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Dawn Sardella-Ayres
University of Cambridge

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Dawn Sardella-Ayres
University of Cambridge

The *Little Colonel* books, Annie Fellows Johnston's best-selling series for children, were published in America between 1895-1912, issued in multiple languages, and read worldwide. The books' protagonist, Lloyd Sherman, is a tomboyish heroine nicknamed the "Little Colonel" for her imperious ways and hot temper, like her Confederate Colonel grandfather. While today, *Little Colonel* books are not readily available in print, not commonly found in libraries or schools, not generally included in children's literature curriculum, and rarely researched academically, what has replaced the books in terms of pop culture awareness is the 1935 film. A successful box office hit, starring Shirley Temple and Lionel Barrymore, the adaptation is especially memorable for its "staircase dance" featuring Temple and Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, film's first interracial dance scene, and their first of several cinematic pairings.

I have closely examined Johnston's *Little Colonel* series, particularly how Johnston constructs a specific kind of white, angelic girlhood not only as model, but essential, especially for American girls. Johnston was invested in a uniquely American project: presenting an image of the American South as something noble, aristocratic, and steeped in national tradition, writing an American fairy tale of the Old South, laden with Lost Cause ideology. This means Black characters in the books are always described in minstrel contexts: hair is "tight little braids of wool" (Johnston, 1901, 23), skin is not just black but "blackest" (Johnston, 1895, 31; 1901, 23), smiling involves a "flash of white teeth and eye-balls" (Johnston, 1901, 23). Black children are always depicted as animals, tumbling about like puppies or kittens. The briefest scenes with Black characters are rife with malapropisms and racial dialect familiar to any minstrel audience at the time, and humor is at the expense of Black characters for the entertainment of white ones. In the *Little Colonel* books, Blackness exists to emphasize the professed subordinate intellectual, social, and physical positions of Black characters compared to white ones. Not only do Black characters function as

accessories to white characters, but it is assumed that this Blackness is performed for the reader, who is certainly raced white, too.

By the time *The Little Colonel* was optioned by Hollywood, Johnston's books were already diminishing in popularity. Comparing *The Little Colonel* movie to the book series, or even just the first book, on which it was based, reveals shifts and different tensions over the forty years separating them. Both the original source material and the cinematic adaptation include minstrel tropes, stock characters, and plots. However, a close, intertextual reading of Temple's and Robinson's dancing in *The Little Colonel*, specifically the iconic staircase dance (immediately recognizable and frequently mentioned in lists ranking top moments in both dance and film history), demonstrates minstrelsy's complicated dynamic interchange with race, gender, power, and American identity and history. By looking at the film, and this historical scene in particular in the context of minstrelsy, it is possible to simultaneously read multiple things in the activity of the dance, as well as in the passivity of being under the camera's gaze. The staircase dance as an epochal American film image does not just "grin and lie," although it can do that too. It also confronts, questions, subverts, repositions, and re-presents, all with a sense of agency. Despite relying on minstrel codes, dances between Robinson and Temple in *The Little Colonel*, especially the staircase dance, also reveal a conspicuously different dynamic between the entertaining Black servant and the angelic white child through their minstrelsy, especially compared to the books. I would argue this alters the original ideology of the *Little Colonel* series, and not only creates new meanings, but has ultimately replaced the books in multiracial public consciousness.

Minstrelsy and Hybridity

At first, the prominent supporting roles played by Black actors in *The Little Colonel* appear as stock minstrel characters, little more than the same racist stereotypes as the books.

