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MASTER JUBA, THE KING OF ALL DANCERS!
A STORY OF STARDOM AND STRUGGLE FROM THE DAWN OF THE TRANSATLANTIC CULTURE INDUSTRY

JAMES W. COOK

Over the past one hundred and fifty years, the antebellum dancer known as 'Master Juba' has become something of a mythic figure in U.S. cultural history. Today he is often heralded as the man who broke the colour barrier in blackface minstrelsy (Winter, 1947; Toll, 1974; Johnson, 1999); or the man who invented tap dancing (Watkins, 1994; Malone, 1996; Anbinder, 2001); or the man who preserved authentic black vernaculars in a sea of minstrel caricatures (Southern, 1971; Hill and Hatch, 2003). Websites, film documentaries, coffee table books, and Broadway musicals celebrate him as one of the first African-American artists to achieve international cultural celebrity. The Dance Heritage Coalition in Washington, D.C. now lists him – along with Martha Graham, Gene Kelley, and Alvin Ailey – as one of 'the nation's 100 Irreplaceable Dance Treasures' (www.danceheritage.org).

In many respects, though, we have only barely begun to excavate the complex history and transnational career behind the Juba legend. Some have claimed that he was 'a free-born Negro' from Providence, Rhode Island (Stearns and Stearns, 1968; Valis Hill, 1996; Knowles, 2002). But if one follows the footnote trail back to the earliest nineteenth-century sources, a far less confident conclusion emerges. All we really know is that he was sometimes billed as the Providence champion in public dance competitions during the mid-1840s. Others have asserted that he married a 'white woman in Britain' (Winter, 1947; Hanners, 1993). Yet none of the extensive press coverage in England, Ireland, or Scotland mentions such a relationship. And no marriage certificate with plausible names and ages was registered during the appropriate years. Even his full name – William Henry Lane – come to us second-hand from a New York City stage manager writing during the mid-1870s.

These lingering gaps and uncertainties in the historical record are distressing, but not entirely surprising. Like most non-elite African Americans born into the racial caste system following north-

ern emancipation, Lane left behind no personal letters, diaries, or newspaper interviews; no recorded traces in U.S. census sheets, city directories, or court records. After almost half a century of scholarly research, we do not know exactly when or where he was born, how he died, or what he may have thought about the numerous white performers with whom he shared theater stages for over a decade.

On the other hand, it would clearly be wrong to describe this as just another case of subaltern erasure in the archives. Compared with the many other African-American dancers who performed in antebellum slave quarters, jonkonnu rituals, public markets, and Pinkster celebrations (Emery, 1972; Epstein, 1981; Stuckey, 1994; Roach, 1996; White and White, 1998; Lhamon, Jr., 1998), Lane's transatlantic career appears remarkably enduring, peripatetic, and extensively documented. We can read multiple first-hand accounts of the New York City dance hall where he first attracted widespread public attention. We can analyze subtle changes in his advertisements, playbills, sheet music, and songsters on both sides of the Atlantic. We can study dozens of reviews of his performances in some of the era's most widely-circulated newspapers. And we can ponder the trajectory of his transatlantic tour schedules – a richly suggestive body of information which helps to answer the fundamental questions of where, when, and how African-American dance first began to appear on stage. One of his London playbills even provides a strikingly uncaricatured visual portrait (see Figure 1, opposite).

It was this complex mixture of subaltern invisibility and mass exposure that first attracted me to

Figure 1: Portrait of William Henry Lane, aka 'Boz's Juba,' from an 1848 playbill for Pell's Serenaders. Harvard Theatre Collection, The Houghton Library

Lane's story. I was also intrigued by the sheer improbability of his commercial success and rapidly expanding celebrity. How was it possible for a young black dancer to move through the antebellum 'show trade' in such public ways, more than a quarter century before the theater became an established nexus for African-American talent? More and more, I have become convinced that this seeming exception represents one of our most important and instructive histories. What it helps to clarify, above all, is the complex process by which something called

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'black' popular entertainment became a driving force in the new transnational culture industries of the nineteenth century.

