

Enacting Nationhood

Enacting Nationhood:
Identity, Ideology and the Theatre, 1855-99

Edited by

Scott R. Irelan

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS

P U B L I S H I N G

Enacting Nationhood: Identity, Ideology and the Theatre, 1855-99
Edited by Scott R. Irelan

This book first published 2014

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2014 by Scott R. Irelan and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-5829-3, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-5829-8

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Images	vii
Acknowledgements	ix
Editor’s Introduction.....	xi
Chapter One.....	1
White Rebels, “Ape Negroes” and Savage Indians: The Racial Poetics of National Unity in Harry Watkins’s <i>The Pioneer Patriot</i> (1858) Amy E. Hughes	
Chapter Two	25
Performing Confederate Nationalism: Constructions of Southern Identity at the Richmond Theatre Elizabeth Reitz Mullenix	
Chapter Three	43
Captive Audience: Theatre Presentations at Johnson’s Island Federal Prison Camp Jenna Neilsen	
Chapter Four.....	59
Lincoln the Yankee Goon: An Early Public Image in both Southern and Copperhead Dramatic Literature and Live Performance Scott R. Irelan	
Chapter Five	75
Performing Politics Perhaps?: “Southern Actor” John Wilkes Booth Thomas Campbell	
Chapter Six.....	97
“Susan B. Anthony or I’m a Dutchman!”: Robert Craig and Nineteenth Century U.S. Burlesque Noreen C. Barnes	

Chapter Seven..... 117
Romancing the Civil War: Reconsidering William Gillette’s Reconciliation
Plays *Held by the Enemy* (1886) and *Secret Service* (1896)
Anne Fletcher

Chapter Eight..... 137
Enacting Nationhood: An Afterpiece
Scott Magelssen

Contributors..... 149

Index..... 153

LIST OF IMAGES

Figure 1-1. A playbill for Harry Watkins's <i>The Pioneer Patriot</i>	4
Figure 1-2. Illustration of Jane McCrea about to be scalped	10
Figure 1-3. Charles-François Mazurier as Jocko	17
Figure 3-1. Johnson's Island Prison Depot Memorial	46
Figure 6-1. "Premier Comedian of the World" Robert Craig	98
Figure 7-1. Special Artist Tom Beene, <i>Held by the Enemy</i>	130
Figure 7-2. <i>Held by the Enemy</i>	131
Figure 7-3. <i>Secret Service</i> composite image.....	133

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to offer a big thank you to all of the people who have helped transition this information from a vague idea to a tangible book, particularly the accommodating, patient folks at Cambridge Scholars Publishing. I would also like to thank Scott Magelssen and Ann Haugo for pointing me in the right direction when looking for a publisher, and Jennifer Young for her proofreading input. Lastly, I thank the authors for believing in this project enough to share their efforts here.

I dedicate this book to Janet Gustwiller who was both an avid reader and a big supporter of my pursuits.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Since the Articles of Confederation created a “league of friendship and perpetual union” in 1777, the slow and steady construction of the “United States of America” as a proposed marker of unity has been a site of contestation, of redefinition, of restlessness. As Congressional legislative activity moved from “constituting” our governmental structure with its “bill of rights,” through suffrage, temperance, Civil Rights legislation and beyond, dramatic literature and live performance (broadly defined) has variously reified, inverted, subverted, and toppled icons of Americana. While there are no sedimented set of “American” traits, per se, certain images and symbols have emerged over the years that track shifts in national identity narratives by establishing distinctiveness through contrast with the “Other.” Nowhere perhaps is this more apparent than in nineteenth century dramatic literature and live performance (broadly defined).

In its attentiveness to a country's identity on the rise, the nineteenth century “American” theatre in form(s), style(s), character(s), and theme(s) played out its own set of identity tropes regarding “We the People...”—the Yankee character, the rugged frontiersman, the Negro character, and various other immigrant identities. These archetypes embody a wider tension between what is and what is not “American” and who are and who are not “the people.”¹ As an expressive form of culture, then, the greatest significance in addressing dramatic literature and live performance (broadly defined) from this era “lies not in its power to provide entertainment, escape, or wish fulfillment, important as these may be, but in its power to open our eyes, to answer our questions, to increase our understanding, and to still our torments.”² This importance, however, is greatly complicated by dealings that eventually build up to secession and the War Between the States.

Enacting Nationhood is a collection of essays that seeks to address this complicated importance by opening an introspective space for further

¹ For more see Scott R. Irelan and Anne Fletcher “Staging “Americanization,” ‘America’ on Stage: Theatre and National Identity, 1671-1867” *Cercles* 19 (2009): 88-101.

² Garff B. Wilson, *Three Hundred years of American Drama and Theatre: From Ye Bare and Ye Cubb to Hair* (NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1973), 2.

exploration into constructions of “We the People...” as captured by dramatic literature and live performance (broadly defined) from 1855-99. To *enact* suggests a sense of representation with reference to daily life. As such, this collection looks at how the representation of “North” and “South,” “we” and “them,” are variously created, captured, confined, and coined to match both tendencies and allegiances of certain geopolitical regions within the part of North America now most commonly identified as the United States. It does so by interrogating intersections of pro-enslavement and anti-enslavement expressions of cultural nationalism, exploring sundry manifestations of partisanship within dramatic literature and live performance (broadly defined), and investigating effects of armed conflict on notions of “nation,” “theatre,” “performance,” and other markers of communal identity. Ultimately, *Enacting Nationhood* points to an ever-shifting aesthetic contract between cultural nationalism and dramatic literature and live performance (broadly defined) from 1855-99.