Walker, played by Robinson, is the grinning Uncle Tom figure: "*Now, honey, all you gotta do is listen with your feet,* he seemed to be telling Shirley Temple… and, as he tapped up the stairs with her, a star tom was born" (Bogle 48). The children May Lilly and Henry Clay operate as standard "pickaninny" foils for Lloyd, although they are significantly more active and vocal characters in the movie. The role of Mom Beck, Lloyd's mammy, is played by Hattie McDaniel, who often famously countered protests about her perpetuating stereotypes with variations of, "Why should I complain about making $700 a week playing a maid? If I didn't, I'd be making $7 a week being one"; a 1989 article on McDaniel in *The New York Times* used her quote "Hell, I'd rather play a maid than be one" as its title (Young 13). But it is oversimplification to reduce *The Little Colonel* movie to binaries of black and white. Indeed, minstrelsy is not a simple binary of black and white. A complicated, essentially American vernacular art form still central to pop culture today, minstrelsy itself is a hybrid performance of not just black-and-whiteness, but black-and-nonblackness that also crosses gender and class boundaries. Minstrelsy and blackface reveal the constructions and conceits of race in America and reflect tensions of white people and nonblack people of color accessing blackness.

Just the presence of minstrelsy/blackface deters many twenty-first century audiences from engaging with older pop culture. Acknowledging the pain of such racist representation without erasing the history of it has been difficult work since the beginnings of Black presence in American entertainment. Minstrelsy's painful embodiment of spectacle, agency, power, ownership, and identity literally masks convoluted elements, including its own diversities; minstrelsy, with its hybrid roots and whitened manifestations, does assorted, overlapping, intersectional, and even contradictory things simultaneously, things that cannot be simply parsed in a neat dichotomy. Michelle H. Martin has explored intricacies and paradoxes of Blackness and racism in children's literature, and how this literature "reflected

the dominant ideology of racism toward African Americans" (256), but Martin also leaves room to question if contemporary critics "impose late-twentieth-century expectations of race" on earlier works, and "perhaps authors who wrote on antiracist themes in the best way that they knew how for their time and place ought not to be faulted for their historically situated brand of prejudice" (258). Minstrelsy reinforces racial prejudices in myriad harmful ways and, concurrently, reveals that all of America's popular culture has been shaped by and filtered through experiences and talents of Black people and the conditions of chattel slavery. Looking back on racist minstrel portrayals in earlier works may "grin and lie," but it also mirrors our own ideologies and history, and, in haunting ways, values Black artistry.

Every key Black figure in American pop culture, including Bill Robinson, has been subject to accusations of tomming, misrepresenting their own race and cultural heritage, selling out. Margaret Morrison, a dance scholar, playwright, and tap dancer/choreographer, observes these protests "date at least to Frederick Douglass's scathing condemnation of minstrelsy in the 1840s" and "even before Robinson appeared in his first two feature films with Temple, *The Crisis* (the magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) published a critique of the relegation of Black actors to 'either buffoons or ubiquitous Uncle Toms' in Loren Miller's 1934 essay, 'Uncle Tom in Hollywood'" (27). Film historian Donald Bogle, who came of age during the 1960s Civil Rights era, has also confronted questions of representation and stereotyping in American movies, and in the fourth edition introduction of his 1973 book, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in Films*, Bogle reflects on his earlier research. Then, speaking to Black teen moviegoers, Bogle writes that they

> dismissed the old-time actors as toms and mammies and spoke of them with boredom, disgust, contempt, and even condescension—as if our bright new movies with their bright new black actors had arrived at

> something called cinematic integrity! … But I wanted comments and analysis on what certain black actors accomplished even with demeaning stereotyped roles. (xxi)

Bogle recognizes the ways in which popular culture is always a product of its time that will inevitably show its age to subsequent generations and insists that "the essence of black film history is not found in the stereotyped role but in what certain talented actors" including Robinson and McDaniel "have done with the stereotype" (xxii). Bogle's critical endeavor is to explore in "their proper historical perspective" (xxiii) the ways in which contemporary cinematic roles for Black actors have been built from this contentious, even painful history and misrepresentation by cultural ancestors. And this means confronting and analyzing, not erasing or cancelling, minstrelsy.

