



Blackface Cuba, 1840-1895 (Rethinking the Americas)

Jill Lane

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Blackface Cuba, 1840-1895 offers a critical history of the relation between racial impersonation, national sentiment, and the emergence of an anticolonial public sphere in nineteenth-century Cuba. Through a study of Cuba's vernacular theatre, the *teatro bufo*, and of related forms of music, dance, and literature, Lane argues that blackface performance was a primary site for the development of *mestizaje*, Cuba's racialized national ideology, in which African and Cuban become simultaneously mutually exclusive and mutually formative.

Popular with white Cuban-born audiences during the period of Cuba's anticolonial wars, the *teatro bufo* was celebrated for combining Spanish elements with supposedly African rhythms and choreography. Its wealth of short comic plays developed a well-loved repertory of blackface stock characters, from the *negrito* to the *mulata*, played by white actors in blackface. Lane contends that these practices were embraced by white audiences as especially national forms that helped define Cuba's opposition to Spain, at the same time that they secured prevailing racial hierarchies for a future Cuban nation. Comparing the *teatro bufo* to related forms of racial representation, particularly those created by black Cubans in theatres and in the press, Lane analyzes performance as a form of social contestation through which an emergent Cuban national community struggled over conflicting visions of race and nation.

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