I use these dates as points of entry and exit for two reasons. First, by 1848 the fallout from the Wilmot Proviso and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo heighten the stakes in a quickly escalating, contentious debate over the admittance of new territories as slave or free. Congressional deliberations eventually lead to the ratification of the Compromise of 1850, including the noticeably divisive Fugitive Slave Act. While neither North nor South got exactly what it wanted from the agreement, many citizens believed the arrangement to be a glimmer of hope for peace, no matter how fragile. By 1855, the brittle balance linking North and South was fractured not only by the ratification of the Kansas-Nebraska Act but also by the potent anti-slavery positions of the newly-formed Republican Party. In some way, the essays within *Enacting Nationhood* coalesce around the deep divisions shaped by this mid-nineteenth century national terrain—schisms that go from bad to worse with the Panic of 1857 and the 1860 election of Abraham Lincoln. Second, the *fin de siècle* is an appropriate close to this collection because of the ways in which the failures of radical reconstruction and the war efforts that necessitate such action are sanitized, sterilized, romanticized, and remembered more for Northern dominance over a Southern “Axis of Evil” than for anything else. It is this sort of *remembering* that still works on us today as we strive to come to terms with a twenty-first century understanding of what it means to be “We the People....”

The idea for this collection began at the American Studies Association conference in Philadelphia where four of these essays first appeared together on a panel. As we sat around discussing our work with one another after presenting, it was obvious to me that there was something

more to say about entangled notions of “North,” “South,” “Nationhood,” “America,” and other contested identity markers as captured by theatre and performance histories (and historiographies) from this era. *Enacting Nationhood* represents a singular step toward “something more.” Given this, the essays that make up this collection are certainly not to be taken as a comprehensive set of perspectives. Rather they are to be understood as a corresponding voice in an ongoing discussion regarding both how and why “the relationships between theatre and memory are deep and complex.”³ To that end, *Enacting Nationhood* is distinctive in that the essays collected here call into question many widely-held assumptions about the intricate theatrical past of the period under review.

In bringing together these particular scholar-artists, this volume seeks not only to open a larger conversation but also to fill a lacuna in existing scholarship by addressing “forgotten” performers, practices, and texts. In fact, contemporary American Studies, Theatre Studies, Southern Studies, and Lincoln Studies scholarship does not necessarily reflect the prolonged existence of divisions between “North” and “South” as reflected in both dramatic literature and live performance (broadly defined) in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. While the work of Charles S. Watson (*The History of Southern Drama* [2009]) cursorily addresses some enactments of nineteenth century Southern national identity, it focuses largely on a broad historical narrative that primarily deals with twentieth century drama. *Southern Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of the South* has published a few articles on dramatic literature and live theatrical performance but nothing as pointed as the chapters included in this collection. Though largely focused on the Richmond theatre scene, James Dorman Jr. does provide an extensive and thorough analysis in his 1967 *Theater in the Ante Bellum South, 1815-61*. Rosemarie Bank’s 1997 *Theatre Culture in America, 1825-1860* argues for a sense of performance that permeated antebellum America. However, notions of “America” referenced here are largely based on what is playing in NYC and how events such as the opening of the Erie Canal had an effect on content, form, and style of dramatic literature as well as live performance in the city. Tice Miller’s *Entertaining the Nation: American Drama in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (2007) is a fine survey of eighteenth and nineteenth century drama and the social issues that surrounded their performance, and Jeffery Mason and J. Ellen Gainor do well in exploring issues of nationalism in the collection *Performing America: Cultural Nationalism in American Theatre* (2001). Other collections that offer insight-filled essays

³ Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 2.

regarding both national narratives and identities include *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in Historiography* (1989), *Writing and Rewriting National Theatre Histories* (2004), *Representing the Past: Essays in Performance Historiography* (2010), *Theater Historiography: Critical Interventions* (2010), and *Public Theatres and Theatre Publics* (2012). Once again, however, these volumes do little to unpack specific enactments of “North” and “South” during the nation’s expansion socially, geographically, and politically in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Ultimately, the goal of this collection is to stimulate your own thinking about these and other related topics, if only in small ways. As such, this collection seeks to build bridges between what is and what is not said in existing publications with respect to how theatre and live performance enacted markers of nationhood.

Amy E. Hughes opens the volume by arguing that the version of early “America” found in Henry Watkins’s *The Pioneer Patriot* (1858) enacts what she keenly identifies as a racial poetics of national unity. National unity is a topic relevant to Elizabeth Reitz Mullenix and her discussion regarding the creation of a Confederate nationalist ideology during the months immediately preceding and then following the outbreak of wartime conflict. She does so through an examination of key texts performed in Richmond, Virginia, with particular attention to the work of John Hill Hewitt. Jenna Neilsen continues themes of Mullenix’s discussion with her “Captive Audience.” In this case Neilsen reveals how Confederate prisoners of war on Johnson’s Island (OH) used theatre and live performance not only as a form of escapism but also as a way to enact solidarity. Southern and Copperhead unity through lampooning President Lincoln is the topic at hand within “Lincoln the Yankee Goon: An Early Public Image in both Southern and Copperhead Dramatic Literature and Live Performance.” Closing out a look at how national identity and ideology are at play in regards to the Confederate States of America, Thomas Campbell focuses on the lesser studied Booth brother, John Wilkes, to argue that his portrayal of Richard III appears to be expressing Southern-leaning values held by the performer