Despite its signifiers, minstrelsy is not a straightforward black-and-white binary, nor even a black-and-nonblack binary. Eric Lott's nuanced exploration of the complications of minstrelsy in American pop culture uncovers the intertwined class, race, and gender issues signified by blackface. In *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (1995), Lott writes that "evidence from the performers themselves points to a more complex dynamic in which such dominative tendencies coexisted with or indeed depended on a self-conscious attraction to the black men" whom the performers were imitating and even embodying (50). Moreover, the minstrel show's "racial meanings" were "inextricable from its class argument" (63); to engage in minstrel performance was to engage in black-coded behavior that existed in intricate relationships with the white working-class performers (usually Irish or Jewish) who "blacked up" to entertain white middle-class audiences. As soon as one was "initiated into the mysteries of the [burnt] cork" (50), the usual boundaries of race, class, and gender all collapse. In *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum American Popular Culture*, William J. Mahar interrogates the

earliest roots of minstrel blackface in America and its complex multicultural and multiethnic heritage. Mahar explores how borrowed material and traditions from Italian and English operas and African and Caribbean cultures came together in a uniquely American hybrid cultural performance, a unification. He posits that minstrel performers "assumed, if only for an evening, that all races, classes, professions, and genders were fit subjects for comedy" (6). Crossover interaction occurs between races in minstrel space onstage, and the performances often provided critique of American social, racial, gender, and economic statuses. But this seeming unification within blackface entertainment is undercut by the physicality of the face covered with burnt cork. Blackface, Mahar argues, "served as a racial marker" to audiences that "reinforced distinctions between black and white Americans" (1). In *Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class,* David R. Roediger also emphasizes class differences defined by theatrical blackface, noting that minstrel shows and blackface created "a new sense of whiteness by creating a new sense of blackness," and thus the white working class performers could be defined, via the temporary condition of blackface, as "not slaves," emphasizing that whiteness is what really matters (115-16). Blackface is no simple either/or condition or performance. Blackface entertainment simultaneously equalizes races and demonstrates cultural hybridity, and yet establishes and reinforces white supremacy.

Tap dance reflects its own knotty complexity inseparable from minstrel and vaudeville tropes, with a variety of styles demonstrating it can be refined, athletic, muscular, comic, loose, controlled, sexual, urbane, dainty… diverse things at once. The history of tap, another uniquely American art form, is also impossible to separate from race/class/gender matters. Constance Valis Hill explores tap's tangled, intercultural hybridity, from its roots in Black and Irish communities in the rural south, to its intertwining performance history, "one

based in black vernacular dance and black rhythmic sensibilities, the other in the jig and clog tradition of white Broadway" (4).[1]

Toni Morrison writes that, in America, Blackness is a national metaphor to be explored, often existing as subtext (9), and Margaret Morrison emphasizes how the "dominant representations of African Americans in popular culture from the 1840s until past the mid-twentieth century were drawn from minstrelsy" (25). Comparing the original *Little Colonel* book and series with its cinematic adaptation, and exploring the language and subtexts of Blackness in both versions, demonstrate different ways in which Blackness is used to reinforce whiteness/nonblackness, much like the diverse ways minstrel shows and vaudeville blackface reinforced whiteness/nonblackness.

"Just Like a Little N*ggah"

Blackness in the *Little Colonel* books is as much about performance as it is race and skin color. In 2019's "Rewriting and Re-Whiting *The Little Colonel*: Racial Anxieties, Tomboyism, and Lloyd Sherman," I examined Lloyd's unsettling transgressions between boundaries of race, class, and gender using minstrelsy. Despite her angelic, golden appearance, five-year-old tomboy Lloyd disrupts her grandfather's aristocratic, Southern social order with her comfort in being ragged and dirty, her comic violence, a seeming Eva-and-Topsy-at-once topsy-turvy performance per Robin Bernstein's *Racial Innocence* (2011). The pivotal book scene where a filthy, bedraggled Lloyd furiously throws mud at her grandfather's white suit is laden with racial, gender, and minstrel meanings. Exploring Lloyd as a tomboy, and looking at the mud scene in particular, within a framework of minstrelsy and blackface, all serves to emphasize Lloyd's questionable statuses in the first *Little Colonel*

[1] Irish immigrants' influence on tap and its fusion with American blackness is suggested by Ray Bolger's 1939 performance as the "raggedy" Scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz*, demonstrating another example of complicated race-class-gender hybridity in American identity and pop culture.

book. She is simultaneously poor and aristocratic, Northern and Southern, beloved and neglected, angelic and wicked, feminine and unfeminine, as well as white and nonwhite. When she arrives in Lloydsboro, Lloyd is an aristocratic white girl acting like a comic, ragged minstrel "pickaninny" figure (Sardella-Ayres, 2019), the inverted fear Lott discusses of a Black body "acting white" as incarnated by the "black dandy" minstrel figure. Lloyd's greatest power and agency in the book is also the greatest threat to her family and community: disrupting, even dismantling, the social, gender, and racial order.

