws (named after the first blackface character) legally sanctioned severe violence, discrimination, and disenfranchisement against black and other marginalized communities.²⁰

In defining race in the United States, Glenn C. Loury suggests that we should “see in American slavery not merely a legal convention but also a ritual and custom defining and legitimating an order of racial hierarchy.”²¹ These laws and ritual customs that legalized the enslavement of African Americans structured race relations in the South and informed racist ideologies throughout the nation from the end of Reconstruction through the end of the Civil Rights era. The impact of these laws was not limited to African Americans, but extended to other minoritized people, such as Indigenous, Latinx and Hispanic, a myriad of East and Southern Asian groups, and other people of color. To move the discourse forward, it is equally important to regularly acknowledge and challenge the ways in which racism and dominant structures of male and white supremacy have shaped the field, its institutions, and its membership since its establishment during these eras of segregation and structural racism.²² Because these societal systems perpetuated racist

20. “Redemption” refers to the period in the early to mid-1870s in which white Southerners called for the violent overturn of Reconstruction endeavors to facilitate equality and equity for recently emancipated African Americans; see Olsen, *Reconstruction and Redemption*, and, more recently, Gates, *Stony the Road*.

21. Loury, *Anatomy of Racial Inequality*, 69.

22. Tamara Levitz has challenged the Society for American Music and its sibling the American Musicological Society to recognize the material history of the organizations and their discipline, and not just the constructed history: Levitz, “Decolonizing the Society for

ideologies and maintained racial hierarchies, critical discussions of blackface performance and its cultural legacy remained on the periphery of the field until after the Civil Rights era and the turn toward a “new musicology” influenced by cultural, literary, queer, and feminist studies.²³ And yet while blackface now emerges more regularly as a critical topic in American music studies, it does not yet feature as a core subject in discussions of American popular music or of the ideology of “art” music as its cultural antithesis.

Although musicology did not develop in the United States until the early to mid-twentieth century, it is built upon the discipline inherited from Europe (focused primarily on white male composers), it was established within a racist societal milieu of Jim Crow segregation, and “popular” styles of music often associated with racialized groups or people of lower socioeconomic classes were slow to gain a place within it. As a result, aside from studies of the “folk” music of black and other minoritized Americans taken up primarily by ethnomusicologists, dominant musicological discourse before the 1970s and 1980s largely ignored the music of such groups and classes—especially black popular music.²⁴ In an article of 1996, Guthrie Ramsey astutely observes that “[d]espite [the] historical interest in black music, its journey to academic legitimization has mirrored the progression of black Americans themselves into mainstream American life: slow, demanding, and sinuous.”²⁵ Significantly, since the publication of Ramsey’s article, the nation has elected its first African American president, Barack Obama, and musicology has made efforts to expand its membership and disciplinary boundaries so as to be more diverse.²⁶ Yet the current political moment—in which the

American Music.” She argues, “Decolonization as a historical process requires that members know this material history. Members also have to recall at times that structures of white supremacy, the distribution of labor, and knowledge production are inextricable from each other.” The article takes (historical) musicology as its primary focus, but there have also been efforts in the Society for Ethnomusicology to engage in decolonizing the field, its membership, and its scholarship; see Davin Rosenberg, ed., “Decolonizing Ethnomusicology,” *SEM Student News* 12, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2016), <https://cdn.ymaws.com/ethnomusicology.site-ym.com/resource/group/dc75b7e7-47d7-4d59-a660-19c3e0f7c83e/publications/SEMSN12.2.pdf>.

23. See Ramsey, “Pot Liquor Principle,” 288.

24. Guthrie P. Ramsey discusses in detail early black music historiography within musicology, particularly the work of African American music historian James Monroe Trotter (1842–1942), who wrote *Music and Some Highly Musical People* (1878), and that of Oscar G. Sonneck (1873–1928), Music Division Chief at the Library of Congress, who helped to build the library’s American music collection. Ramsey notes that despite the importance of these scholarly achievements, the field remained committed to Western classical composers and styles as primary topics, even through the “new musicology” turn in the 1980s. Ramsey, “Cosmopolitan or Provincial?”

25. *Ibid.*, 12–13.

26. The Eileen Southern Travel Fund sponsored by the American Musicological Society’s Committee on Cultural Diversity, as well as the recent Committee on Race and Ethnicity within the same society, have attempted to expand the ethnic/racial demographics of the field and its topics through recruitment, financial support, awards, and special sessions at annual meetings. The Society for Ethnomusicology has made similar efforts through the Ric Trimillos Annual

lives and basic rights of black and brown Americans and many other marginalized groups are under constant threat—cautions us against assuming we have already made significant advancement toward racial justice, equity, or inclusion within the discourse and its membership, or within professional music societies. According to the 2017 National Science Foundation report, the number of scholars of color granted PhDs in music studies remains exceptionally low. Of 157 PhDs awarded in Musicology and Ethnomusicology combined, 8 were Hispanic/Latinx, 1 was American Indian or Alaska Native, 6 were Asian, and 3 were African American; of 86 awarded in Music Theory, 2 were Hispanic/Latinx, none were American Indian or Alaska Native, 4 were Asian, and 3 were African American.²⁷ As I wrote in 2012, until there is a drastic increase in the number of scholars of color who attain graduate degrees in music studies or are a part of the American Musicological Society, the Society for American Music, the Society for Ethnomusicology, and other music societies, we might continue to find these scholarly voices and their intellectual concerns and topics marginalized or silenced rather than located within the core of music studies.²⁸

Black music, or “the music of black Americans,” to draw on the title of pioneering musicologist Eileen Southern’s monumental work, begs that its analysis be grounded in its practices and practitioners.²⁹ Southern’s work is an example of interdisciplinary, boundary-pushing musicological methods that focus on questions of race and identity.³⁰ She inaugurated contemporary black music studies in musicology and presents a wealth of archival resources that point to the diverse histories, experiences, and music of black Americans in the United States. An important contribution made by this text toward a musicology that is centered on equity and on revising racialized music histories is its attention to the popular and Western art music styles of African Americans, as performed, created, and received in the nation. Southern also takes care to provide detailed historical context for the experiences of blackness within and beyond the United States. She acknowledges

Meeting Travel Award, the Deborah Wong Research and Publication Award, and the Day of Ethnomusicology (where a small group of high school students are invited to attend a day at the annual meeting of the Society for American Music). The Society for Music Theory’s Committee on Diversity also aims to make its membership, publications, awards, and viewpoints more open to racial and ethnic diversity through travel grants, special sessions, and collaboration with the American Musicological Society’s Committee on Cultural Diversity.

27. “Doctoral Recipients from U.S. Universities: 2017,” National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, National Science Foundation, December 4, 2018, <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf19301/data>.

28. Morrison, “(De)Constructing Musicology’s Borders.”

29. Southern, *Music of Black Americans*.

30. Samuel Floyd’s *Power of Black Music* is another important work in black and American music studies that draws on the archival and historical expansiveness of Southern’s book and applies new critical theories and methods (such as Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s *Signifying Monkey* of 1988) that were developed during the postmodern turn in musicology in the 1990s.

the contributions of women, the Indigenous American population, and those throughout the African and Afro-Latinx diasporas as central to this narrative of black American music.

Defining Blacksound

Southern's *The Music of Black Americans* directly addressed the complex cultural topics that emerged from the making of black popular music. Blackface performance is central to her discussion of US music history and black entertainment, especially as African American performers gained more regular access to the popular stage through blackface in the post-Reconstruction era.³¹ Blackface might have gone from being the central style of US popular entertainment to being a more localized phenomenon in the mid-twentieth century, but its embodiment, commodification, and performance had already shaped the basic foundation of the nation's popular music and culture for over a century. The aesthetics of blackface, both behind and beyond the mask, persisted through its sonic complement: Blacksound. Drawing on Southern's work, I develop Blacksound as both an object of study and a methodology through which to consider the aesthetic and political function of blackface within the history of popular music.

As an object of study, Blacksound is the sonic and embodied legacy of blackface performance as the origin of all popular music, entertainment, and culture in the United States. The term does not purport to stand in for the myriad of complex black sounds produced by black people. Rather, it reveals the material and ephemeral remnants of the sounds and performances (what I refer to as "intellectual performance property") produced by African Americans since the antebellum era, from their development in localized contexts to their "popular" or seemingly race-neutral packaging in the commercial music industry. Blacksound is an integration of historical, material, and hermeneutic analysis of performance, publications (sheet music, minstrel manuals, pop music charts, reviews, and so on), recordings, and other ephemeral technologies vis-à-vis the aesthetic construction of race and racism within popular entertainment. The historical materiality of Blacksound unfolds as a dialectical process that traces how sound and movement in American popular music, from its origins in blackface in the early nineteenth century (when mostly ethnic white men performed imagined and witnessed aspects of black aesthetics), through and after the Civil War (when black performativity began to impact blackface more directly), and into Reconstruction and Redemption (when widespread migration within and immigration

31. Southern, *Music of Black Americans*, 231–44. Blackface was a main source of income for working musicians in the United States during the nineteenth century and became a primary source of employment for black itinerant musicians looking for work in the Reconstruction era.

to the United States led to the continued amalgamation of ethnic folk sounds into popular music), finally came to form the basis of the modern music and entertainment industry. Such an analysis unpacks the ways in which (intellectual) property, performance, structural inequities, and the racialization of identity (that is, whiteness, blackness, and “authentic” notions of race in general) are interconnected in the making and economy of popular music.