Returning to the North for a look at “Yankee” culture, Noreen C. Barnes examines the life and times of Robert Craig to dissect his enactments of burlesque from 1864-72. What she finds is that contextualizing his work within mid-nineteenth century “Yankee” culture provides a way of seeing various performance modes in transition. Transition is at the center of what Anne Fletcher investigates with “Romancing the Civil War.” In re-examining William Hooker Gillette’s *Held by the Enemy* (1886) and *Secret Service* (1896) she argues that these

reconciliation plays represent enactments of both cultural *remembering* and national romanticizing of wartime activities as the nineteenth century came to an end. Scott Magelssen brings the collection to a close with his reflection on the relationship between what it *was* to be “American” in the mid-to-late nineteenth century and what it *is* to be “American today.” To do so he uses his fieldwork at Conner Prairie, a living history museum outside Indianapolis, and its program *1863 Civil War Journey: Raid on Indiana*, a program designed to interpret the events of the War Between the States and, in particular, how it affected Indiana “Hoosiers.”

In the end, the dramatic literature, live performances, and spirited personalities examined in the following essays deserve attention because of what they reveal about nationhood narratives, the expression of communal cohesion through dramatic literature and live performance (broadly defined), and the reflection of a localized sense of “We the People...” both then and now.

CHAPTER ONE

WHITE REBELS, “APE NEGROES” AND SAVAGE INDIANS: THE RACIAL POETICS OF NATIONAL UNITY IN HARRY WATKINS’S *THE PIONEER PATRIOT* (1858)

AMY E. HUGHES
BROOKLYN COLLEGE, CUNY

In January 1858, as the nation wrestled with the slavery question and continued to suffer economically from the Panic of 1857, actor and stage manager Harry Watkins proposed to P. T. Barnum (proprietor of the American Museum in New York) that he adapt Sylvanus Cobb, Jr.’s *The Pioneer Patriot* for the museum’s in-house theatre. Cobb’s story, which centers on the Battle of Oriskany (1777) during the American Revolution, had just concluded serial publication in the *New York Ledger*, the most widely read “family paper” in the US. The sensational tale centers on Philip Lancey, a patriot fighting with other American rebels for independence. He is secretly in love with his father’s ward, Isabel Carlton. However, on her nineteenth birthday, she is obliged to marry Guy Bradbrook—a Tory, a drunkard, and a villain—because of a promise she made to her father on his deathbed. Despite several spectacular confrontations with savage “Indians” allied with the Tories, Philip keeps Isabel safely away from Guy. In the end, though, the villain manages to abduct her from the patriots’ camp. But mere moments before exchanging matrimonial vows with Isabel, Guy is shot and killed by Zebulon Beebe, an embittered white man indentured to the Bradbrook family. Guy’s death frees Isabel from her promise, and the story concludes with the happy expectation of Philip and Isabel’s union.

For Watkins, much was at stake. About four months earlier, he had been hired by John Greenwood to fulfill the role of Director of

Amusements at the American Museum (whose prominence as a house of “moral” dramatic entertainment had waned in recent years) and charged with the seemingly impossible task of returning the theatre to its former glory.¹ Watkins’s hunch about the dramatic potential of *The Pioneer Patriot* turned out to be right. Spectators flocked to see Cobb’s story brought to life, and the production was so popular that Barnum—himself reeling from the effects of the Panic—was able to keep the doors open at the struggling museum. The play remained on the bill for six weeks and was presented a total of forty-seven times.² Why were audiences attracted to the play during this time of national crisis? Certainly, its provenance contributed to its allure. By appealing to the largest common denominator, editor Robert Bonner painstakingly built the *New York Ledger* into one of the most widely read periodicals in the country. Cobb’s writing appeared frequently in its pages. In fact, between 1856 and 1887, he wrote 130 serials, 834 short stories, and thousands of shorter pieces for the *Ledger*. Bonner published work by many prominent authors, including T. S. Arthur, Henry Ward Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Louisa M. Alcott, Henry W. Longfellow, William Cullen Bryant, and Charles Dickens (whose only story for an American periodical, “Hunted Down,” ran in 1859). At the time of *The Pioneer Patriot*’s publication, the paper boasted a weekly circulation of 300,000 nationwide—an extraordinary number for the period. Endeavoring to appeal to even the most sensitive of readers, both Southern and Northern, Bonner took great pains to provide wholesome but entertaining content while gingerly communicating a politics of neutrality. The play’s pedigree was hyped repeatedly in the museum’s advertisements, and on at least one occasion, a woodcut

¹ Harry Watkins describes his experiences adapting, staging, and acting in plays at Barnum’s establishment in his journal: Harry Watkins, *Diary*, Skinner Family Papers, Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University (hereafter *HWD*). Although he never became famous, Watkins always worked; by the time of his death in 1894, he had penned more than twenty plays, performed all over the United States, and even enjoyed a successful tour in England with his wife, actress Rose Watkins (formerly Mrs. Charles Howard). Spanning the years 1845-60 and comprising 1,200 pages in thirteen volumes, his diary is a rich resource for theatre historians as well as scholars of English literature, U.S. history, and American Studies. Uncatalogued and unknown, the manuscript has eluded notice; I am currently working on an annotated critical edition of the journal, which when published will supersede Maud and Otis Skinner’s *One Man in His Time: The Adventures of H. Watkins, Strolling Player* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1938), the only version of the diary available in book form, now out of print.