Lloyd's actions prior to the mud-pie scene have all blurred rather than reinforced the differences between blackness and whiteness; there has been no mask of cork or greasepaint to remove to define her nonblackness. Rather, Lloyd has been effortlessly shifting in and out of minstrel performances and slipping between social, racial, and gender statuses. Without the physical blackface to remove, Lloyd's white superiority is less apparent to others, especially her grandfather, with the real threat that she is unclassing and un-racing herself by acting like and mingling with Black children. Mud, like greasepaint, can be washed away and thus affirm Lloyd's whiteness, upon which the Colonel then is able to proudly recognize her as "a Lloyd through and through" (Johnston 34; see figure 1). Until then, Lloyd's nebulous conditions reflect American racial anxieties about misidentification, passing, and racial mixture.

Figure 1. Annie Fellows Johnston. *The Little Colonel*. Illustrated by Etheldred B. Barry. Boston: Joseph Knight Company, 1896. Library of Congress, Rare Book and Special Collections Division. https://www.loc.gov/item/07010535/

Shirley Temple Black and Bill Robinson White

When played by Shirley Temple, with a cast including Robinson, McDaniel, and Lionel Barrymore, the amalgamated, transgressive Little Colonel reads differently on screen than on the page, with different dynamics.[2] Like the fictional Lloyd, Temple, too, is a complicated hybrid, often reduced to a static symbol of ideal, innocent American girlhood. She, like Lloyd (and numerous other girls' literature protagonists she portrayed, including Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm, Heidi, and Sara from *A Little Princess*), embodies sturdy tomboyism and agency combined with traditional, even archaic, hyper-femininity, in a state of perpetual girlhood. Even more tomboyish than her book counterpart, Temple's Lloyd is active and resilient, an actual (if honorary) military colonel who performs several feats of heroism. Kimberly G. Hébert reads Temple, often marketed as America's "littlest minstrel,"

[2] A longer critical work would also examine film differences, including the movie's shift to an earlier, 1870s setting and Barrymore's physically aggressive portrayal of the Old Colonel.

as part of "a new form of minstrelsy" in Hollywood, which "continued the minstrel tradition with one significant alteration—erasure" (189). According to Robert Toll (quoted in Hébert), at this time, Black people "became just the unpaid sources of the material—music, dance, humor—that periodically revitalized American popular culture and made white entertainers famous and rich" (189). However, I would argue that *The Little Colonel*'s staircase dance pointedly forces viewers to look and recognize, to see not only blackness and whiteness, but talent and original sources. By closely examining textual and visual space, and Robinson and Temple's negotiation of environment both onstage and behind the scenes, it is possible to see a distinct shift in power from what the book series presented. Issues of physicality and embodiment in the books are quite different from the movie. The staircase dance, when situated historically, reformulated dynamics of gender, race, and class, breaking down boundaries and placing the two performers on somewhat-equal/equivalent, literal footing. Instead of demonstrating the passive "loving embrace" of an enslaved person as examined in *Racial Innocence,* in *The Little Colonel* film the characters Lloyd and Walker become an interdependent, active partnership. Rather than the white child possessing power and knowledge and teaching the child-like Black adult, like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, here the Black adult teaches the white girl-child and, briefly, they both subvert white patriarchy together.