DICKENS' REPRESENTATION

As many readers will already know, Charles Dickens played a critical role in this process. The key episode took place in February 1842, about six weeks into Dickens' first tour of the United States, when the young British author saw Lane perform at a black-owned dance cellar in New York's notorious Five Points neighborhood (Cook, 2003; Harris, 2003). Eight months later, Dickens recounted the performance in his best-selling travelogue, *American Notes for General Circulation*. The dance scene begins with an audience request:

> *What will we please to call for? A dance? It shall be done directly, sir: 'A regular break-down'.... Five or six couples come upon the floor, marshaled by a lively young negro, who is the wit of the assembly, and the greatest dancer known.... [T]he sport begins to languish, when suddenly the lively hero dashes in to the rescue. Instantly the fiddler grins, and goes at it tooth and nail; there is new energy in the tambourine; new laughter in the dancers; new smiles in the landlady; new confidence in the landlord; new brightness in the very candles. Single shuffle, double shuffle, cut and cross-cut; snapping his fingers, rolling his eyes, turning in his knees, presenting the backs of his legs in front, spinning about on his toes and heels like nothing but the man's fingers on the tambourine. Dancing with two left legs, two right legs, two wooded legs, two wire legs, two spring legs – all sorts of legs and no legs – what is this to him? And in what walk of life, or dance of life does man ever get such stimulating applause as thunders about him, when, having danced his partner off her feet, and himself too, he finishes by leaping gloriously on the bar-counter, and calling for something to drink, with the chuckle of a million of counterfeit Jim Crows, in one inimitable sound!*

Previous scholars have mined this remarkable passage for a variety of analytical purposes. Eileen Southern, Robert Farris Thompson, and Graham and Shane White have emphasized the similarities between certain bodily gestures – Lane's 'snapping fingers' or 'turned in knees,' for instance – and much older West African dance rituals that circulated, via slavery, through the Atlantic diaspora (Southern, 1971; Farris Thompson, 1996; White and White, 1998). Marshall and Jean Stearns, Jacqui Malone, and Dale Cockrell, by contrast, have read Dickens' passage as evidence of a complex cross-pollination between white and black vernacular styles, wholly typical of poor, interracial neighborhoods such as New York's Five Points (Stearns and Stearns, 1968; Malone, 1996; Cockrell, 1997).

Less well understood is how Dickens' representation may have affected the young black man at its center. And on this score, it is important to be clear that Dickens did not simply 'discover' Lane in February 1842. Rather, Lane's professional career seems to have begun at least two years earlier, when he worked at New York's Vauxhall Gardens, an outdoor venue managed by none other than P.T. Barnum. At this very early juncture, however, Lane was an almost surreptitious presence in the New York show trade. During

the summer of 1840, most of the local reporters covering Vauxhall seem not to have realized that the blackface prodigy advertised as 'Master Rattler' was actually black. In 1841, Barnum took the deceit a step further, promoting Lane as 'Master John Diamond,' the leading Irish-American dancer of the day. Barnum even staged bogus dance competitions as part of the act, with wagers on Lane-as-Diamond to win!

For anyone interested in the hopelessly mixed racial origins of American popular culture, Lane's surreptitious passage through the early black-face trade is enormously instructive. What the episode demonstrates is not simply that Irish immigrants like John Diamond imitated black dance moves performed in interracial contact zones (Cockrell, 1997; Lhamon, Jr., 1998), but that one of the first, putatively white imitators was in fact a black man who performed in black-face. The reason we know this is because some-one intimate with Barnum's affairs wrote an angry missive to the Sunday Flash, an underground 'sporting paper' catering to New York's white-collar 'swells.' Here is a portion of the letter that appeared in September 1841:

> *Gentlemen – I noticed in your paper of last week, a communication...relative to the Vauxhall dancing humbug. Now, as I happen to be fully acquainted with the particulars of the matter, I will...give you a still further insight into these dark transactions. In the first place, I will inform you, for your private enlightenment, and the enlightenment of the public if you choose, that so far from the Vauxhall bastard representation being the true Master Diamond whose name he assumes, he is no more or less than a veritable negro; and the same negro, too, who was brought out last season under the name of 'Rattler'.... The boy is fifteen or sixteen years of age; his name is 'Juba;' and to do him justice, he is a very fair dancer. He is of harmless and inoffensive disposition, and is not, I sincerely believe, aware of the meanness and audacity of the swindler to which he is at present a party. As to the wagers which the bills daily blazon forth, they are like the rest of his business – all a cheat. Not one dollar is ever bet or staked, and the pretended judges who aid in the farce, are mere blowers...*