As a methodology, Blacksound considers the systemic and property conditions under which popular music is produced. These conditions include the political, cultural, and legal parameters that affect the ways in which the aesthetic and performance practices of African Americans have been exploited and embedded in the discourses of popular music and sound, even as they are made hypersonic (or rendered racially inaudible) when marketed to a primarily white audience. Blacksound takes up the ontological origin of intellectual property as it has been shaped by the context of chattel slavery in which blackface minstrelsy was born. This method of popular music analysis is an attempt at an “engaged musicology” as introduced by Naomi André in *Black Opera*. Engaged musicology is described by André as a process that “incorporates the shared lived experiences of everyone involved: the performers and the public. Such an approach that brings together opera in a historical context and focuses on how it resonates in the present day points to a type of analysis I call an *engaged musicology*.”³² Through a direct engagement with performance studies, sound studies, Black feminist studies, and queer studies, Blacksound seeks to expand the inclusive development of musicological discourse by placing sound, race/identity, performance, and its reception at the center of the analysis of popular music making in the nation.

Particular to the political legacy of Blacksound is the historical and essentialist attempt to delimit black performativity, black personhood, and the ability for black people to *be* by circulating counterfeit and imagined performances of blackness in and out of blackface. These performances—which I designate “scripts”—developed into stereotypes and frequently stood in for the varied experiences and ways of being of African Americans. I use the word “script” as a way of understanding the impact of minstrelsy on racial identity and the aesthetics of property relations, referring to the specific sonic and corporeal markers of identity that came to be performed, stereotyped, embodied, and circulated through blackface. This impact was fundamental to the way particular civic and quotidian performances of a nonblack “self” became culturally aligned with whiteness, as ethnic whites also felt free to perform the *limits* of self as citizen through blackface on and off the minstrel stage. Within and without the ritual of blackface, masked performance developed sonic and bodily “markings,” or scripts, that became closely attached to stereotyped ideas of race (such as blackness); simultaneously, a space for

32. André, *Black Opera*, 1 (André’s emphasis).

whiteness was constructed and freely articulated through the blackface mask. The development and transmission of these sonic and bodily scripts is central to my deconstruction of the formation of racial identity and notions of intellectual (performance) property in Blacksound's emergence out of blackface.

The amalgamation of this sonic and embodied legacy in commercial entertainment simultaneously constructs recognizable sounds of popular performance via black(face) aesthetics that are made accessible to and absorbed into the public domain.³³ Blacksound also accounts for the legacy of violence that is embedded in the commercialization of popular music out of blackface performance, as black people have experienced, and continue to experience, systemic racism, while white (and other nonblack) people freely express themselves through the consumption and performance of commodified black aesthetics without carrying the burden of being black under white supremacist structures.³⁴ Tracing this aesthetic phenomenon provides insight into the way the embodiment and performance of racialized sound figures into the development of property relations and continues to resonate within the complicated, often interracial, and often racist contexts out of which popular music styles emerge. Blacksound as an analytical tool is an attempt to address George Lewis's call for music historians to develop a *nomadic* Americanist musicology that challenges the discipline's "political tendencies toward" rigidity and "fold[s] music into the vast sweep of American historiography."³⁵ Blacksound reveals how popular performance, from its origins in blackface and its rapid spread throughout the nation, overlaps with multiple aspects of US history, politics, and culture, while being both embodied (in performance and consumption) and commercialized through mass entertainment. Through this concept, I also aim to develop an approach that "theorizes the outcomes" of Blacksound's potential impact on identity and popular entertainment beyond the United States, a country with the "most extensive and influential mediascape" across the globe.³⁶

I have created the neologism "Blacksound" as a compound noun in order to engage the material nature of the diverse sounds produced by black people—as well as the aesthetics assigned to blackness through the legacy of blackface—that are consumed in and beyond the United States. Blacksound prompts us to consider how these constructed commercial aesthetics are in dialogue with the ways in which "black sounds" produced by black people have been theorized and practiced within music, history, literary, performance, and critical race studies. What Blacksound contributes to

33. On "amalgamation" in racialized performance in nineteenth-century America, see Nyong'o, *Amalgamation Waltz*.

34. See Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 23.

35. Lewis, "Americanist Musicology and Nomadic Noise," 693–94.

36. *Ibid.*, 693.

these discourses is an analysis of the way the commercialization of popular sound and the rituals of blackface performance materialize through property and race relations. The concept is a call to shift attention to the (im)-material aspects of blackface performance that are difficult to recover when relying specifically on a recording, as blackface proliferated for decades through sheet music and live performance before commercial audio and film recordings became available in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

An analysis that employs Blacksound takes seriously the “thickness” of performance—whether live, recorded, or prerecorded. This approach foregrounds the embodied production of sound through which we might examine how “intermaterial vibration can afford a better understanding of the ways in which music does what it does, and the ways in which humans use it as a force for good and bad.”³⁷ Through “intermaterial vibration,” Nina Eidsheim provokes us to move beyond thinking of music and sound as fixed objects to thinking of them as “transferable energy” that pulsates “through and across material . . . transforming as it adapts to and takes on various material qualities.”³⁸ Blacksound amplifies the liveness of sound in performance in its analysis of nineteenth-century minstrelsy. This method considers what it meant for the popularity of blackface to be as much about racial ridicule as about an embodiment (at the level of vibrating sounds and movements) of counterfeit and existing black aesthetics in imagining and constructing oneself as “white,” while simultaneously creating a seemingly racially neutralized popular sound and aesthetic through performance. Blacksound asks that we reflect on the “phonic materiality” invoked by Fred Moten to attune to the material hyperonicity of blackness that always cuts through and across the scripting and erasure of black people and their aesthetic practices.³⁹ This materiality pierces the sounds of popular entertainment that emerged from blackface, its commercial industry, and the copyright laws that defined whose and which aesthetics might be claimed as intellectual property or made public domain.

Black performance practices, or the intellectual performance property of black people, have a history of being absorbed into popular entertainment, making them ineligible for copyright and available in the public domain. Performance itself was not deemed copyrightable in the foundational property laws that emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and so early black aesthetics—often transmitted through the orality or corporeality of enslaved peoples—were excluded from the realm of protection in both copyright and contract law at the time when notions of intellectual property

37. Eidsheim, *Sensing Sound*, 163.

38. *Ibid.*, 16.

39. Moten, *In the Break*, 1.

were forged.⁴⁰ Performance was not protected under copyright law until 1897; dramatic works, which might have included music, were not protected under copyright law until 1856, and sheet music outside of a dramatic performance was not deemed copyrightable until 1831. Thus the publisher of a song or the performer who made it popular received both the credit and most of the compensation until federal copyright law was revised in 1909. Recordings did not fall under copyright protection until the 1976 federal copyright revision, and even then the actual sounds on the recordings were not protected.⁴¹ Meanwhile, mostly white music industrialists capitalized upon the (unrecognized) intellectual performance property of black Americans, both in and out of blackface, throughout the nineteenth century. This process helped to define and liberate imagined visions of whiteness through black popular aesthetics scripted into sheet music and other tangible forms subject to legal protection. This scripting also occurred through the racialization of black aesthetics (either delimited as being black or neutralized as “popular” for primarily white/mass music makers and consumers) and actual African Americans, even while the latter group largely had limited property claims over their personhood or personal creations throughout most of the nineteenth century. When applied as a hermeneutic, Blacksound reinterprets generally accepted notions of intellectual property within the making of copyright laws in the United States. It interrogates assumptions about the aesthetic legacy of blackface vis-à-vis notions of intellectual (performance) property, and it considers the ontological basis of property and identity that developed out of the aesthetics of racialized performances.

Blacksound points to the process of constructing racialized scripts, prior to the moment in which notions of an “authentic” black or white sound in popular music solidified along the black/white hierarchical division of sound that Jennifer Lynn Stoever defines as “the sonic color line.”⁴² Blacksound highlights the action-based process described by Erich Nunn as “sounding the color line” by analyzing the aesthetics of blackface performance in its historical context.⁴³ Similarly to “the sonic color line” and “sounding the color line,” Blacksound is a conscious attempt to centralize the processes whereby sound and its circulation are as critical to understanding the formation of race

40. On the history of performance in copyright law, see Miller, *Copyright and the Value of Performance*.

41. The 1976 copyright law came twenty years after “rock and roll” was taken up and popularized by white performers, producers, and executives, who until this revision were able to “legally” replicate or create counterfeit versions of original blues, R&B, and rock and roll songs by black performers from a recording, because the music on the recording was not considered copyrightable (as were the sheet music and the mechanical reproduction of a recording). This shrewd popular music model helped to establish commercial popular music and its industry in the mid-twentieth century, more than a century after it began in blackface.

42. Stoever, *Sonic Color Line*.

43. Nunn, *Sounding the Color Line*.

and racism in discourses on race as visibility (imagery, skin, and other forms of representation).

Blacksound, however, considers how the scripting of racialized sound develops out of blackface, as the aesthetic and property value of these scripts shifts during the antebellum, Civil War, and post-Reconstruction eras prior to the advent of recordings and the establishment of the modern commercial music industry. Rather than taking sound as already (racially) segregated, Blacksound conceptualizes and reimagines how sonic and corporeal ideas of race were materially taken up into the body, commercially developed, and commodified, within a system that reinforced the development of whiteness itself as a form of property to which value (political, economic, and cultural) is assigned, while whiteness was being constructed in blackface.⁴⁴ Blacksound served as an aesthetic basis for the civic enactment, performance, and formation of race and its hierarchies.