To be sure, initially the inaugural film pairing of Temple and Robinson looks like another version of Uncle Tom and Little Eva, the loyal, childlike, Black adult man being educated and saved by the angelic golden child. Toni Morrison makes clear the uneasy spaces of childhood, commodity, blackness, whiteness, and social roles when she uses Temple to symbolize innocent white American girlhood in her 1970 novel *The Bluest Eye*. Much like Lloyd in the *Little Colonel* books, Temple in *The Bluest Eye* also reinforces whiteness and white girlhood by contrasting specifically with Blackness and Black girlhood. Also similarly, Temple, like the book version of Lloyd Sherman, becomes a static symbol of idealized

American girlhood in Morrison's novel, dehumanized and lacking agency, representing only an archaic code of values at odds with reality. As with the Topsy-and-Eva topsy-turvy doll Bernstein discusses in *Racial Innocence*, Shirley Temple's golden, dimpled, white girlishness marks Black girlhood as everything opposite; if Temple is innocent, Black girls are wicked. If Temple is beautiful and appealing, Black girls are ugly and unlovable. If Temple can access Blackness, Black girls are destroyed if they try to access whiteness. While the novel, and the feelings about Temple demonstrated by Pecola and Claudia, the two Black girls who function as protagonist and narrator respectively, does not (and, arguably, cannot) take into consideration Temple's own real life circumstances, the two girls' relationship to Temple demonstrates ideologies Temple represented to generations of girls.[3]

However, because of her physical appeal and celebrity, Temple's own powerlessness and oppressions are often overlooked. As a child star, and the biggest Hollywood box-office draw during the Great Depression, with dolls, dresses, toys, and books in her image sold globally, Temple gives the impression of possessing agency and power. Yet understanding her as an often-sexualized child-product of the film industry, or exploring the ways in which her eroticized girl-child's body is physically overwhelmed and exploited by men in her films, exposes problematic gender, class, and/or sexual systemic oppressions. Temple's earliest roles involved burlesque or exotic dancing, and Temple described them as "a cynical exploitation of our childish innocence that occasionally were racist or sexist" (Black 14). She was lied to about her own age and kept up a hectic film and travel schedule for years in the relentless public eye; she underwent tediously painful nightly methods for setting her fifty-six ringlets, which fans and critics alike would publicly pull and tug to see if they were real.

[3] More critical work is needed on *The Bluest Eye* alongside Temple's and Robinson's interracial pairings, as well as Temple's cinematic portrayals of several of the key protagonists of girls' literature at the time. In what ways does Temple's embodiment of Little Eva, Rebecca, Lloyd, Heidi, and Sara reinforce ideology about girls and girlhood, and about who and what is left out of "girlhood" as a result?

Shirley Temple is often turned into a passive symbol, disregarding the real child she was, and her lived experiences.

Of course, comparisons between a white girl and a Black man to determine who had or has the most/least power in a given situation at a time in history is futile and ineffective, what Roxane Gay calls "Privilege or Oppression Olympics" in *Bad Feminist* (18). Margaret Morrison clarifies this problem further: "I do not imply that race and gender are equal as sites of meaning, power, or identity. Any site of meaning represents a complex, multifaceted construction that intersects in 'historically specific ways' with multiple other sites of meaning" (29). As performed by Robinson and Temple, the Black body as property, the child's body as property, and the female body as property are inseparably related issues and mutually inform each other in the film version of *The Little Colonel*.

Walker, the Old Colonel's "long-suffering body servant," rarely speaks in the first *Little Colonel* book and is not a significant textual presence in later books. Walker has no relationship, nor any meaningful exchanged dialogue with Lloyd in the *Little Colonel* series. He is simply one of the accoutrements of white Southern aristocracy. But the movie version of Walker, portrayed by Robinson, is given a much more prominent role in the film and the plot. This was also Robinson's breakout role, the first of four film pairings with Temple. He later became choreographer on Temple's movies as well.