One suspects it was this scandal in the New York sporting fraternity that drew Dickens to Lane's performance five months later. Perhaps the young British author had heard rumors of Barnum's teenage prodigy who could perfectly imitate Diamond's imitations. And perhaps it was these very transactions that Dickens had in mind when he portrayed Lane leaping 'gloriously' onto the bar counter, and laughing with the chuckle of 'a million counterfeit Jim Crows.' Given recent events at Vauxhall, it is hard to imagine that Lane did not relish the opportunity to perform as himself for one of the world's most famous authors – no burnt cork involved.

One gets the sense, too, that Dickens intended his passage as a kind of provocation. In stark contrast to most of the published U.S. writing on early blackface, Dickens presents his 'lively hero' as a figure of singular talent rather than an object of public derision. The scene's climac-tic image is a confident black dancer laughing with, or perhaps at, the racial 'counterfeits,' rather than playing the fool for white audi-ences. The fact that Dickens went on, as a

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much older man, to assemble a lengthy resume of cross-racial condemnation, only adds to the intrigue of what may have sparked his surprisingly sympathetic portrayal of Lane's performance. In 1865, for example, Dickens publicly supported the use of brutal military force to suppress the Morant Bay uprising in Jamaica (Ackroyd, 1990; Lindfors, 1999; Moore, 2004). At the very least, then, we can say that Dickens' racial attitudes changed over time, and varied according to context. Like most white Victorian gentlemen, he seems to have had a much easier time embracing black double shuffles than anti-colonial politics.

More certain are the long-term impacts of Dickens' early representational choices. *American Notes*, we now recognize, was one of the first mass-circulated literary texts of the nineteenth century (Meckier, 1990; McGill, 2003). Within forty-eight hours, Dickens' travelogue sold more than 50,000 copies in the United States alone. And within about a week, dozens of U.S. newspapers in every part of the nation were running chapters – both in serial format and as special 'extra' editions – with little regard for British copyright. By the end of 1843, literary and theatrical parodies of Dickens's travelogue were circulating widely on both sides of the Atlantic. This circulation, in turn, created dramatically new forms of public exposure for a young black artist previously visible only in poor urban neighborhoods like the Five Points, or hidden behind Barnum's bogus personas. Although Dickens never mentioned the episode again – not in his public writings and speeches, not even in his private letters and diaries – Lane would continue to cash in the cultural capital generated by *American Notes* for the rest of his career.

THE 'UNMATCHED AND MATCHLESS' JUBA

Let me pause here briefly to offer two important qualifications. Above all, I do not mean to suggest that Dickens was singularly responsible for pushing black vernacular dance across the threshold of commercial visibility. Such a claim would ignore the cumulative impact of dozens of earlier literary representations on both sides of the Atlantic, not to mention the critical role played by Lane himself, who clearly exerted a considerable degree of aesthetic agency in commanding Dickens' attention. Rather, what needs to be explained in 1842 is the unprecedented constellation of author, subject, and market forces: the fact that Dickens was the world's best-selling writer when he ventured into the Five Points; or the fact that Lane was at least a generation removed from slavery, and thus far better equipped to capitalize upon Dickens' international distribution; or the fact that this cross-racial encounter occurred just as minstrelsy was becoming one of the first transnational culture industries of the modern era. At issue here, in other words, is not so much a wholly new form of representation – or a fully autonomous act of minority resistance – but a complex chain of causality within a rapidly shifting set of historical conditions.