Jayna Brown's "racial mimicry"—forms of racial delineation with and without cork—is a cogent framework for many useful concepts that have been developed to describe the ways in which black people and blackness have been imagined, appropriated, and consumed in popular culture.⁴⁵ In its analysis of race from an intersectional position, Blacksound is in dialogue with other concepts that engage with the legacy of racial mimicry and consider the impact of black aesthetics on and their absorption into popular culture. These include Mendi Obadike's "acousmatic blackness" (a "sonic skin" that enables stereotypes of blackness to be articulated and understood when no blackness is visualized); Nina Eidsheim's "sonic blackness" (the perceptual phantom of a vocal timbre, projected by the listener, which happens to match current expectations about blackness, or the shaping of a vocal timbre to match ideas about blackness); Barbara Savage's "aural blackface" ("sounding" black by performing what might be recognized as black dialect); Kristin Moriah's "sounding blackness" (black performance, singing, and listening as a political act); and Daphne A. Brooks's "sonic blue(s)face" ("a palimpsest of spectacular aural racial and gendered iterations" developed out of minstrelsy by black and white women performers).⁴⁶

Blacksound reveals not only how the scripts of blackface performance suggest racial mimicry, but also how the sounds and movements embedded in those scripts become racialized and imagined as authentic or inauthentic,

44. See Harris, "Whiteness as Property," which considers how the construction of whiteness as a form of racial identity evolved into a form of property, historically and currently acknowledged and protected in American law.

45. Brown, *Babylon Girls*.

46. Obadike, "Low Fidelity," 72, 151; Eidsheim, "Marian Anderson and 'Sonic Blackness'"; Savage, *Broadcasting Freedom*, 7; Moriah, "I Dreamed and Loved and Wandered and Sang": Sounding Blackness in W. E. B. Du Bois's *Dark Princess*," *Sounding Out!* (blog), August 20, 2018, <https://soundstudiesblog.com/2018/08/20/i-dreamed-and-loved-and-wandered-and-sang-sounding-blackness-in-w-e-b-du-boiss-dark-princess/>; Brooks, "This Voice Which Is Not One," 49.

depending upon the body, listener(s), and conditions under which the performance takes place. Furthermore, Blacksound traces the materiality of these ephemeral performance scripts as they concretize into racial signifiers. Using this concept, the analyst might investigate how whiteness, blackness, and other forms of racial identity are articulated through the aesthetics of popular music and the making of intellectual (performance) property. Central to the concept is Toni Morrison's discussion of the "Africanist presence" that shapes "the self-evident ways in which Americans choose to talk about themselves" and is ever present as a "visible and invisible mediating force" in the literary, and in this case musical, imagination.⁴⁷

What, exactly, is at stake when the legacy of blackface minstrelsy—with its own complex ideologies and identities often left unchecked in popular and critical discourses—becomes a sonic and economic foundation of popular music, its industry, and notions of intellectual (performance) property within and beyond US borders? In this article, I begin to address this weighty question by analyzing the impact of the sound, performance, and history of early popular blackface archetypes on the circulation of Blacksound. Blacksound unfolds as both a historical phenomenon and a method of analysis, as I interrogate the aesthetic, political, and property legacies of two blackface characters who helped to establish blackface's popularity throughout the nineteenth century—"Jim Crow" and "Zip Coon."

"Jim Crow" and "Zip Coon": Blackface Caricatures and Architects of Blacksound

Early blackface of the 1820s and 1830s was widely popularized through the performance of three popular blackface caricatures: "Jim Crow" (ca. 1828), "Zip Coon" (ca. 1834), and "Lucy Long" (ca. 1838). "Jim Crow" was a caricature of the enslaved black man; "Zip Coon" was a caricature of the Northern, urban "dandy"; and "Lucy Long" was the "female" character on the minstrel stage, one introduced in drag and blackface, a racist, sexist caricature that was subsequently developed into an array of stereotypes of black women ("jezebel," "wench," "mammy," and so on).

Blackface performance began with mostly Irish and English working-class American men darkening their faces with burnt cork, wearing tattered clothing, using stereotyped "black" dialect, and cavorting on stage to tunes that were mostly adopted from blackface sheet music. In the 1820s and 1830s, these early blackface performances would appear as entr'acte diversions within more "formal" plays, and in the 1840s they developed into the most common and lucrative form of popular entertainment, blackface minstrelsy.⁴⁸

47. Quoted in Nunn, *Sounding the Color Line*, 28.

48. Laurence Hutton records that famous early American stage actor Edwin Forrest would include performances of "the Dandy," "Coffee" (a "Jim Crow"-like character), and "Panza"

“Blacksound” refers to the legacies, sounds, and movements of African American bodies—both real and imagined—on which blackface performance and popular entertainment were based. It also refers to the sonic and embodied performances of one’s own (nonblack) racial or ethnic identity as a vehicle for self-imagination and the construction of race within the nation’s racial caste system. These quotidian and spectacular racialized sounds and performances are central to the development of ideals of citizenship in the making of whiteness from the nineteenth century to the present. Because Blacksound developed within the contexts of chattel slavery and blackface minstrelsy, its political economy is always critical to understanding how it functions sonically and circulates socially in the construction of popular music and identity in US history.

As a method of tracing the historical embodiment of racialized sound, Blacksound speaks to the way scripts of racial “authenticity” have been grafted onto physiology and claim to represent natural interiority. John L. Jackson notes that racial authenticity does not point to a natural phenomenon but is the most commonly accepted way (the other being “sincere” performances of race) in which we have structurally come to understand how race functions. According to Jackson, “authenticity theorizes . . . an unbalanced relationship between the powerful seer and the impotently seen, the latter being a mere object of the seer’s racial gaze and discourse, a rendition of identity that Frantz Fanon famously illustrates with the exclamations of a child, ‘Look, a Negro . . . Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!’”⁴⁹ “Authenticity” often suggests that which can be seen and thereby taken as “natural” to a particular racialized group or person—depending upon who is looking and what position or perspective they inhabit (for example, regarding one’s skin color as an indication of race). Blacksound is a tool with which to unpack the embodied performances and projections of race that give meaning to “black skin” through the lens of the colonial gaze (of the white onlooker) within the racist regimes that shaped the making of European American societies.⁵⁰ Consequently, the performance of blackness in blackface by ethnic whites not only determined how black people came to be seen and treated in the United States, but provided a proxy for whiteness to imagine itself as other than “Other”—or as a singular, natural category of superior existence based upon an investment in racialized whiteness “as an [invisible] organizing principle in social and cultural relations.”⁵¹

(from *Don Quixote*) in his acts, alongside his frequent roles in Shakespearean and other “serious” dramas: Hutton, *Curiosities of the American Stage*, 104. Ohio native and Irish descendant Daniel Decatur Emmett is credited with helping to formalize these individual performances into the multi-act theatrical production known as blackface minstrelsy.

49. Jackson, *Real Black*, 17.

50. The use of “black skin” here is based upon Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*.

51. Lipsitz, *Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, 1.

The following questions posed by queer and performance studies theorist E. Patrick Johnson in his foundational text *Appropriating Blackness* are paramount to my analysis of early blackface characters, Blacksound, popular culture, and racial formations:

What happens when “blackness” is embodied? What are the cultural, social, and political consequences of that embodiment in a racist society? What is at stake when race or blackness is theorized discursively, and the material reality of the “black” subject is occluded? Indeed, what happens in those moments when blackness takes on corporeality? Or, alternatively, how are the stakes changed when a “white” body performs blackness?⁵²

This analysis will also move beyond considerations of the “appropriation” of “authentic” racial performances in an effort to question the construction and reception of performance scripts that signal a relationship to racial authenticity. As Johnson notes, while claims to black authenticity by black people might serve a political purpose, “black authenticity” as a singular, racial signifier is “overdetermined—contingent on the historical, social, and political terms of its production.”⁵³ And as this discussion will demonstrate, white men in early blackface performance were amalgamating their own folk sounds, imagined sounds of black Americans, and created counterfeit versions of blackness through embodying an imagined and conscripted black “other” through Blacksound.

The cover of the “Jim Crow” sheet music shown in Figure 1 presents the masked, stereotyped blackface character.⁵⁴ First printed by American publisher W. C. Peters soon after the successful performance of the caricature by T. D. Rice in the late 1820s, this “Jim Crow” cover became one of the first lithographic images to appear on early American popular sheet music—a technology that would become the standard marketing tool for popular sheet music at mid-century.⁵⁵ Many of the derisive stereotyped attributes that became associated with the “Jim Crow” character—the exaggeration, sexualization, and almost disfigurement of his body, his tattered clothing and appearance, his angular movements and posture, and his blissfully unaware gaze—are evident in the representation on the sheet music. As the masked character entered the stage, the initial presentation of a blackened face and caricatured posturing added a level of artifice that encouraged the audience to internalize this stereotype as an accurate portrayal of a black “other” in relation to their (white) selves. Significantly, these factors are in play before the blackface character is even heard. The material consequences

52. Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*, 2.

53. *Ibid.*, 3.

54. The image in Figure 1 is reproduced from the African American Sheet Music Collection at the John Hay Library, Brown University, <https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:24788/>.