Several film- and dance-focused critical studies explore Robinson's career and how he negotiated social, racial, and professional systems. Hill examines Robinson as a major source for bringing together various American cultural elements, "fusing ragtime syncopations with a light-footed and vertical style of jigging" which made "his tap dancing the embodiment of Afro-Irish fusions in American tap" (66). She argues that Robinson demonstrates, too, the turn-of-the-twentieth-century ideology of "racial uplift" for Black Americans, promoted by scholars including W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington; Hill

analyzes how Robinson "used dance and popular performance to imaginatively stage a level of social and cultural advancement that was otherwise unavailable" (115). Margaret Morrison notes, "In the 1910s, Robinson dropped the blackface" and "was one of a generation who worked to abandon demeaning stereotypes, create opportunities on stage, and perform empowered masculinity and virtuosic showmanship as the strategies of subversion and uplift" (28). This elevation is literal in Robinson's staircase dance, an act he choreographed in the early 1900s, inspired by a dream: "I was being made a lord by the King of England and he was standing at the head of a flight of stairs. Rather than walk, I danced up to get it" (Edwards 82). Hill points out that "Robinson's dreams of racial uplift were realized by dancing up a real flight of stairs to knighthood," and he "broke with the convention of dancing along the narrow horizontal line of the stage to utilize the verticality of the stage space, thus elevating the dancer to occupy the center of the proscenium frame" (66-7). This, I emphasize, is the meaning of the dance as performed in partnership by Robinson and Temple in *The Little Colonel*, with all of its intertextual, intercultural, and intersectional implications: the visual, physical dimensions of the staircase dance are crucial to reinscribing the ways racialized, commodified bodies in *The Little Colonel* as a pop culture entity are understood.

Robinson negotiated labyrinthine debates about his agency as a performer under the racist eye of Hollywood's cameras. While, as Martin has pointed out, minstrelsy originally developed as "a political art, often glamorizing slave life and thereby undermining the theme of slave emancipation" (255), Robinson's career is an example of "subversion and negotiation of minstrel stereotypes and the complex position he held, and continues to hold, for his public" (M. Morrison 23). Bogle identifies Robinson's work as an example of the "Good Negro"/Tom characters, who "remain hearty, submissive, stoic, generous, selfless, and oh-so-very kind. Thus they endear themselves to white audiences and emerge as heroes of sorts" (4-5), and Margaret Morrison quotes Bogle when she writes that Robinson's "smiling

minstrel mask in the role of the well-dressed house slave is used by the filmmakers to display the Uncle Tom's contentment which 'has always been used to indicate the Black man's satisfactions with the system and his place in it'" (26). But Morrison also interrogates Robinson's agency within the minstrel confines: "Robinson held the unique position as the sole adult, African-American tap dancer to appear in mainstream films (for white audiences) as a featured, speaking character who was central to the plot" (24). She continues:

> As Robinson embodies the minstrel trope of the happy, dancing, black man, he also performs his agency through his self-possessed body carriage and the virtuosic performance of his own sophisticated choreography. At first glance, even Robinson's neat-fitting butler's tailcoat gives him a refined line. African-American class acts of tap utilized precision dancing, grace, and elegance as key strategies to embody and display empowered, black masculinity and subvert pervasive portrayals of raggedy and backwards darkies. (25)

Robinson himself directly attacked accusations of "tomming" in a 1937 interview quoted in Morrison's article, stressing, "I am a race man! And I do all in my power to aid my race. I strive upon every turn to tear down any barriers that have existed between our two races and to establish harmonious relationships to all," an interview that "permitted Robinson to 'negotiate a middle ground for himself that effectively deflect[ed] criticism of his Uncle Tom roles'" (29).

As many critics discuss, Robinson's films challenge viewers to develop what bell hooks calls an "oppositional gaze," or, as Margaret Morrison paraphrases it:

> the critical spectatorship to view African-American talent within an environment of racist imagery. An oppositional gaze can lead viewers to engage in a complex process of filtering, where either Robinson's tap

> artistry or the racist content is foregrounded…. Robinson's movies, and the close juxtaposition of tap and teeth, demand that the viewer stays in that moment of rupture, that we keep both the grotesque horrors of Jim Crow and the delights of tap dance in our line of vision, and that we remember that tap virtuosity and "the terrible pleasures" of minstrelsy [Lott 1993, 11] are interlocked. (29)