My second qualification involves the oft-repeated claim that Lane 'broke the colour line' in antebellum minstrelsy. This claim, it seems to me, is largely correct, but needs to be unpacked very carefully. In actual practice, the colour line that Lane encountered during the early 1840s was a highly volatile, shifting thing, and was always bound up with powerful market forces. As we have seen already, the racial rules in a Five Points dance cellar were very different from

those twelve blocks away at Vauxhall Gardens. In one context, Lane encountered an African-American club owner and an interracial audience eager to witness 'genuine breakdowns' performed by local black talent. In the other, he played to much larger crowds, but in the twice-mediated persona of a white rival performing in blackface. Such variations from venue to venue are best understood not as definitive crossings of fixed or finished thresholds – black vs. white, margin vs. mainstream, vernacular vs. commercial – but as part of Lane's ongoing efforts to negotiate viable positions within a racial caste system whose more localized strictures and cultural proclivities were in almost continual flux.

The first evidence of Lane's efforts to capitalize on Dickens's exposure can be found in January 1843, when the *New York Sporting Whip* announced a so-called 'challenge dance' between the 'negro dancer, Juba' and the real John Diamond. The specific context of this announcement (in another New York sporting paper) suggests that Lane was still playing to the east-side underground. Yet this was a far cry from Barnum's Vauxhall ruse, not least because the notice explicitly identified Lane as an African-American performer. It also redefined his position vis-á-vis commercial blackface: the very same man who had impersonated Diamond in 1841 now took the stage as Diamond's leading artistic rival.

In 1844, Lane was part of at least three more 'challenge dances' with Diamond in New York and Boston. Surviving evidence suggests that these competitions were highly ritualized cultural phenomena, with multiple judges, elaborate scoring systems (for speed and accuracy), and surprisingly lucrative pay-offs. The winners often received a silver cup, or a cash prize of a few hundred dollars. In the days leading up to the first Juba/Diamond contest on July 8th, supporters on both sides issued public challenges on behalf of their favorites, one of which actually appeared as a paid advertisement in the *New York Herald*. This advertisement provides our clearest glimpse into this antebellum world of competitive dance, so it is worth quoting at some length:

> *GREAT PUBLIC CONTEST Between the two most renowned Dancers in the world, the Original JOHN DIAMOND, and the Colored Boy JUBA, for a Wager of $300... at the BOWERY AMPHITHEATER, which building has been expressly hired from the Proprietor, Mr. Smith, for this night only, as its accommodations will afford all a fair view of each step of these wonderful Dancers. The fame of these Two Celebrated Breakdown Dancers has already spread over the Union, and the numerous friends of each claim the Championship for their favorite, and have anxiously wished for a Public Trial between them... [to] thus know which is to bear the Title of the Champion Dancer of the World. The time to decide that has come, and the friends of Juba have challenged the world to produce his superior in this Art for $100. That challenge has been accepted by the friends of Diamond, and on Monday Evening they meet, and Dance Three Jigs, Two Reels, and the Camptown Hornpipe. Five Judges have been selected for their ability and knowledge of the Art, so that a fair decision will be made.*

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There seems to be no surviving record of how this particular contest played out. But the evidence we do have suggests that Lane garnered significant white support. One good indicator is the surprising lack of commentary in the *New York Herald* the following week. While James Gordon Bennett, the paper's notoriously anti-black editor, had been quite happy to promote the contest, he was entirely silent about the results. Also noteworthy are the entirely unapologetic references here to the 'friends of Juba,' and the use of the term 'art' to describe Lane's dancing. Modern skeptics might argue that such friendship was a far cry from genuine respect; or that the white convention of locating black artistry in vernacular dance forms (as opposed to more elite cultural pursuits) was itself a form of racialized condescension. The particular context of these claims, however, points to a rather different conclusion. Publicly arguing for the superiority of black talent – especially against an Irish-American champion, especially in a New York neighborhood known for its Democratic politics, Irish gangs, and segregated workshops – was no small gesture in 1844. And within less than a year, Lane was out on the road, using the recent victories over Diamond as advertising fodder for his own interracial minstrel troupes.