55. See Howard, *Stephen Foster, America's Troubadour*, 137.



Figure 1 Cover for the “Jim Crow” sheet music published by E. Riley, New York, ca. 1831

of Blacksound are captured by Johnson in the following passage, which highlights what is at stake in the performance and construction of race by individuals within larger systems of power:

White Americans also construct blackness. Of course, the power relations maintained by white hegemony have different material effects for blacks than for whites. When white Americans essentialize blackness, for example,

they often do so in ways that maintain “whiteness” as the master trope of purity, supremacy, and entitlement, as a ubiquitous, fixed, unifying signifier that seems invisible. Alternately, the tropes of blackness that whites circulated in the past—Mammy, Sapphire, Jezebel, Jim Crow, Sambo, Zip Coon, pickaninny, and Stepin Fetchit, and now enlarged to include welfare queen, prostitute, rapist, drug addict, prison inmate, etc.—have historically insured physical violence, poverty, institutional racism, and second-class citizenry for blacks.⁵⁶

In short, the fictional “black” sounds and movements scripted in blackface performance are often regarded as “natural,” realistic displays of African Americans as individuals, even though the ethnic whites performing their perceptions of blackness in blackface had choreographed these staged identities, embodied their performance markers, and continued to participate in the making of “whiteness” (in and beyond performance) in juxtaposition with these staged versions of blackness. I use the term “choreographed” to refer to the way in which an individual’s voice, vocal timbre, and movement are constructed through various psychological, cultural, and physiological factors, yet are imagined as “naturally” produced by their body. This theory is based on the work of Nina Eidsheim, who states,

I hence propose, drawing on concepts from dance and choreography, a theoretical and analytical framework that can address voice as the product of both societal shaping *and* individual articulation and materiality. This framework foregrounds the ways in which vocal timbral character is mistakenly attributed to race. Thus, we may consider how the sound of a singer’s voice is in fact a co-creation to which listeners significantly contribute.⁵⁷

What ethnic sounds were “choreographed” into the embodied sounds of “Jim Crow,” and how did the scripting of this Blacksound in blackface impact sound’s racialization through popular performance? Ashon Crawley’s “choreosonic” framework is helpful in unpacking and simultaneously holding together the relationship between sound, movement, and embodiment in performance. Crawley defines the choreosonic as “a portmanteau underscoring that choreography and sonicity, movement and sound, are inextricably linked and have to be thought together.”⁵⁸ In *Blacking Up*, Robert Toll imagines which choreosonic practices might have had the most resonance in Rice’s successfully improvised performance of “Jim Crow”:

Since the melody to “Jim Crow” was a familiar English tune and the words were neither unusual or especially clever, it must have been the dance that made Rice’s performance such a public rage. Descriptions of the “hop,” the rhythms, and the peculiar shoulder and arm movements involved in the dance

56. Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*, 4.

57. Eidsheim, “Voice as Action,” 10.

58. Crawley, “That There Might Be Black Thought,” 125.

strongly suggest that it was a variation of a characteristically Negro shuffle in which the feet remain close to the ground and upper-body movements predominate.⁵⁹

Toll does not indicate exactly how familiar the “English tune” was, and he also neglects to acknowledge the potential impact of the “blackened” (stereotyped) dialect in the lyric—a precursor to what might be referred to in popular culture today as a feigned “blaccent.” Yet he points to an interesting paradox engendered by the blackface mask: the blackface performance of traditional Anglo-Celtic sounds by white men who circulated the earliest examples of commercial Blacksound is consistent with the ways in which the performer embodies (or becomes possessed by) what was *imagined* as the freeing movements, gestures, and sounds of captive African Americans through the ritual of blackface minstrelsy. Conversely, when the ethnic white gaze, on and off the stage, connected (vaguely) similar performance scripts of blackface to the actual bodies of African Americans, these racialized scripts became conflated with the real lives of blacks in America. The stereotyped performance of the “plantation darky” was grafted onto the ontology of blackness within the structures of antebellum American slave society. The “plantation darky” famously billed as “Jim Crow” later bequeathed its name to the racist legalized segregation codes that plagued the nation between Reconstruction and the Civil Rights era. The foundation of American popular music is based in the construction and embodiment of “whiteness” by ethnic white Americans through the foil of stereotyped and commodified scripts of blackfaced blackness.

Other familiar characters of the early nineteenth-century popular stage, such as the Yankee, the Savage, and the Backwoodsman, were often performed alongside “Jim Crow” in variety shows or short entertainments between the acts of plays. But it was “Jim Crow,” then “Zip Coon” and “Lucy Long,” that came to dominate the popular stage and lay the blueprint for subsequent blackface character types. These caricatures, created in the northeast and along the Ohio River valley, became the basis of the way audiences and performers heard and absorbed racialized scripts of black men and women on the popular stage across the nation during the first half of the nineteenth century.

In his influential book *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, Eric Lott developed his concept of “love and theft” through a frequently quoted anecdote according to which T. D. Rice based his performance of “Jim Crow” on a black dockhand named “Cuff,” who begged Rice to give him his clothes.⁶⁰ Given the ubiquity of blackface minstrelsy in the mid-1840s, Lott argues that the anxieties displayed by (Irish American) white working-class men in the minstrel theater “facilitate[d]

59. Toll, *Blackening Up*, 43.

60. Lott, *Love and Theft*.

safely an exchange of energies between two otherwise rigidly bounded and policed cultures” that was “based on a profound white investment in black culture.”⁶¹ Blacksound takes impetus from Daphne Brooks’s *Bodies in Dissent* (2006), which reminds us that the consumption and enjoyment of “blackness” through blackface was actually a “terror” that African Americans had to contend with as they entered popular entertainment, shifted the material resonance of Blacksound post-emancipation, and found ways of subverting the dominance of blackface stereotypes. In this groundbreaking study, Brooks reads Dion Boucicault’s play *The Octoroon* (1859) and Thomas Russell Sullivan and Richard Mansfield’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1887) vis-à-vis minstrelsy, as productions that transform the “scophylic display of racially indeterminate bodies in transatlantic theatre culture into an expression of (white) ontological anxiety and theatrical control over corporeal representation.”⁶² This “ontological anxiety” took place among mostly Irish and other white American performers and audiences through blackface and the making of Blacksound. Even in integrated settings in more urban areas, racism, white supremacy, and the conditions of enslavement prevented any “safe” or equal exchange between whites and blacks.

An account of T. D. Rice’s performance of the song “Jump Jim Crow” published by Lawrence D. Hutton in 1891 differs from the story that forms the basis of Lott’s work. This account makes it possible to consider important ways in which the caricature was imaginatively perceived and performed without being limited to mimicry and authenticity, “minstrelsy’s mixed erotic economy of celebration and exploitation,” or “love and theft,” as primary paradigms by which to engage the legacy of the blackface façade.⁶³

The history of “Jim Crow” Rice, as he was affectionately called for many years, has been written by many scribes and in many different ways, the most complete and most truthful account, perhaps, being that of Edmon S. Conner, who described in the columns of the *New York Times*, June 5, 1881, what he saw and remembered of the birth of Jim Crow. . . . The actors could look into the stable-yard from the windows of their dressing-rooms, and were fond of watching the movements of an old and decrepit slave who was employed by the proprietor to do all sorts of odd jobs. As was the custom among negroes, he had assumed his master’s name, and called himself Jim Crow. He was very much deformed—the right shoulder was drawn up high, and the left leg was stiff and crooked at the knee, which gave him a painful but at the same time ludicrous limp. He was in the habit of crooning a queer old tune, to which he had applied words of his own. At the end of each verse he gave a peculiar step, “rocking de heel” in the manner since so general among the many generations of his imitators; and these were the words of his refrain:

61. *Ibid.*, 6.

62. Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent*, 10.

63. Lott, *Love and Theft*, 6.

“Wheel about, turn about,
 Do jis so,
 An’ ebery time I wheel about
 I jump Jim Crow.”

Rice closely watched this unconscious performer, and recognized in him a character entirely new to the stage. He wrote a number of verses, quickened and slightly changed the air, made up exactly like the original, and appeared before a Louisville audience, which, as Mr. Conner says, “went mad with delight,” recalling him on the first night at least twenty times. And so Jim Crow jumped into fame and something that looks almost like immortality.⁶⁴

In this description of Rice’s performance of “Jim Crow,” it is not “Cuff” who creates the watershed moment that sparked the blackface tradition, as in Lott’s influential “love and theft” theory. Lott’s 1993 publication permeates minstrel studies, and one of his lasting legacies is his suggestion that “[m]instrel performers often attempted to repress through ridicule the real interest in black cultural practices they nonetheless betrayed . . . what my title loosely terms ‘love and theft.’”⁶⁵ While my research on blackface seeks to unpack these performative nuances of whiteness, it does not assume an automatic “theft” of “authentic” scripts of blackness by the white minstrels in blackface. Instead, I consider the way in which these sonic and embodied racialized scripts were negotiated through performance and in blackface, and what this negotiation reveals. In contrast to Lott’s reading, I contend that the drastic moment of performance here is the live blackfaced performance itself. I use the term “drastic” as suggested by Carolyn Abbate, who draws on Vladimir Jankélévitch to define the “drastic” moments in performance as connoting “physicality, but also desperation and peril, involving a category of knowledge that flows from drastic actions or experiences and not from verbally mediated reasoning.”⁶⁶ Thus, Rice improvised what would develop into an early ethnically hybrid popular American sound and movement, as he performed stereotyped scripts of blackness (in blackface) that were based on a fictionalized and imagined black character while infusing his own Irish American practices into the performance. Rice’s Irish folk sounds, exaggerated movements, and stereotyped dialect served as the basis of blackface’s early Blacksound. They also served as the basis of what blackface represented in form and in function: “terror and enjoyment.”