² *HWD*, vol. 13, January 18, 20, 25, February 8 and 27, 1858.

illustration that originally appeared with Cobb's story was reproduced on a playbill.³ (Figure 1-1)

I argue that the depiction of early America presented in *The Pioneer Patriot* both addressed and assuaged some of the anxieties preoccupying Barnum's middle-class patrons in 1858. The play features several familiar stereotypes: the virtuous white hero, the violent Indian, and the happy slave. Watkins deploys these types within a complex web of racial relations that, in essence, emphasize the moral imperative of maintaining an undivided United States. In other words, *The Pioneer Patriot* enacts a racial poetics of national unity. Philip, an exemplary model of American patriotism, poses a stark contrast to the corrupt and immoral Guy, who serves as Philip's political and romantic nemesis. Meanwhile, the Mohawk warriors in the drama—who accept compensation from the Tories in exchange for rebels' scalps—have more in common with the merciless Indians depicted in Robert Montgomery Bird's 1837 novel *Nick of the Woods* than the noble savage at the center of John Augustus Stone's *Metamora* (1829), a role made famous by Edwin Forrest. But arguably, the most compelling figure in *The Pioneer Patriot* is Jocko, Philip's trusty slave, which Watkins himself performed. Described as an "ape negro" in the cast list, Jocko is an amalgam of both the happy slave associated with minstrelsy and "Jocko the Brazilian ape" from ballet and pantomime. At a time when abolition was a hot topic in public discourse, Jocko's loyalty,

³ Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1741-1930* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1938), 2:102, 2:358-60, and 2:361; Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1998), 218n3; David Dowling, *The Business of Literary Circles in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 68; Ralph Admari, "Bonner and 'The Ledger,'" *American Book Collector* 6 (1935): 176-93; Christopher Looby, "Southworth and Seriality," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 59, no. 2 (September 2004): 198. The *Ledger's* readership can only be roughly estimated; as Mott observes, "Rumor is all we have to go by in the matter, for Bonner, a man of extraordinary acumen in such things, was content to let rumor do the work, especially since the *Ledger* carried no advertising and had no necessity for circulation statements" (2:10). For more on the nineteenth century story paper and its role in forming imagined communities of readers, see Patricia Okker, *Social Stories: The Magazine Novel in Nineteenth-Century America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003); and Joyce W. Warren, "Uncommon Discourse: Fanny Fern and the *New York Ledger*," in *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*, edited by Kenneth M. Price and Susan Belasco Smith (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 51-68.

resilience, and upbeat attitude provided an optimistic vision of what happens when a slave is treated “properly.”

BARNUM'S AMERICAN MUSEUM
 Cor. Broadway and Ann St., opposite St. Paul's Church:

Admittance to the whole Museum, the Picture Gallery, the Natural History Department, the Happy Family, and the Unconquered Room, as well as the entertainments in the Lecture Room... 25 Cents
 Children under 10 years... 12 Cents. Seats in the Parquet and First Gallery... 12 Cents extra
 MORNING VISITORS ADMITTED TO THE AFTERNOON PERFORMANCES FREE.

JOHN GREENWOOD, Jr., and HENRY D. BUTLER..... Proprietors
JOHN GREENWOOD, Jr...... Manager
Mr. H. WATKINS..... Director of Amusements

THE GREAT TRIUMPH OF THE AGE
 IS THE
 NEW AMERICAN DRAMA
 Adapted by H. Watkins, Esq. from Sylvanus Cobb's
GREAT LEDGER STORY
 OF THE
PIONEER PATRIOT



OR, THE MAID OF THE WAR PATH
 And now being presented at the establishment,
EVERY EVENING
 AS WELL AS
Wednesday & Saturday Afternoons,
 To crowded and gratified Audiences.

Figure 1-1. Playbill for Harry Watkins's *The Pioneer Patriot* (ca. January 1858), featuring a woodcut that originally appeared in the *New York Ledger*. TCS 65 (American Museum), Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard University.

Although the plot of this drama has nothing to do with slavery, I assert it had everything to do with slavery in 1858. It premiered at a time when the nation was facing several rebellions—most obviously, dissension in the South regarding the possibility of abolition, but also resistance emanating from the Seminole Indians in Florida and the Mormons in Utah. Both Bonner and Barnum provided safe havens from the conflict and controversy of the times as their sensational stories and plays depicted imaginary worlds in which heroes and villains were instantly recognizable and justice always prevailed. The moral legibility of the historical America portrayed in *The Pioneer Patriot* disavowed and denied the complexities of the present, when pressing questions related to slavery, Mormonism, and the consequences of Indian removal had no easy answers. These disavowals and denials are most vividly apparent in the play's representation of race—white, red, and black.