During the fall of 1844 and most of 1845, Lane was the advertised headliner for at least three different companies, including the Georgia Champions, the African Troubadours, and the American Chimers. The tour dates from this period carve out a circulatory pattern almost entirely unique within the broader history of antebellum minstrelsy. During the mid-1840s, most young stars in the New York blackface trade (John Diamond, for example) headed south or west, to places like Philadelphia, Baltimore, Cincinnati, Richmond, Natchez, and New Orleans. Lane, by contrast, moved north along the Atlantic coastline, hitting a wide range of cities and small towns from Providence, Rhode Island to Portland, Maine. In one sense, of course, this highly circumscribed tour schedule was itself a product of segregation – a circuit somewhat peripheral to the antebellum show trade's most prominent and profitable venues. Surviving playbills, moreover, list the relatively low ticket price of 12 and 1/2 cents (about half that garnered by the leading white minstrel companies during the same period), which may suggest that sailors, dock workers, and other poor laborers constituted Lane's core audience early on.

Yet these very same facts point to a second conclusion: namely, that Lane used his early tours of coastal New England to build a kind of 'counter-public' within the antebellum minstrel trade. Listen, for example, to what the papers were saying in Gardiner, Maine:

> *Juba – the great, the renowned – the unmatched and matchless Juba – the most wonderful breakdown dancer in America, if not in the whole world – Juba, who danced against John Diamond at the Chatham Theatre in New York for $500, and pocketed the 'rocks' [...] Juba himself has been here! During the last week, he 'shaved it down' at the Town Hall, for four nights, before crowded and fashionable houses, and by the astonishing skill and ease with which he executed some of the most difficult performances, drew down torrents of applause.*

This surprisingly unqualified praise operated within strict geographic boundaries. What could be said in the papers in Maine or Massachusetts was very different from what could be said in New York City or Philadelphia. But that is precisely why these early tours were so important. As Michael Warner has recently argued, part of what defines a modern counterpublic is the creation of alternative 'horizons' of 'opinion and exchange,' different 'assumptions about what can be said or goes without saying' (Warner, 2002). In all of these different respects, Lane's decision to perform in places such as Gardiner, Maine constituted both an act of professional survival and a clever circumvention of the existing market strictures. While the leading New York papers may have been unwilling to acknowledge his triumphs over Diamond, editors across New England were quite happy to proclaim him 'the most wonderful breakdown dancer in America.'

Lane's efforts at strategic positioning are also evident in some of his early aesthetic choices. Consider, for example, his 'Imitation Dance,' a kind of one-man cutting contest that served as the finale for most of his recorded performances in 1844-1845. A playbill from Portland, Maine provides a typical description:

> *The entertainment to conclude with the Imitation Dance, by Mast. Juba,*
> *In which he will give correct Imitation Dances of all the principal Ethiopian Dancers in the United States. After which he will give an imitation of himself – and then you will see the vast difference between those that have heretofore attempted dancing and this WONDERFUL YOUNG MAN.*
>
> *Names of the Persons Imitated:*
> *1. Mr. Richard Pelham, New York*
> *2. Mr. Francis Brower, New York,*
> *3. Mr. John Daniels, Buffalo,*
> *4. Mr. John Smith, Albany,*
> *5. Mr. James Sanford, Philadelphia,*
> *6. Mr. Frank Diamond, Troy,*
> *7. Mast. John Diamond, New York.*

Recent scholarship has rightly pointed to the perverse logic of an antebellum marketplace that encouraged Lane to 'give an imitation of himself' (Lott, 1993). But what are we to make of the lines that follow? Needless to say, very few playbills from the mid-1840s used phrases like 'wonderful young man' to describe African-American performers. It also seems important to acknowledge the considerable market savvy expressed through these promotional gestures. By presenting himself in this way, Lane did not simply claim superiority to all of the leading white dancers. More ambitiously, he made the racial appropriations of blackface his aesthetic subject, the very focus of his signature performance. And in this sense, his 'Imitation Dance' served as a powerful act of defiance from someone who, more typically, would have lacked any means of representational control. Each night, Lane cleared the stage and named all of his principal competitors. He then closed the show by demonstrating – move for move, and gesture for gesture – the 'vast difference' between his own artistry and 'those that have heretofore attempted dancing.'