A painting by Robert Colescott also challenges viewers in terms of gaze, color, and spectatorship with *Shirley Temple Black and Bill Robinson White,* a 1980 reimagination of Robinson and Temple in 1939's adaptation of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm,* and playing on Temple's married surname. Susan Gubar discusses the Colescott painting in her 1997 book, *Racechanges: White Skin, Black Face in American Culture:* by "switching the races" to ridicule "our assumptions about white hegemony in cultural scripts" we can speculate, as Colescott did, "what kind of society ours might have been if Shirley Temple had been black[?] What if America's sweetheart during the thirties were a little dark child?" (203-04). Moreover, we can consider Robinson's agencies and Temple's oppressions without erasing the lived realities of either. Transactions, interactions of power, cultural history, authority, and identity become a transgressive space when performed by a Black adult and a white girl in the liminal, physical space of a staircase, framed in minstrelsy. The staircase dance becomes an intersectional demonstration, a complicated negotiation of signifiers, cultures, and social statuses.

"Now, You Just Watch!"

Plot-wise, the staircase dance happens on Lloyd's first night at her grandfather's plantation house (almost an hour into the film's 81-minute runtime), where she has been sent by her mother after her father falls ill resulting from financial ruin. Sad and overwhelmed

even before her grandfather, the Old Colonel, criticizes her shabby clothing as "not respectful," Lloyd tells Grandfather that she and her parents will soon be sent to the poorhouse, and declares she is going home to her mother (1935-02-22 00:55:06).

Walker, who has been told to take Lloyd upstairs to bed, leads her toward the house's staircase, assuring Lloyd her grandfather loves her and is just cranky. "You should hear the things he says to me. They would just curl your hair," he says to the famed curly-top, pointing to his own hair, making another significant physical link between them as they stand at the foot of the staircase (1935-02-22 00:56:05). Lloyd balks at going upstairs, saying more than once that she "doesn't want to," but Walker then promises to show her "a brand-new way how to go upstairs," and, after directing her "Now, you just watch," he launches into two minutes of dancing up and back down the staircase (00:56:22). When he finishes, Lloyd has moved to the other side of the staircase, smiling and standing upright, declaring "I want to do that, too!" (00:58:35). Walker takes her hand in his, and, with the camera often focused on their feet, Walker instructs Lloyd as they tap together up and down the stairs, praising her: "Say, you catch on quick!" (00:58:48) and "You sure learn fast!" (00:59:42). The spell is broken when the Old Colonel interrupts their playful duet, demanding to know "What's goin' on 'round here?" (00:59:19) and Lloyd and Walker run up the rest of the stairs together, where Walker promises Lloyd that "tomorrow, I'll show you some more steps" (00:59:43).[4]

Here, Robinson's Walker is in the role of expert and mentor, both in and out of character; as the film's choreographer and with decades of dance experience, he is in a position to approve or disapprove of Lloyd-Shirley as his student, and to continue to teach

[4] The second dance scene in the stables is more collaborative than instructive, but still has a subversive feel, in liminal space. Lloyd, in fancy new riding clothes, asks Walker if he is "gonna show me some new steps today?" Walker demurs, and Lloyd doesn't ask again, but May Lilly starts playing harmonica. Walker immediately begins a tap step, rhythmically repeating "I just ain't got time to do no dancin' today." Lloyd imitates him, and they trade steps, showing off for and challenging each other, with Henry Clay and May Lilly as audience. They finish with a paired dance demonstrating slyness about sneaking in this dance break between their obligations. Then a housemaid yells for Walker, and he does a comic yet defiant tap-step off the screen, making all three children laugh. Lloyd continues to dance for May Lilly and Henry Clay until the movie's villains arrive, interrupting.

her. Walker is also in a position of authority with his access to the upstairs, privileged white domestic space that Temple's Lloyd initially resists. With their gazes focused on each other and their backs often toward the camera, the dance itself is an example of the Black man and the white girl—both limited social roles subject to systemic oppressions—uniting, manipulating, subverting, transcending, utilizing, displaying control and balance, all suggesting power and knowledge… at least until the Old Colonel's presence reasserts social and racial order.

"What's Goin' on 'Round Here?"