Saidiya Hartman invokes this dyad in *Scenes of Subjection* in order to rebut Lott’s “love and theft” claims. The drastic moments of live blackface performance also conjure the racist terror of the black Americans on whom its caricatures are based, while providing pleasure and self-making opportunities for its white participants. Hartman’s discussion of “terror and enjoyment”

64. Hutton, *Curiosities of the American Stage*, 115–17.

65. Lott, *Love and Theft*, 6.

66. Abbate, “Music—Drastic or Gnostic?,” 510.

reveals what is at stake in the performance of blackface and the embodiment of Blacksound: “Thus the desire to don, occupy, or possess blackness or the black body as a sentimental resource and/or locus of excess enjoyment is both founded upon and enabled by the material relations of chattel slavery.”⁶⁷

“Zip Coon”: Sounding the Blackface Urban Dandy

While “Jim Crow” might be responsible for the ubiquity of blackface in the 1830s, this figure was complemented by another popular stage character of early blackface, “Zip Coon.” If the former represented the slow, lazy, dumb Southern “plantation darcy,” “Zip Coon” stood for the urban “dandy”—well dressed, smooth-talking, a clever schemer, a sexual predator, and aloof. Although this character performed elements of “high” society through dress and presentation, the blackening of “Zip Coon” emphasized that he was a poser, naturally unable to achieve the civic and societal status of the “elite” whites, and that he represented a counterfeit on stage. This urban dandy might have appeared alongside and as frequently as “Jim Crow” in early minstrelsy, but unlike the “Jim Crow” song, the song that made “Zip Coon” a staple of blackface still survives today through the well-known tune “Turkey in the Straw.”⁶⁸ As one of the earliest popular blackface publications, the “Zip Coon” sheet music is a direct example of the way Blacksound was constructed within American popular music and identity.

Before T. D. Rice, George Washington Dixon, a white Virginian, was the best-known blackface “delineator” (as performers in blackface were referred to in contemporary accounts) of the late 1820s. Dixon became famous through helping to cement two of the three primary caricatures of blackface performance through the popular songs “Coal Black Rose” and “Long Tail Blue” between 1827 and 1828, two of the first popular blackface characters/songs to appear both on the minstrel stage and in sheet music.⁶⁹ Like “Jim Crow,” “Coal Black Rose” represented the “plantation darcy” through the “Sambo” character, while “Long Tail Blue” presented the urban black dandy, an early and more “genteel” (that is, less overtly racist) version of the “Zip Coon” stereotype.⁷⁰ The relationship between “Jim Crow,” “Zip Coon,” and the female impersonator “Lucy Long” was central to the development of blackface minstrelsy, as the social values embedded in the performance of these stereotypes are realized, both in and out of blackface, through sound’s racialization. With regard to the connection between the two dominant blackface male characters, William J. Mahar notes that “both

67. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 21.

68. See Hamm, *Yesterdays*, 124.

69. See *ibid.*, 117.

70. See Lewis, “Daddy Blue,” 267.

types embody the contrast between comedic and dramatic characters representing the conflicts between urban and rural, elite and common, white and black in American folk theatricals and on the legitimate stage.⁷¹ These conflicts were frequently staged in the early to mid-nineteenth-century American theater, as Dixon performed “Coal Black Rose” and other blackface tunes during performances of works such as Rossini’s opera *William Tell* and Shakespeare’s *Richard III*.⁷² Dixon is mostly remembered, however, for his famous urban black dandy portrayal of “Zip Coon.”⁷³

The “Zip Coon” song effectively conflates the character of the song’s title and an actual black individual through musical personification. On the cover of the “Zip Coon” sheet music published by Thomas Birch in 1834, the body of the character might be almost as contorted as that of “Jim Crow,” but the more performatively effeminate pose, his “long-tail” coat, and accessories that suggest a possibly “upper-class” status (top hat, jewelry, tailored vest, and so on) convey a different blackface caricature altogether (see Figure 2).⁷⁴ The blackfaced urban dandy—attractive, well dressed, “educated”—effectively embodies the irony and fear of black “upward” mobility throughout the nation, as he also performs the class frustrations of an urban, white working-class immigrant population on the rise between the 1820s and the 1840s. The middle-to-upper-class African American impostor of “Long Tail Blue” and “Zip Coon” emerged while slavery was on the decline throughout the North, also the time when urban class conflicts were developing along racial lines.

Dixon first appeared singing blackface comic songs in July 1827 at the Lafayette Theater in New York, then the largest theater in both England and America.⁷⁵ It was also around this time, between 1827 and 1828, that slavery was officially abolished in New York State.⁷⁶ As the presence and visibility of African Americans increased throughout the urban North, structural competition for class and economic mobility often became a racialized matter for working-class Irish Americans of the Jacksonian “common man” era.⁷⁷ Furthermore, escalating tensions between abolitionist and anti-abolitionist

71. Mahar, *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask*, 210.

72. See Hamm, *Yesterdays*, 126.

73. Dixon was so revered for his performance of “Zip Coon” that his name was used as an advertisement on the cover of the sheet music issued by various publishers at the time, such as that published by J. L. Hewlett in New York: “Sung by Mr. G. W. Dixon.” During antebellum minstrelsy, this was a common practice by which to boost sheet music sales of individual songs.

74. The image in Figure 2 is reproduced from the African American Sheet Music Collection at the John Hay Library, Brown University, <https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:24794/>.

75. See Lewis, “Daddy Blue,” 257.

76. See *ibid.*, 260.

77. On the rise of Irish immigration in the 1840s, the populist candidature and election of Andrew Jackson, and what is referred to as “Jacksonian democracy” in relation to blackface performance, see Saxton, “Blackface Minstrelsy and Jacksonian Ideology.”

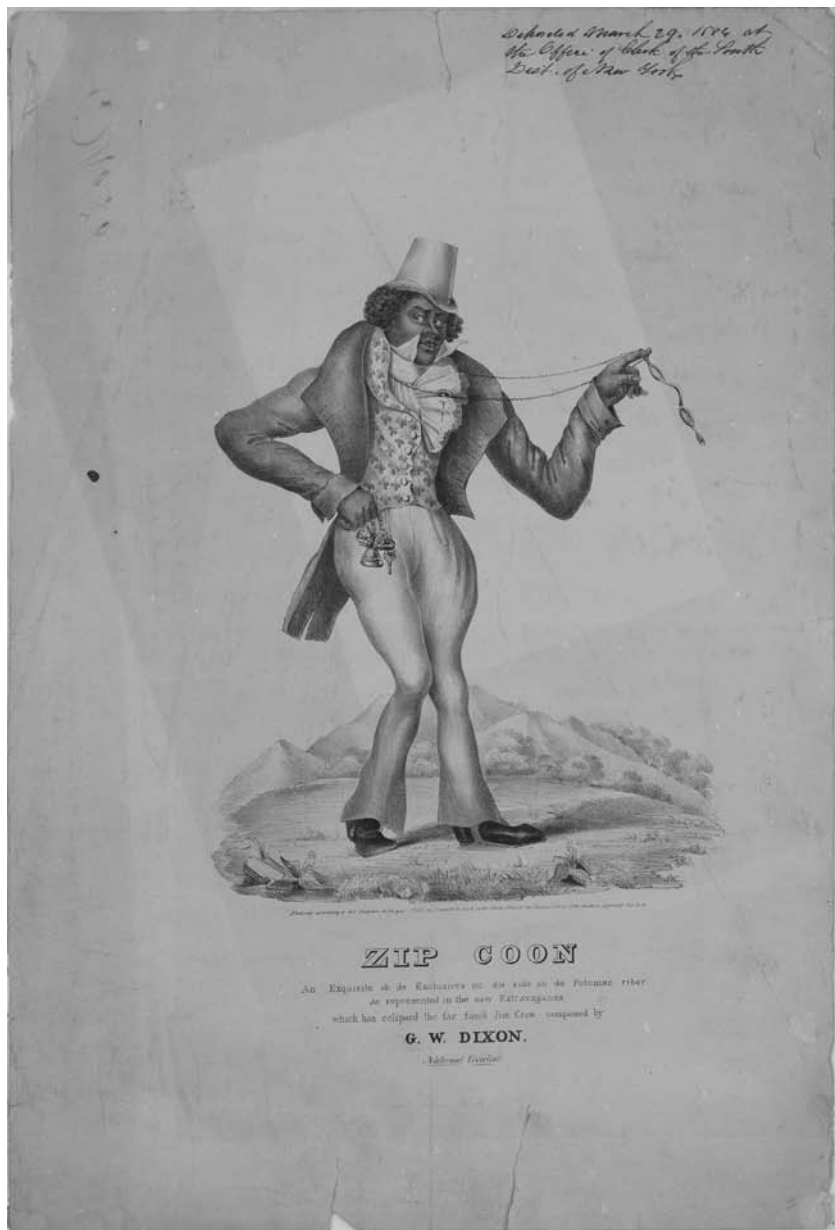


Figure 2 Cover for the “Zip Coon” sheet music published by Thomas Birch, New York, 1834