White

In melodrama, the fact of being white, or the “property of whiteness” (to employ Cheryl I. Harris’s phrase), is not the only thing that makes or marks the hero. Rather, whiteness must be complemented by virtue, ethical action, and respectable habits of living. In *The Pioneer Patriot*, “true” whiteness is configured through a series of contrasts. Protagonist Philip Lancey and antagonist Guy Bradbrook are both white, but their similarities begin and end there. From the outset, it is clear that the Bradbrooks are careless and greedy: they squander opportunities, mismanage their affairs, and abuse their laborers. When introducing them to the reader, Cobb writes, “The residence of Nathan Bradbrook [Guy’s father] was a fine one for the time, and his land was rich and productive, and he owned a large tract. Had it not been for his expensive manner of living, his looseness in business and his habits of dissipation, he might have accumulated wealth upon his farm.” At one point in Cobb’s *Ledger* story, the heroine experiences an unpleasant physical reaction to Guy, and her thoughts immediately turn to Philip, who embodies the opposite qualities: “With a fearful shudder, [Isabel] cast her eyes on Guy Bradbrook, and until that moment she had not fully realized the utter degradation of his character. Must she be bound for life to such a thing? She thought of Philip Lancey, young, brave, handsome, generous, and noble; and the contrast was startling.” Cobb describes Philip as “possess[ing] all his father’s virtues, without one fault which his best friends could single out.” When he first appears in Watkins’s play, Philip expresses these virtues in a short monologue (invented by the playwright) about the rebels’ fight against the

British, declaring, “Patriot blood must flow to wash this despotism from our soil. The cost has been counted and full well we know that henceforth the sleep of safety can be found only in the cradle of Liberty.” In short, he is a paragon of patriotism, a selfless young man dedicated to the fight for liberty despite the possibility of death.⁴

In drama and fiction during the antebellum period, intemperance often served as a sign of immorality, and this is certainly the case in *The Pioneer Patriot*. After Guy manages to abduct Isabel from the rebels’ camp, he and his father discuss the impending marriage. Guy behaves inappropriately toward not only Isabel but also his father, and it becomes clear that he has overindulged in drink: “He had moved so near to the maiden that she could smell, in the fumes of his breath, the cause of his peculiar zealously of expression.” When Guy refers disrespectfully to his father as “my dear old soul of wax,” the senior Bradbrook realizes that “his darling boy had been drinking more deeply than he had thought” and removes him from the room. Watkins underscores the villain’s intemperance to an even greater degree, going so far as to show him drinking rum. In his early career, the actor was best known for playing the dissipating Edward Middleton in W. H. Smith’s *The Drunkard* (1844). Audiences particularly loved his enactment of the famous *delirium tremens* scene. Watkins’s knowledge of the temperance-drama formula

⁴ Cheryl I. Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (June 1993): 1707-91; Sylvanus Cobb, Jr., “The Pioneer Patriot; or, The Maid of the War-Path,” *New York Ledger* 13, no. 35 (November 7, 1857): 1; Cobb, “Pioneer Patriot,” *Ledger* 13, no. 40 (December 12, 1857): 6; Cobb, “Pioneer Patriot,” *Ledger* 13, no. 33 (October 24, 1857): 1; Harry Watkins, *The Pioneer Patriot; or, The Maid of the War Path* (New York: William B. Smith, 1858), 7. A note about my use of *The Pioneer Patriot* as it originally appeared in the *Ledger*: given the popularity of Bonner’s newspaper, it is likely that many spectators had read (or heard about Cobb’s story before they saw Watkins’s version at the American Museum. Barnum and Watkins seemed to be acutely aware of this important intertextual relationship, because advertisements and playbills frequently leverage the *Ledger*’s cultural capital. Watkins lifted a considerable amount of dialogue straight out of Cobb’s text, and the list of costumes at the beginning of the published play mirrors Cobb’s descriptions exactly, suggesting that the production also endeavored to reproduce the story visually (Watkins, *Pioneer Patriot*, 4). Therefore, the *Ledger* story is a key resource for understanding how spectators may have perceived the play; toward that end, I cite it frequently throughout this essay.

may be one reason why he chose to highlight Guy's drinking habits as a way to reveal his bad character.⁵

Guy's villainy is also expressed in his interactions with Zebulon Beebe, a white employee of the Bradbrook family who, for all intents and purposes, is treated like a slave. This serves as a crucial point of comparison between the villain and the hero. Philip treats Jocko, his "ape negro," so well that he inspires the slave to perform sensational acts of bravery and bravado. In contrast, Zeb suffers all manner of verbal and physical abuse from Guy, who insults, slaps, and even strikes him with that iconic symbol of slavery, a whip. At one point in the *Ledger* story, Zeb himself emphasizes this strange dynamic when he says facetiously, "Thank ye, my master!" after Guy punches him in the ear.⁶ In Watkins's dramatization, the physical abuse is even more extensive. In the penultimate scene, Guy refers to himself as the man's "master" and strikes him so violently with his whip that Zeb falls to the ground and faints. After Guy exits, Zeb—now "bleeding from the head"—slowly rises, takes up the whip, and vows, "By the same lead that opened the fool's veins, shall his blood flow!" Both on the page and on the stage, these spectacular gestures communicated to the audience that the two men were engaged in the worst kind of master-slave relationship—one defined by suffering and cruelty—whereas Philip and Jocko were engaged in the "best" kind: paternal, cooperative, mutually beneficial. In the end, the villain's treatment of his white slave has dire consequences. Zeb grows so resentful that he murders Guy, paving the way for Philip and Isabel's marriage.⁷

Red

Curiously, in scholarly studies and checklists of "Indian drama," theatre historians have overlooked *The Pioneer Patriot*, even though it premiered at a notable venue (Barnum's museum) and was subsequently published. Most historiography has tended to focus on a handful of works with Indian characters, such as Stone's *Metamora* (1829), featuring the

⁵ Cobb, "Pioneer Patriot," *Ledger* 13, no. 36 (November 14, 1857): 5; Watkins, *Pioneer Patriot*, 40; *HWD*, vol. 4, April 16, November 24, and December 7, 1849; and June 14, 1850.