Over the next few years, Lane continued to build upon these early successes. In 1846 and 1847, he worked as a founding member of Charley White's Serenaders, a minstrel company based in New York's Bowery. Noteworthy here was not

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ɾ few years, Lane continued to build arly successes. In 1846 and 1847, he ounding member of Charley ıaders, a minstrel company based in ɔwery. Noteworthy here was not simply the return to lower Manhattan, but the specific combination of personnel. Over the previous two years, Lane had collaborated with talented but lesser-known performers such as Tom Briggs, an early master of the banjo. Charley White, by contrast, was one of the leading impresarios of antebellum minstrelsy, which meant that Lane now came into contact with many of the industry's biggest stars. In 1847, for example, he co-starred with Dan Emmett in 'Going For the Cup,' a comic skit based on a challenge dance, at White's newly-opened Melodeon theater. Around this time, too, we begin to see the first acknowledgements of Lane's expanding national celebrity in more mainstream New York newspapers. By January 1848, even the *New York Herald* offered short notices extolling the 'unrivalled' feats of 'Juba, the king of negro dancing.'

'BOZ'S JUBA'

The most critical breakthrough, however, came in the spring of 1848, when Lane sailed for England with 'Pell's Serenaders,' a newly-formed touring company which also included Gilbert Pelham (or 'Pell') and Tom Briggs. Significantly, the manager of the new company was none other than Richard Pelham, Gilbert's older brother and one of the most important figures in antebellum minstrelsy. Only five years earlier, Pelham had been a founding member (along with Billy Whitlock, Dan Emmett, and Frank Brower) of New York City's very first minstrel troupe – the Virginia Minstrels. Somewhat ironically, then, it was probably cash generated by the explosion of white minstrelsy in lower Manhattan that helped finance Lane's debut in London. Ironic, too, was the fact that Pell's Serenaders made their debut at London's Vauxhall Gardens, the much older and better-known Southwark venue after which New York Vauxhall had been named. London Vauxhall, however, was a more respectable institution that catered to white-collar workers, urban merchants, and even aristocrats. Later that summer, Lane and company performed for the Duchess of Kent's birthday party.

The reception for Lane in the British press suggests a number of new wrinkles, as well. The most basic change involves the sheer volume of coverage. Hunting for Lane in U.S. newspapers during the mid-1840s is arduous, needle-in-a-haystack research. In well over a hundred different periodicals across the northeastern U.S., I have discovered a grand total of thirty-one notices. In London, by contrast, roughly the same number of periodicals weighed in on Lane's performances during the summer of 1848 alone – from opinion-makers such as the *Times* and *London Illustrated News* to more specialized sheets such as *The Ladies' Newspaper* and *The United Service Gazette* (a military newsletter). Over the next three years, one can follow Lane's career almost week-by-week, with lengthy advertisements, playbills, and reviews from most of the leading theaters and music halls across England, Ireland, and Scotland. Significantly, we find him billed in these materials as 'Boz's Juba,' a more explicit attempt to connect Lane's live performances to Dickens' literary representation (Boz was Dickens' well-known pen name). Many of the playbills from the late 1840s, in fact, quoted the key passage from *American Notes* in full, thereby framing public expectations about what kind of performance Lane would deliver.

Equally striking are the new patterns of discourse and criticism running through the British press

coverage. A lengthy 1848 review from the *London Mirror* is a good case in point:

> *There never was such a laugh as the laugh of Juba – there is in it the concentrated laugh of fifty comic pantomimes; it has no relation to the chuckle, and least of all to the horse laugh; not a bit of it – it is a laugh distinct, a laugh apart, a laugh by itself... it enters into your heart and you laugh sympathetically – it creeps into your ear and clings to it, and all the subsequent sounds seem to be imbued with a cachinnatory quality. Well, though the laugh of Juba be wondrous, what may be said of Juba's dancing? We fancied we had witnessed every kind of dance, from the wilds of Caffria to the stage of the Academie at Paris... but all these choreographic manifestations were but poor shufflings compared to the pedal inspirations of Juba. Such mobility of muscles, such flexibility of joints, such boundings, such slidings, such gyrations, such toes and such heelings, such backwardings and forwardings, such posturings, such firmness of foot, such elasticity of tendon, such mutation of movement, such vigor, such variety, such natural grace, such powers of endurance, such potency of pastern, were never combined in one nigger. Juba is to Vauxhall what Lind is to the Opera House.*