sentiments from the 1830s to the Civil War era culminated in race riots in many urban areas. Newspaper accounts of a riot in New York City in July 1834 referred to mobs of working-class and mostly Irish Americans attacking the establishments of abolitionists and African Americans.⁷⁸ The mob made its way to the nearby Bowery Theater in Manhattan's downtown Five Points district, where significant numbers of African Americans were settled in the early nineteenth century. The working-class periodical the *New York Sun* reported that Dixon and his "Zip Coon" performance calmed the rioters: "Mr. Dixon, the singer (an American)[,] now made his appearance. 'Let us have Zip Coon,' exclaimed a thousand voices. The singer gave them their favorite song, amidst peals of laughter—and his Honor the Mayor . . . made his appearance. . . . Dixon, who had produced such amazing good nature with his 'Zip Coon,' next addressed them—and they soon quietly dispersed."⁷⁹ Dale Cockrell notes that before Dixon appeared on the Bowery stage that night, a performance of *Metamora* by Edwin Forrest, the famed American Shakespearean actor, had been cut short by rioters.⁸⁰ It is worth pointing out here that, although Forrest gained great popularity in his Shakespearean roles, *Metamora* was by an American author, premiered by Forrest (an American), and on an American topic—that of Native American and Puritan interaction in New England. Although the rioters that evening were focused on the elite, English management of the Bowery, Dixon's "Zip Coon" was called on not to replace *Hamlet*, but to replace a "Native" of the new nation in the character of *Metamora*. Indigenous Americans posed just as great a threat to European manifest-destiny-driven immigrants who took land from the Indigenous peoples during frontier expansion in mid-nineteenth-century North America.

According to news reports, the working-class, Irish American rioters were reacting to comments made by the Bowery's English stage manager, Mr. George P. Farren, who was "accused of using language disrespectful to the Americans."⁸¹ The organization of these working-class audiences into "mobs" protesting against the "respectable" English theater—resulting in the replacement of the famous Shakespearean thespian with the blackface American urban dandy via Dixon—is an example of the paradox that was embedded in the ritual of blackface performance.⁸² This paradox, one that allows for both self-expression and the rejection of other through the performance of "Zip Coon," was so potent that it came to express the class anxieties of the rioting group in ways that juxtaposed the ridicule of blackness

78. See Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder*, 99.

79. *New York Sun*, July 11, 1834, quoted in Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder*, 100.

80. Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder*, 100. On this performance, see Martin, "Interpreting *Metamora*."

81. *Commercial Advertiser*, July 10, 1834, quoted in Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder*, 100.

82. The *Commercial Advertiser* notes that handbills had been posted throughout the city to notify protesters of the accusation against the English theater owner: see *ibid.*

and the ability to freely express and represent themselves through blackface. These expressions, however, were never separate from the burnt-cork mask through which significant class and societal anxieties were articulated by white participants in mid- to late antebellum America.

Current literature on blackface performance frequently warns against relying on a single historical artifact in deconstructing its impact on society at large. To this end, Christopher J. Smith points to the necessity of taking seriously the participatory and improvised nature of popular blackface performance: “Participation was both a fundamental part of Afro-Caribbean and African American performance, powerfully attractive as a target not only of observation but also imitation, and, as a result of this attraction, powerfully subversive. The music and dancing made audiences want to participate; this desire for participatory pleasure is at the root of popular music’s appeal.”⁸³ In this section of the article, I demonstrate how significant lyrical and sonic aspects of the “Zip Coon” sheet music served as a basis for the participatory improvisation of an aspirational whiteness through performing a blackfaced “other” in the construction of a “popular” Blacksound.

While “Jim Crow” performances generally presented a static character through the “plantation dandy” stereotype, the lyric and cover image of the “Zip Coon” song suggest a more dynamic portrayal of the stereotyped black fop. The well-dressed urban dandy shown in Figure 2 was a musician, politician, and frontiersman—in blackface. To understand the way in which Blacksound is performed through “Zip Coon,” I will consider how these racialized scripts are embedded in its lyric. Different presses published their own versions of popular mid-nineteenth-century blackface tunes as they did of all popular songs, particularly across the different regions of the United States. In the 1820s and 1830s, it was not yet common for a “composer” or “author” to attain rights to a published work. It was common, however, for a publisher to use the name of a famous performer of a song to promote the sheet music, as in the ca. 1834 Firth and Hall edition of “Zip Coon,” which advertises on its cover “Zip Coon: A Popular Negro Song as Sung by Mr. Geo. W. Dixon with great applause.”⁸⁴ In this edition of “Zip Coon,” the brief chorus that begins on the second page of the music repeats the line “Old Zip Coon is a very larned scholar” in three consecutive four-measure phrases (see Figure 3). The melody that accompanies the repetition of these lyrics is the B section of the familiar “Turkey in the Straw” (see Example 1).⁸⁵ Right away, the sharply dressed “Zip Coon” is portrayed as the counterfeit of a “real” middle- or upper-class white citizen. Rather than being a “learned scholar” he is a “larned” scholar, and his blackfaced dialect sonically

83. Smith, *Creolization of American Culture*, 25.

84. “Zip Coon” (Firth and Hall). See <https://digitalcollections.detroitpubliclibrary.org/islandora/object/islandora%3A208302>.

85. Example 1 is transcribed from O’Neill and O’Neill, *O’Neill’s Music of Ireland*, 281.

Z I P C O O N.

I went down to San dy hook, to der ar ter noon; I went down to
 San dy hook, to der ar ter noon; I went down to Sandy hook,
 to der ar ter noon; And de fust man I met dere was old Zip Coon.

Handwritten:
 11/10 ref
 Hackley Collection SP.
 375

Figure 3 The music of “Zip Coon” in the edition published by Firth and Hall, New York, ca. 1834, reproduced courtesy of the E. Azalia Hackley Collection of African Americans in the Performing Arts, Detroit Public Library

reminds us of his stereotyped “blackness,” which in turn becomes an ontological indicator of his inability to articulate being an educated scholar *and* black. As the chorus ends, the lyric clearly shows this “dandy” to be a fraud, as “Zip Coon” goes from being a “larned scholar” to being a banjoist: “He plays on the Banjo Cooney in de hollar.” The banjo was associated with lower- and working-class American folk, particularly because of its African origins—surely not the instrument of choice of a “learned scholar” during the antebellum era. It was, however, the instrument of choice of Anglo-Celtic American immigrants who interacted with African Americans across the Upper South during the colonial era,⁸⁶ and of those who articulated their class and racial

86. See Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*.

Old Zip Coon is a ve-ry larned schlar, Old Zip Coon is a
 ve-ry larn-ed scholar, Old Zip Coon is a ve-ry larned scolar, He
 plays on the Ban-jo Cooney in de hollar.

2 Did you ever see de wild goose sail upon de ocean,
 O de wild goose motion is a very pretty notion,
 For when de wild goose winks he beckon to de swallor,
 An den de wild goose hollar, google, google, gollor.

3 Old suke Blueskin fell in love wid me,
 She vite me to her house for to take a cup of tea
 What do you think Old Suke had for de supper!
 Dare was chicken foot sparrow grass & apple sauce butter,

4 O my ole mistress is very mad wid me,
 Because I wouknt go wid her and live in Tennessee;
 Massa built a barn dere and put all de fodder,
 Dere was dis ting and dat ting and one ting an oder.

5 As I was a goine down a new cut road,
 I met a little Tarrapin a looking at a Toad;
 An jist at evry time de toad begin to jump,
 De Tarrapin he hide himself behind a burnt stump.

6 Dat tarnal critter Crocket, he never say his prayers,
 He kill all de wild cats de Coons and de Bears,
 An den he go to Washington to help to make de laws
 An dere he find de Congress men sucking of deir paws.

7 If I was de President of dese United States,
 I'd suck lasses candy and swing upon de gates,
 An dose I didn't like I'd block em off de docket,
 An de way I'd block em off would be a sinto Crocket.

8 I tell you whats a goine to happen now very soon,
 De United States bank will be blown to de moon,
 Den all de oder bank notes will be mighty plenty,
 An one silver dollar will be worth ten or twenty.

9 O glory be to Jackson, for he blow up de Banks,
 An glory be to Jackson, for he many funny peanks
 An glory be to Jackson, for de battle of Orleans,
 For dere he gib de enemy de hot lutter beans.

Figure 3 continued

anxieties in blackface during the antebellum era. The banjo was so deeply associated with minstrelsy that its African roots were buried beneath the hybrid performance practices that Irish American performers developed in blackface.

Although the revelation that “Zip Coon” was a banjoist cast doubt upon his ability to be a “learned scholar,” the blackfaced dandy continued to express both the anxieties and the aspirations of the working class, mostly Irish American audiences who participated in his creation during the late antebellum era. The political tensions of Jacksonian democracy, European

Example 1 “Turkey in the Straw”

immigration, and frontier and industrial expansion were central topics in both of the versions of the “Zip Coon” song that were printed in 1834. In the version published by Thomas Birch, the fourth through sixth verses speak of the aspiring dandy as president (over Andrew Jackson), with Davy Crockett on the ticket as his VP (see Figure 4):⁸⁷

I tell you what will happen den, now bery soon,
De Nited States Bank will be blone to de moon;
Dare General Jackson, will him lampoon,
An de bery nex President, will be Zip Coon.