⁶ Cobb, "Pioneer Patriot," *Ledger* 13, no. 40 (December 12, 1857): 6.

⁷ Cobb, "Pioneer Patriot," *Ledger* 13, no. 37 (November 21, 1857): 5 and *Ledger* 13, no. 42 (December 26, 1857): 5; Watkins, *Pioneer Patriot*, 54-55. Given Zeb's last name (Beebe), it is possible that he is marked as Irish. If so, then this would complicate Zeb's claim to "true" whiteness, since early American cultural constructions of whiteness often omitted the Irish.

canonical “noble savage” popularized by Forrest; Louisa H. Medina’s *Nick of the Woods* (1838), a negative portrayal of Native Americans based on Bird’s novel of the same name; and John Brougham’s burlesques *Met-a-Mora* (1847) and *Po-ca-hon-tas* (1855), which simultaneously mock and mine the noble/ignoble savage types.⁸ Nevertheless, *The Pioneer Patriot* merits examination not only because it was popular at the time but also because it seems to reflect many of the anxieties percolating around race in 1858. Throughout the play, the mercenary Indians are demonized, and Jocko—the black slave who steadily and spectacularly exterminates them—is celebrated. I contend that these portrayals of violent savages and loyal slaves advocate for Indian removal and also endorse the persistence of slavery.

According to Richard Moody, the noble savage of *Metamora* and other works represented “the archetype of human nobility. His natural goodness was so chaste, his heart so incorrupt, that he could safely trust his intuitive judgment on any occasion with no danger of falling into the pitfalls of

⁸ This may be due, in part, to the long shadow cast by Forrest, whose portrayal of *Metamora* fascinated audiences for decades and has subsequently fascinated theatre scholars. Also, *The Pioneer Patriot* is difficult to classify because it features a number of stock types. Nevertheless, the absence of the play in histories of the “Indian drama” is noteworthy. See, for example, books by Jeffrey D. Mason, *Melodrama and the Myth of America* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1993) and Matthew Rehorn, *Pioneer Performances: Staging the Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); articles and chapters by Richard E. Amacher, “Behind the Curtain with the Noble Savage: Stage Management of Indian Plays, 1825-1860,” *Theatre Survey* 7, no. 2 (1966): 101-14; Marilyn J. Anderson, “The Image of the Indian in American Drama During the Jacksonian Era, 1829-1845,” *Journal of American Culture* 1, no. 4 (Winter 1978): 800-10; Sally L. Jones, “The First but Not the Last of the ‘Vanishing Indians’: Edwin Forrest and Mythic Re-Creations of the Native Population,” in *Dressing in Feathers: The Construction of the Indian in American Popular Culture*, edited by S. Elizabeth Bird (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 13-27; Don B. Wilmeth, “Noble or Ruthless Savage? The American Indian on Stage and in the Drama,” *Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 39-78; Don B. Wilmeth, “Tentative Checklist of Indian Plays (1606-1987),” *Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 1, no. 2 (Fall 1989): 34-54; and unpublished dissertations by Rayna Diane Green, “The Only Good Indian: The Image of the Indian in American Vernacular Culture,” PhD diss., Indiana University, 1973; Burl Donald Grose, “‘Here Come the Indians’: An Historical Study of the Representations of the Native American Upon the North American Stage, 1808-1969,” PhD diss., University of Missouri-Columbia, 1979; and Kathleen A. Mulvey, “The Growth, Development, and Decline of the Popularity of American Indian Plays before the Civil War,” PhD diss., New York University, 1978.

moral disobedience.” However, as Jeffrey D. Mason points out, the phrase itself “gently maintain[s] the inferiority of the savage to the civilized,” keeping the natural goodness and autochthonous incivility of the Indian in uneasy tension. By the time Charles Dickens wrote “The Noble Savage” (1853), an essay in which he pilloried the Romantic vision of the primitive man, villainous Indians began predominating in literature and drama.⁹ Don B. Wilmethe observes that works like John Hovey Robinson’s *Nick Wiffles* (1858), James Pilgrim’s *Stella Delorme* (1859), and *The Mute Spy* (author unknown, 1859) “turned away from the largely noble and stately Indians created by such novelists as [George Fenimore] Cooper, [William Gilmore] Simms, and Bird, and found inspiration instead in weekly story papers that portrayed Indians as mean, filthy, treacherous individuals, frequently side-kicks of white villains.”¹⁰ Given its content and provenance, Watkins’s play is clearly part of this trend. When it premiered in 1858, more often than not the Indian was depicted in dramas as ruthless and violent—in short, an obstacle in the path to Americans’ pursuit of happiness. The figure of the ferocious savage gave audiences an opportunity to believe that the mass removal of the indigenous population was preferable to assimilation.

Although Cobb portrayed his story as one based on true events, he omitted a crucial historical detail: during the Revolutionary War, different tribes took different sides. Mohawks led by Thayendanega (also known as Joseph Brant), a chief mentioned repeatedly in both the *Ledger* serial and Watkins’s dramatization, joined forces with the British because they believed the Crown was more likely to offer them land grants and other concessions. Meanwhile, Oneidas, Tuscaroras, and other communities supported the revolutionaries. Alliances were fungible, but neutrality was impossible. As Rosemarie K. Bank points out, citizens never fully forgave the native peoples who supported the British during the revolution. Well

⁹ Richard Moody, *America Takes the Stage: Romanticism in American Drama and Theatre, 1750-1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955), 81; Mason, *Melodrama and the Myth of America*, 34; Charles Dickens, “The Noble Savage,” *Household Words* 7, no. 168 (June 11, 1853): 337-39; Louise K. Barnett, *The Ignoble Savage: American Literary Racism, 1790-1890* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), 12; Robert F. Berkhofer, *The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 95; Roy Harvey Pearce, *The Savages of America: A Study of the Indian and the Idea of Civilization*, rev. ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), 199-200.