On one level, of course, this passage articulates some of the deep racialized ambivalence that scholars of U.S. minstrelsy have long described as its essential feature (Lott, 1993; Cockrell, 1997; Lhamon, Jr. 1998). For most of the review, the English writer extols Lane's performance with layer upon layer of glowing adjectives, only to undercut the praise with one nasty racial epithet towards the end. Still, it seems important not to lose sight of the considerable social and ideological distance that Lane was traversing. In the United States, Lane had struggled for eight long years to receive a single sentence of praise from the leading New York papers. In London, by contrast, the *Mirror* reviewer went to great lengths to set Lane's laughter apart from the conventional 'horse laugh' of minstrelsy. More surprising still, this reviewer compared Lane's 'pedal inspirations' to the operatic singing of Jenny Lind, perhaps the most revered stage performer on either side of the Atlantic during the mid-nineteenth century.

In at least two crucial ways, then, Lane's international circulation complicates our conventional portrait of antebellum minstrelsy: first, by demonstrating that the early blackface trade extended well beyond a few working-class theaters in Lower Manhattan; and second, by illustrating why these transnational markets mattered for a young black artist forced to operate within enormously difficult conditions of possibility. A useful point of comparison here is George Lipsitz's recent work on hip hop, which has emphasized the dialectical potential of mass-distributed cultural commodities to serve as transnational conduits of oppositional ideas. For Lipsitz, one of the most intriguing features of contemporary globalization is the inability of the nation state to 'trap' cultural capital within a fixed set of boundaries, a development which he sees as potentially generative for new, twenty-first century forms of subaltern visibility, communication, and resistance (Lipsitz, 1994). Yet I wonder if this particular facet of globaliza-

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tion was, in fact, a lesson absorbed and acted upon by some of the very first African-American artists and intellectuals to achieve international celebrity. Certainly, the broader trajectory of Lane's career suggests an ongoing resistance to containment by any particular market, region, or nation. And Lane was hardly alone. Indeed, it was at this very moment, during the late 1840s, that black abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, and William and Ellen Craft self-consciously used Britain's literary and lecture markets as oppositional networks to raise capital and exert transatlantic political leverage (Blackett, 1983; Rice and Crawford, 1999). In this sense, at least, the long-running scholarly tendency to treat black popular culture and black political activism as unrelated nineteenth-century projects needs to be reconsidered.

As one sorts through the contemporary trajectories of other leading African-American performers such as Francis Johnson, Elizabeth Greenfield, James and George Bohee, Sam Lucas, James Bland, Irving Sayles, Hosea Easton, and the Fisk Jubilee Singers, a much larger historical pattern begins to emerge. Circulation across regional and national markets was not simply incidental to these pathbreaking careers – it was the very means by which African-American performance became visible and ultimately sustained itself across the nineteenth century. From Ira Aldridge's pathbreaking theatrical tours of the British provinces during the late 1820s, to the all-black minstrel companies of Charles Hicks, who criss-crossed the South Pacific during the 1880s and 90s, African-American cultural success – indeed, survival – regularly required some form of strategic transnational circulation.
It is important, however, not to lose sight of the very real dangers built into these market maneuvers – especially at a moment when minority-owned venues were almost non-existent. Two late episodes from Lane's career help to clarify both the possibilities and the perils. The first comes in the spring of 1850, when newspaper notices suddenly announced Lane as a solo act. Especially interesting at this juncture is an angry complaint from Richard Pelham (the manager of Pell's Serenaders), who had clearly expected Lane to continue as his star attraction. Here, as always, we are constrained by the sources. Because Lane left behind no written records of his own, we cannot know precisely what triggered his decision. Still, the act itself is instructive. At the height of his British celebrity, Lane made the bold decision to dump his white handlers and go it alone: one of the very first declarations of black independence in the history of modern show business.