An wen Zip Coon our President shall be,
He make all de little Coons sing posum up a tree;
O how de little Coons, will dance and sing,
Wen he tie dare tails togedder, cross de lim dey swing.

Now mind wat you arter, your tarnel kriter Crocket,
You shant go head widout old Zip, he is de boy to block it[;]
Zip shall be President, Crocket shall be vice,
An den dey two togedder, will hab de tings nice.⁸⁸

87. The images in Figure 4 are reproduced from the African American Sheet Music Collection at the John Hay Library, Brown University, <https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:24795/> and <https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:24796/>.

88. “Zip Coon” (Thomas Birch).

Irish and other European immigration to the United States increased between the 1830s and the 1850s, and general-turned-president Andrew Jackson, of Ulster Scot descent, came to represent the spread of democracy to the “common man.” The expansion of universal suffrage to include all white men, and not just the property-owning Anglo elite, was largely spawned by the rise of Jacksonian democracy from the 1820s until the end of his presidency in 1845. As Barbara Lewis notes,

Under the democratic Jackson, the political constituency was redefined to exclude from the demos free blacks. . . . The new spirit of equality, certainly a euphemistic term, was intent on laundering the immigrant middle, and determined to exclude the darker and higher reaches of the citizenry. Jackson’s leveling program was accomplished with significant media assistance from the penny press and the theatre.⁸⁹

Jacksonian ideals significantly influenced structural developments in US politics and society, but the exploits of frontiersman Davy Crockett were often celebrated by non-elite, poorer, and working-class (especially Irish) white men, as westward expansion and “outlaw” tactics became celebrated during the growth of the United States. As described by Lewis,

Crockett quickly became a national hero, a kind of home-grown Superman, bigger-than-life symbol of the rugged individual who single-handedly roped and harnessed the wild west. In those days, Tennessee was still considered the west. By eliminating the dark savages, pushing them off their lands, Crockett made the territory habitable for decent, law-abiding white folks and their Christian families. Crockett also presided over [Zip] Coon, and Coon’s lyrical attempts to establish his superiority were all the more ridiculous because the audience knew for sure which one was the master and which the slave. Coon’s extravagant pretensions were not disturbing in the least, just laughable.⁹⁰

On stage, the darkened dandy used comedy to ridicule both white high society, as he was portrayed as being “above” the working-class audience, and black Americans, as he was portrayed as “below” them through performance. The expressive possibilities for white performers that were embedded in the blackfaced performance of “Zip Coon” quickly became the paradoxical paradigm of blackface, blackness, and Americanness. Although intentionally farcical, “Zip Coon” represented many aspects of the *real* ways in which ethnic whites in urban and frontier regions viewed aspects of their own lives in antebellum society. Consequently, this caricature further highlighted the paradox of blackface’s hybrid nature in Blacksound’s development throughout the nineteenth century, guided by lower- and working-class whites’ performative engagement with blackface and blackness. Central to this paradox is the ability for white ethnicities to express their own anxieties and desires for

89. Lewis, “Daddy Blue,” 259.

90. *Ibid.*, 268.

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1834
SHEET
MUSIC

ZIP COON.
A
FAMOUS COMIC SONG,
as Sung by
ALL THE CELEBRATED COMIC SINGERS,
with
WONDERFUL APPLAUSE.
Composed and Arranged
For the
PIANO FORTE.

New York: Published
at ATWILLS MUSIC SALOON, 201 Broadway.

Maestoso
Allegro

O ole Zip Coon he is a larnedskoler, O

ole Zip Coon he is a larnedskoler, O ole Zip Coon he is a larnedskoler, Sings

posum up a gum tree an coony in a holler. posum up a gum tree, coony on a stump,

Entered according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1834, by Tho^s Birch,
in the Clerk's office of the District Court, of the Southern District of New York.

Figure 4 The music of “Zip Coon” in the edition published by Thomas Birch, New York, 1834

class and political aspiration within the ethnic divisions of whiteness in the antebellum United States. The simultaneous ridicule of upper-class whites and any class of blacks found in this stereotyped black(face) character is what made “Zip Coon” a vehicle for whites to freely articulate both sameness and difference in the racialized structuring of American society through the

176

posum up a gum tree, coony on a stump, posum up a gum tree, coony on a stump, Den

over dabble trubble, Zip Coon will jump, O zip a duden duden duden zip a duden day. O

Zip a duden duden duden duden duden day. O Zip a duden duden duden duden duden day.

Zip a duden duden duden zip a duden day.

2
 O its old Suky blue skin, she is in lub wid me,
 I went the udder arter noon to take a dish ob tea;
 What do you tink now, Suky hab for supper,
 Why chicken foot an posum heel, widout any butter.

3
 Did you eber see the wild goose, sailing on de ocean,
 O de wild goose motion is a berry pretty notion;
 Ebery time de wild goose, beckens to de swaller,
 You hear him google google google goller.

4
 I tell you what will happin den, now bery soon,
 De Nited States Bank will be blone to de moon;
 Dare General Jackson, will him lampoon,
 An de bery nex President, will be Zip Coon.

5
 An wen Zip Coon our President shall be,
 He make all de little Coons sing posum up a tree;
 O how de little Coons, will dance an sing, swing,
 Wen he tie dare tails togedder, cross de lim dey

6
 Now mind wat you arter, you tarmel kriter Crocket,
 You shant go head widout old Zip, he is de boy to block it
 Zip shall be President, Crocket shall be vice,
 An den dey two togedder, will hab de tings nice.

7
 I hab many tings to tork, about, but dont know wich coon
 So, here de toast to old Zip Coon, before he ginto rust;
 May he hab de pretty girls, like de King ob ole,
 To sing dis song so many times, fore he turu to mole.

MS. 189315

Figure 4 continued

choreosonic, material aesthetics of Blacksound in blackface. In his discussion of the impact of the song “Zip Coon” on class conflict, Cockrell suggests that its “genius,”

from the perspective of the white working-class audience, was its ability to ridicule both up and down the social ladder simultaneously, making a funny song

a double treat, and to give expression to white common-person feelings of being bracketed out of the day's sociopolitical dialogue. Zip . . . gives character to the reason why blacks cannot possess the "honorable" status accorded whites and, at the same time, expression to the abstract, distant, unnatural, and, finally, unworkable pretensions of the powerful.⁹¹

While both the cover and the lyric of the "Zip Coon" sheet music might suggest a black character (the latter through its "blackface" dialect), the printed music itself falls squarely within various folk music styles of the British Isles. As many recent Irish immigrants were still closely connected to their folk traditions, vernacular musics such as the hornpipe, jig, and reel continued to serve as the musical basis of late antebellum blackface performance. Hans Nathan notes that "Zip Coon" is related to two Irish hornpipes, "The Glasgow Hornpipe" and "The Post Office," both of which, like much dance-influenced folk music of the Celtic traditions, are considered fiddle tunes (see Examples 2 and 3).⁹² The relationship between "Zip Coon" and these two tunes, in terms of both melodic contour and rhythm, is indeed striking. Of the two abovementioned versions of "Zip Coon" published in 1834 in the wake of Dixon's popular performance, the Firth and Hall edition (Figure 3) is a simpler, more straightforward presentation of the melody with only slight rhythmic variation. The Thomas Birch edition (Figure 4) is more distinct rhythmically and has more variation, although the basic melody, as well as the harmonic and melodic rhythm, remain the same. Given that improvisation in live performance was central to realizing blackface sheet music, it is likely that the more distinctive Birch version contains more of the rhythmic and melodic embellishments that would have been added in live performance. In comparing the "Zip Coon" song with traditional Irish folk styles, I will use the simpler version of it published by Firth and Hall (Figure 3).

"Zip Coon" is in duple meter and is characterized by rapid rhythmic patterns in two-beat measures of a sort found in traditional hornpipes and reels. The eight measures of "The Glasgow Hornpipe" (Example 2) closely correspond in harmony as well as in melodic and rhythmic contour to the first sixteen measures of "Zip Coon." In each case, both the melody and the harmony revolve around the major pentatonic scale on G. The pentatonic basis of the "Zip Coon" melody, characteristic of Celtic folk music as well as various vernacular musics internationally, contributes to the tune's folk-like quality.⁹³ Rhythmically, the melody consists of small, repeated cells featuring arpeggiated leaps and dotted figures, suggesting the fiddling styles of both African and Irish folk traditions.⁹⁴ The melody "restarts" every eight

91. Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder*, 94.

92. Nathan, *Dan Emmett*, 166. Examples 2 and 3 are transcribed from Nathan's study (168).

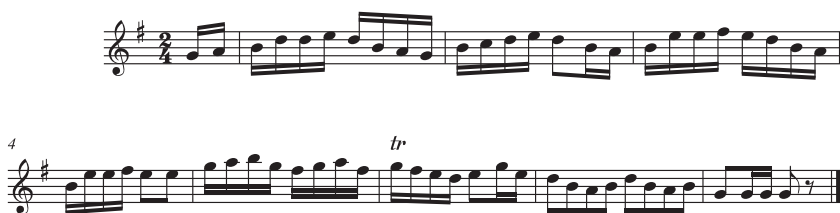
93. See *ibid.*, 174.