¹⁰ Wilmethe, “Noble or Ruthless Savage?,” 52. See also Laura L. Mielke, *Moving Encounters: Sympathy and the Indian Question in Antebellum Literature* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 13.

into the next century, American Indians continued to suffer the consequences. In *The Pioneer Patriot*, the tribes that collaborated with the colonists are forgotten. The only Indians who remain are the “bad” ones—those who scalped and killed the earliest proponents of the fledgling nation.¹¹



Figure 1-2. Illustration of Jane McCrea on the verge of being scalped by American Indians. Samuel Griswold Goodrich, *A Pictorial History of America; Embracing Both the Northern and Southern Portions of the New World* (Hartford, CT: House and Brown, 1850), 595. Courtesy of Queens College Library, City University of New York.

¹¹ Rosemarie K. Bank, *Theatre Culture in America, 1825-1860* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 464. For more on the involvement of native peoples in the Revolutionary War, see, for example, Colin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Joseph T. Glatthaar and James Kirby Martin, *Forgotten Allies: The Oneida Indians and the American Revolution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006); Barbara Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1972); Isabel Thompson Kelsay, *Joseph Brant, 1743-1807* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1984); and Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

In nineteenth century print and visual culture, “the vindictiveness attributed to the Indian is stressed and any admirable characteristics denied,” as Marilyn J. Anderson writes. Louise K. Barnett observes that characters of the “ignoble savage” type:

are given to skulking and lurking, exulting over reeking scalps, uttering chilling cries, and devising fiendish torments for their hapless victims. . . . In addition to practicing a barbaric kind of warfare, bad Indians are treacherous, vengeful, and superstitious. Above all, bad Indians are defined as implacable enemies of whites, the perpetrators of a monotonously repeated pattern of aggression against them.

Or, as Burl Donald Grose succinctly states, “This Indian is good only when dead.”¹² In the immediate wake of the Revolutionary War, images of whites suffering harm at the hands of Indians—particularly Jane McCrea, a woman killed by natives allied with the British in 1777—served as lightning rods for anxieties about ignoble savages. John Vanderlyn’s painting *Death of Jane McCrea* (1804), which Luke Gibbons describes as “one of the most famous artistic representations of the Revolution,” served as a visual archive of anti-Indian sentiment. McCrea continued to be fetishized in visual and material culture well into the nineteenth century. (Figure 1-2) Indeed, McCrea’s scalp of long flowing hair is cited in *The Pioneer Patriot*. After Philip ambushes and kills two Indians in the forest, one of the patriots traveling with him finds the scalp of a woman (identifiable by its long, flowing hair) on one of the bodies. Since Cobb’s tale is set during 1777, it seems likely that this incident invokes the memory of McCrea’s scalp, which was taken from her along with her life.¹³

Cobb and Watkins portray Indians in such a way that their extermination seems both merited and inevitable. At one point in Cobb’s story, the revolutionary rebel Captain Grover laments, “I have seen husbands and fathers butchered before their wives and children! I have seen women murdered without even time for prayer! I have seen infants torn from their parents’ bosoms, and their little heads crushed to atoms while the agonized mothers sued in vain! I have seen the scalp torn from the yet living victim!” Human scalps frequently appear, serving as

¹² Anderson, “Image of the Indian:” 808; Barnett, *Ignoble Savage*, 81; Grose, ““Here Come the Indians,”” 7.

¹³ Luke Gibbons, ““Subtilized into Savages’: Edmund Burke, Progress, and Primitivism,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 86; Kelsay, *Joseph Brant*, 204; Cobb, “Pioneer Patriot,” *Ledger* 13, vol. 34 (October 31, 1857): 1.

constant reminders of the natives' savagery. For example, when Philip is taken captive by a band of Tory-allied Indians, one of the warriors shows him a leather thong upon which five "fresh and gory" scalps are laced. The hero becomes enraged. He finds the spectacle of hair and flesh so disturbing that he loses his composure:

"Go hide your infernal work!" [Philip] cried, unable to contain himself. "Is it not enough that you rob and butcher at the beck of Englishmen, without thus seeking to wreak a bloody vengeance upon the poor, helpless bodies of those whom you have killed?"

"Ugh! Put one more on here, mebbe!" returned the savage, with a shrug of the shoulders and a horrid contortion of the face. "Put on nice one—make just six—half-dozen, you call him. One more—ugh!" And, with another shrug of the broad shoulders, and another abominably horrific working of the ugly face, the red savage walked away.

In this exchange, the Indian's rude primitivism manifests in broken English, grotesque facial expressions, and a macabre joke about collecting Philip's scalp in order to achieve a "half-dozen." Watkins adapts this scene slightly by transforming the nameless brave into the Mohawk chief Mountain Ash. In *The Pioneer Patriot*, this chief serves as a kind of spokesman for the Indians, articulating their ethics and worldview. Instead of threatening to take Philip's scalp, he proffers a sardonic statement of sympathy for the hero when Philip criticizes the Mohawks' war tactics:

M. Ash. See here—(*holding up a scalp*)—this be scalp of your friend.

Philip. Go—hide your infernal work! Is it not enough that you rob and butcher by hire, without thus seeking to wreak a bloody vengeance upon the helpless bodies of those whom you have killed?