The staircase dance can be read numerous ways, and one is within the framework of Mikhail Bakhtin's carnivalesque**,** exposing hierarchies of gender, class, and race by inverting them, even temporarily. From Robinson's story about being made lord by the King of England, and their dance performance rooted in minstrel blackface entertainment, to Temple's simultaneously dominant yet innocent screen presence, and her ability to make vast amounts of money during the Great Depression, the two dancers' navigation up and down a staircase destabilizes all known power structures, the collapsing of aforementioned usual boundaries as seen in society and in minstrelsy, which in turn reinforces them overall at the dance's conclusion.

As Maria Nikolajeva writes, carnivalesque is important for children and children's literature because "children in our society are oppressed and powerless, having no economic resources of their own, no voice in political and social decisions, and are subject to a large number of laws and rules." But carnivalesque reverses "the existing order, elevates the fictional child to a position superior to adults" (89). A number of social, physical, racial, and gender boundaries are broken with the staircase dance, both on-screen and off. In *The Oxford Handbook of Screendance Studies,* Ann Murphy reads this scene with Robinson as the

African American "signifying" figure, the "trickster at the crossroads who prepares the way for Temple to ascend from one level to the next, both physically and metaphysically" (741). Temple, too, is transgressive; at a time when tap was most closely associated with ideas of blackness and masculinity (Hill 4), and in a movie set in the regressive 1870s Reconstruction Era South, Temple's Lloyd challenges the liminal territory of white girlhood, repurposing domestic home space into something subversive. Temple and Robinson make the Southern plantation home into their own shared stage, performing with and for each other, not the camera/an audience. However, in the end, order is restored, and it is white Southern patriarchy who defines "what's goin' on 'round here."[5]

Like minstrelsy itself, Temple and Robinson's cinematic and dance pairings resist easy, tidy readings. There are continued questions to ask about racism and minstrelsy within Temple's movies, and in Robinson's and Temple's collective collaborations, and even as lifelong family friends.[6] The popularity of nostalgic plantation or "Lost Cause" revisionist stories in both book- and film formats from the time Johnston's series was published to when Temple and Robinson were making films adds even more context and complexities. It is necessary to place *The Little Colonel* in dialogue with these texts for more broad discourse, including Thomas Nelson Page's *In Ole Virginia, Marse Chan, and Other Stories* (1887) and Joel Chandler Harris's *Uncle Remus* stories (1881), both referenced in Johnston's *Little Colonel* books, the novels of Thomas Dixon Jr., and D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, the 1915 film adaptation of Dixon's 1905 novel, *The Clansman: A Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan, Gone with the Wind* (published in 1936, adapted for film in 1939), *Way Down South* (1939), and Disney's adaptation of Harris's Uncle Remus stories, *Song of the South*

[5] The staircase dance, with Robinson and Temple hand-in-hand, was reportedly cut from screenings in the South.
[6] Collectively, the Temple-Robinson film pairings suggest different meanings. Margaret Morrison close-reads Robinson as Temple's favorite slave in *The Littlest Rebel*, "Uncle Billy" (a name Robinson had Temple and her parents call him in real life), entertaining her guests by dancing. In *Dimples*, Robinson is paired with actor Stepin Fetchit. Few of these roles demonstrate the staircase dance's transgressiveness, perhaps further confirmation for its ultimate carnivalesque reinforcement of white patriarchal norms.

(1949). Nevertheless, here, by closely examining the visual cinematic text compared to Johnston's book, and the characters' negotiation of environment, *The Little Colonel* film creates new meanings and upends the dynamic of racialized bodies (see figure 2). I also might suggest, in the end, that the film forces the audience to see color, not black-and-white, with the Technicolor finale of Lloyd's "pink party," the first time both Temple and Robinson were seen on screen in color. A century after Johnston's original book was published, the once-familiar image of the static, white Little Colonel character from the books, dressed in her Napoleon cap, has been replaced by the more dynamic image of Temple and Robinson's barrier-breaking interracial dance.

Figure 2. Shirley Temple and Bill 'Bojangles' Robinson. *The Little Colonel*, 1935.

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