94. This style might also be impacted by the black fiddling traditions that came from various parts of Africa and continued to develop in the Americas; see Dje Dje, "(Mis)Representation of

Example 2 “The Glasgow Hornpipe”



Example 3 “The Post Office”



measures, just as that of “The Glasgow Hornpipe” does every four measures. And in both melodies, a four-measure rhythmic phrase is repeated to form a larger period—one of eight measures in “The Glasgow Hornpipe” and one of sixteen measures in “Zip Coon.” This motor-rhythmic practice is another common trait of hornpipes, jigs, and reels, as it serves to propel the dance frequently associated with the tune.

Significantly, these musical forms were also connected to movement, dance and participatory exchange being key parts of many Anglo-Celtic traditional styles. The frequent “restarting” of rhythmic cells in short phrases might correspond to the rapid rhythmic succession of dancers’ heels and toes in the jig and reel, which became known as the “breakdown” throughout the United States. Yet it was the way in which these styles were improvised in blackface that gave them a distinctly American flair. The precarious ontological conditioning of blackness in American slave society allowed for the “noisy” sounds and “ragged” movements—“improper” traits within “proper” society—that were stereotypically scripted onto African American bodies in order to be safely and freely expressed by white Americans through blackface performance. This free expression, however, also allowed ethnic whites to *mask* their own cultural noise and raggedness in blackface, while African American identity in US society continued to be shaped by a hybrid of caricatured blackness within an expression of one’s ethnic whiteness.

African American Music.” Dje Dje notes that “playing the fiddle in the Americas can be regarded as a reinforcement rather than a diminishment of Africanisms, which led to transformation and the development of new stylistic trends” (13).

Consequently, the paradox of performing this aspiring upper-class dandy in blackface is juxtaposed with the ethnic white sounds that underlie his characterization.

The Scots Irish reel is also characterized by repeated rhythmic phrases that begin and end in the same manner.⁹⁵ The influence of the reel is evident in both the chorus of “Zip Coon” (mm. 17–32 of the vocal part in Figure 3) and the traditional Irish tune “The Post Office” (Example 3). While “The Post Office” consists of four two-measure phrases, “Zip Coon” consists of four four-measure phrases; both are characterized by G major tonality and melodies driven by a rapid rhythmic pattern that alternates between scalar and arpeggiated movement. In the “Zip Coon” chorus, the first four-measure phrase is repeated a tone higher to create the second, while the third and fourth phrases are rhythmically related but melodically independent.

The Blacksound scripts that influenced the popularity of “Zip Coon” are based on the hybridity of these ethnic white folk expressions and stereotyped performances of blackness. It is difficult, however, to separate the enjoyment an ethnic white participant might have felt in recognizing “self” within the familiar tunes from the freedom they felt in expressing the “other” by imitating and imagining black performance practices. In any case, the traditional ethnic white sounds that helped to popularize “Zip Coon,” together with the performance of sound and movement through an imaginary black “other,” became the mode through which Blacksound most affected reality. The simplicity, derisiveness, and catchiness of the “Jim Crow” and “Zip Coon” songs, ritualistically improvised in blackface, became mapped onto an ontology of blackness *as* simple and thereby not equal to its white counterparts throughout society. As Sandra Jean Graham makes clear, the impact of blackface performance remained detrimental to black people, even after its sound shifted to include more of their own aesthetic and performance practices: “not only did these white parodists capitalize on black creativity through appropriation, replacing the black composer, but their lyrics and performances also re-placed black minstrel performers—and by extension black society—under white control.”⁹⁶

Conclusion

As Blacksound developed both within and out of blackface, the stereotyped stage personae, sheet music, descriptions, and performance scripts of “Jim Crow,” “Zip Coon,” and “Lucy Long” began to stand in for the *real* lives of an increasingly free African American population in antebellum urban centers. Simultaneously, it created space for the construction of whiteness,

95. See Nathan, *Dan Emmett*, 182.

96. Graham, *Spirituals and the Birth of the Black Entertainment Industry*, 243.

through popular sound and performance, and for the economic and civic elevation of that whiteness under the unequal societal conditions that began during slavery and persisted through and beyond Jim Crow-era segregation.

The competition for economic, political, and societal mobility became even more racialized during the late antebellum era, as an increasing population of recently immigrated, working-class whites witnessed an increase also in the population of free, educated, working- and middle-class blacks, as well as immigrants who came in large numbers from East Asia and other parts of the world. Mostly Irish Americans from urban areas were the key exponents of blackface minstrelsy during its formalization in the 1840s and the first years of its ubiquity in the 1850s and 1860s, as the US population grew both in number and in ethnic/racial diversity. Blacksound continued to shift and develop during the growth of the popular music industry, and, together with blackface, became the medium through which other ethnic white Americans, women, African Americans, and other people of color would enter the music-industrial complex that became the American popular music industry.

While this article has focused on the early history of Blacksound, the concept itself accounts for the shift in American popular music that occurred during the nineteenth century as black performers and people of other backgrounds began to have a more direct impact on the development of popular sound, gaining greater if still limited access to participation in the popular music industry. From the beginning of the twentieth century and through the Jim Crow era, as black people began to migrate to more urban areas after emancipation, the sounds and movements (that is, intellectual performance property) that traveled with them continued to affect popular music, especially in places like New York, Chicago, and Nashville, where the commercial music industry was heavily concentrated. Just as blackface minstrelsy developed within chattel slavery, notions of intellectual property began to shift as “late-nineteenth-century American analytical jurisprudence perpetuated this ephemeralization and abstraction of property” and extended “copyright grants in published musical scores to cover voice.”⁹⁷ Taking this into account, Blacksound reveals how the racialization of sound and shifting notions of intellectual property throughout the nineteenth century made popular music a space in which to hear, see, and interrogate the circulation and commodification of the black performance property that serves as the aesthetic basis of the industry and identity formation.

To make the aesthetic and structural legacy of blackface minstrelsy central to discussions of popular music in and beyond the United States and to employ Blacksound as an analytical tool with which to address its complicated resonances is a scholarly approach that takes equity and justice seriously within musicological discourse. Blacksound allows scholars to interrogate the complexities of music making within unjust societal structures, especially

97. Best, *Fugitive's Properties*, 15, 19.

with regard to race, identity, and intellectual property relations in the popular music industry. It also allows for analysis of the way in which the material, commercial, and cultural foundations of American popular music have shifted over time, from its origin to the present, without losing the history of its aesthetic basis in blackface and racist caricature.

If our fields, societies, and institutions of higher education are to remain relevant, our approaches and policies must embrace the diverse and lived experiences of the entire population,⁹⁸ and resist the proliferation of right-wing discriminatory acts against women (trans- and cisgendered), immigrants, black, brown, Indigenous, and other people of color, queer and trans individuals, and other marginalized groups. People of color and other sidelined groups within the field of musicology—together with their topics, interests, practices, methods, experiences, and cultural productions—might become central to its discourse and structures if the majority of scholars take up extant methods both within and outside of music studies, as well as those yet to be developed, that move these communities and their experiences into the heart of musicological inquiry. Musicology does not and cannot exist in a bubble. It exists in societies that remain steeped in sexism, racism, homophobia, xenophobia, ableism, and other forms of immediate discrimination against people who do not fit what is constructed as a constitutive norm. Equity and equality among diverse people might not have been central to Adler's *Musikwissenschaft* or its subsequent development, but we, as scholars of music today, should recognize what is at stake for the most disenfranchised in our disciplines and societies, and consider how we might contribute to remedying their experiences through our scholarship and actions, as we go about the rigorous study of music making within our diverse cultural landscape.

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98. The US minority (nonwhite) population is currently more than 30 percent and is expected to exceed 50 percent by 2050; see Joel Kotkin, "The Changing Demographics of America," *Smithsonian Magazine*, August 2010, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/the-changing-demographics-of-america-538284/>. The Pew Research Center notes that by 2055 the United States will not have a single racial or ethnic majority, and that over the next few decades, most of US population growth is projected to be linked to Asian and Hispanic/Latinx immigration; see D'Vera Cohn and Andrea Caumont, "10 Demographic Trends That Are Shaping the U.S. and the World," *Fact Tank: News in the Numbers*, Pew Research Center, March 31, 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/03/31/10-demographic-trends-that-are-shaping-the-u-s-and-the-world/>.

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Abstract

This article highlights practices of exclusion embedded in musicology—especially in relation to race, racialized people, and race relations—in order to rupture its constructed borders and decentralize the normative systems that have come to shape the discipline, its membership, and its discourses. To this end, I define and apply the concept of Blacksound—the sonic and embodied legacy of blackface performance as the origin of all popular music, entertainment, and culture in the United States. Blackface emerged as the first original form of US popular music during chattel slavery, and it helped to establish the modern music industry during the time in which Guido Adler began to define *Musikwissenschaft* (1885). Blacksound, as the performative and aesthetic complement to blackface, demonstrates how performance, (racial) identity, and (intellectual) property relations have been tethered to the making of popular music and its commercialization since the early nineteenth century. Blacksound also reveals how practices of exclusion that are germane to musicological discourse are connected to the racist practices and supremacist systems that defined society and popular culture throughout the nineteenth century. To redress the impact of these customs, this article defines and employs Blacksound as a means of placing

(the performance of) race, ethnicity, and their relationship with other forms of identity at the center of the way we approach and select our subject matter and create musicological epistemologies within the development of music studies.

Keywords: race, intellectual property, blackface, popular music, Blacksound