Initially, the decision seems to have worked quite successfully. Four weeks later, in a review for one of Lane's solo performances, the *Sheffield Times* declared: 'to speak in praise of Juba is perhaps a... needless iteration: his reputation is now European, and his skill has been the theme of admiration in all quarters of our island... we are fearless to declare that Juba has no equal... no words can possibly convey an idea of his peculiar skill in a province so entirely his own.' By August, 1850, however, Lane found himself the target of racialized resentment in Manchester. The details are sketchy, but this is what I know. In the weeks leading up to Lane's arrival, Manchester newspapers reported that the city's stage workers were growing increasingly angry about low salaries, poor job security, and a growing influx of 'foreign celebrities.' This, in turn, seems to have

provoked Britain's leading show business periodical, *The Era*, to draw a kind of line in the sand.

For over two years, this London-based trade paper had offered nothing but praise for Lane's performances with Pell's Serenaders. But now the editors declared that Juba is 'jumping very fast at the Colosseum,' and warned him to 'be wise in time,' noting that it is 'easier to jump down than to jump up.' The fact that *The Era* was also the official publication of the Licensed Victuallers Association, England's national trade organization for food and drink purveyors, no doubt increased the threat's efficacy (especially among managers who might have otherwise considered booking Lane as a solo act). A week later, the *Era* editors declared the Manchester issue largely resolved: 'Juba has jumped away – by the way of an earnest yet friendly caution, let us hope that he will not throw himself away. Be wise in time is a wholesome motto.'

At this point, Lane begins to disappear from public view. The voluminous British press coverage slows to a trickle. And the geography of his performance sites shifts once again: this time, from leading patent theatres and urban assembly rooms back to non-elite singing saloons and working-class music halls. Significantly, one of the very last reviews I have found comes from a short-lived British 'sporting paper,' and puts him in a Glasgow music hall strikingly similar to the Five Points dance cellar chronicled by Dickens.

Whether or not Lane ultimately died in Britain remains an unresolved (and perhaps irresolvable) mystery. Quite fortuitously for our purposes, an English census taker discovered Lane momentarily stationed in the small Worcestershire town of Dudley, six months after the Manchester episode. The resulting entry from March 1851 gives his name as 'Henry Juba' and describes him in a number of different ways, including lodger, 'professor of dancing,' twenty-six years of age, and born in Barbados (a self-description which may have been designed by Lane to circumvent contemporary immigration laws). Over the next half century, multiple published accounts from veteran U.S. minstrel performers claimed that Lane died in England the following year, a scenario which would help to explain why no modern researcher has found any traces of public performances beyond 1852.

Yet there is at least a small, lingering possibility that such theories about Lane's demise were nothing more than transatlantic rumor. Indeed, just when one begins to imagine a sense of closure to this remarkable story, along comes another fugitive source which points in very different directions. To illustrate, let me conclude with two final pieces of evidence. The first is a passenger list for an August 1851 packet ship from Liverpool to New York City. There, about two thirds of the way down the handwritten log, among dozens of English and Irish immigrants, is the name Henry Juba. The age given on the list – twenty years old – is a little young, and there is no indication of race, birthplace, or purpose of travel. Still, the geographic and chronological proximity of this Henry Juba and the Henry Juba on the 1851 census sheet is striking. Perhaps Lane had grown tired of touring, or the sheer physical toll of performing on stage for over a decade. Perhaps he took his British earnings and decided to change course, living out the rest of his years beyond the glare of the public spotlight.
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new and friendlier markets. My speculation in this instance comes from an 1860 article on the Five Points dance trade, published in the short-lived *New York Illustrated News*. As part of the story, the author returned to the actual dance cellar visited by Dickens in 1842, and ventured a very different account of Lane's final years. 'One could hardly imagine,' he concludes, 'that from this low establishment emanated a performer who had, subsequently, the honor of astonishing the autocrat of Russia with his jig-dancing. But such is the case. From this very room, little Juba was rescued to become the greatest jig-dancer that the exhibition boards have ever known. He died, if we remember aright, in St. Petersburg.'

That Lane's personal and professional outcomes remain a matter of such wide conjecture – even today – is of course instructive. One might argue, in fact, that this lingering uncertainty is (at least in part) an historical aftershock of the cultural policy-making initiated by the *Era* editors in 1850. By issuing an ultimatum on Lane's solo career, these editors did more than demonstrate their power to shape the terms of public visibility within the nineteenth-century culture industry. They also made it harder for us to be certain about how Lane chose to respond.

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