M. Ash. Ugh! White man talks brave—pity he lives so short time.

And yet overall, Mountain Ash seems not so much immoral as amoral. On two occasions in Watkins's play, he steps outside the ignoble savage stereotype and makes philosophical statements regarding the supposed superiority of white men. When Philip accuses him of having no honor, the chief replies, "you say *honor*. What is he? Where White man's honor? In shooting down every Indian he find? Yes—yes—yes,—that is White man's honor?" And when Nathan asks him for Philip's scalp, he comments to the audience, "Ugh! White man call Red man *savage*! May-be. Indian can't

see difference!”¹⁴ In this moment, Mountain Ash characterizes Bradbrook as representative of *all* white men. But of course, in the melodramatic world of *The Pioneer Patriot*, Bradbrook is something less than a perfect white man. He is a villain, and therefore his contemptible actions may be explained as moral failings—thereby discounting the chief's comments about the similarities of the white and red races, to a degree.

The extermination of Indians is elevated to spectacle in both the print and dramatic versions of the story. In the *Ledger*, each installment featured a woodcut depicting an event in Cobb's tale. The image accompanying the second installment illustrates an incident that likely thrilled readers and spectators alike: the moment when Philip gingerly approaches an Indian from behind and kills him with his axe.¹⁵ Interestingly, Jocko is the character who seems most invested in the exercise of Indian-killing, and he amasses the greatest body count, too. For example, it is Jocko, not Philip, who shoots and kills Mountain Ash—in full view of the audience—when he rescues his master from the Indians. He murders another Mohawk chief, Kanadandagea; collects his clothing and weapons; and brings the items to Philip, who uses them to impersonate the dead Indian and infiltrate the enemy camp.

Watkins also incorporates a melodramatic “sensation scene” in the second scene of the play, during which Jocko traps two Indians in a burning building and leaves them to roast. The slave perpetrates these murders with a kind of earnest glee, as if it is one of the most important services he can render his master. Watkins even writes jokes for Jocko about the pleasures of Indian-killing. He enthusiastically promises Philip, “If any ob dem copper colored Injun niggers comes in de wercinity ob dese apple stealers, (*holding up his hands,*) by squasherum, I'll choke de red all out ob dem, til dey is bracker dan Ole Jocko.” After he murders Kanadanagea, he tells his master, “By squashey! I'se got de fighten' feber so bad dat I'll neber git worse ob de disease 'till I'se massacred 'bout a hundred o' dem Rory-Torys, an' 'bout a thousand o' dem red-injun niggers!”¹⁶ At one point, Jocko explains to his fellow slave Phillis (a black

¹⁴ Cobb, “Pioneer Patriot,” *Ledger* 13, no. 41 (December 19, 1857): 5; Cobb, “Pioneer Patriot,” *Ledger* 13, no. 38 (November 28, 1857): 5; Watkins, *Pioneer Patriot*, 32-35 (quotations on 34 and 35; emphasis in original).

¹⁵ Cobb, “Pioneer Patriot,” *Ledger* 13, no. 34 (October 31, 1857): 1. The scene is enacted in Act I, scene iii of Watkins, *Pioneer Patriot*, 12.

¹⁶ Watkins, *Pioneer Patriot*, 11, 12, 29-30, and 35. Jocko further demonstrates his expertise by killing a number of Tories. In the final battle scene, which takes place at the Bradbrook estate, soon after Jocko enters the house a Tory with a bloody face is “pushed backward from an upper story window, where he hangs by the

woman who serves the heroine, Isabel) why he so readily murders red men: they do not fit neatly into the racial categories that Jocko understands. This dialogue appears in Cobb's story and is included verbatim in Watkins's adaptation. After telling Phillis how he rescued his master and killed Mountain Ash, she declares,

Phillis. Massys sake, Jocko—you'se killed good many Injuns in your time.

Jocko. Yas, I neber could like dem—kase dey's neider one ting nor toder.

Phillis. Why, what you mean?

Jocko. I mean dat dey's neider wite man nor nigger.¹⁷

Neither white nor black, neither master nor slave, the "Injun" is nothing but trouble. In the world of *The Pioneer Patriot*, it is better, even, to be black than red. A trusty slave like Jocko knows his place and his role, whereas the savage Indian defies assimilation, defies removal, defies categorization. For these reasons, Jocko relishes his work, and is celebrated for it.

The stereotypes of the hostile Indian and the earnest slave reflect a national poetics of race that was firmly in place by 1858. As Roy Pearce, Ronald Takaki, and Alden T. Vaughan have argued, the emergence of the "redskin" as a racial classification took shape over time. When white explorers of the North American continent first encountered the native population, they believed they had stumbled upon a primitive version of themselves—a white but uncivilized people. This differed significantly from European perspectives of Africans. Vaughan explains:

English and American writers ... believed at the outset of England's age of expansion that Africans were inherently and immutably black—a color fraught with pejorative implications—and that therefore Africans were fundamentally unassimilable even if they adopted English ways and beliefs. At the same time, Anglo-Americans believed that American Indians were approximately as light-skinned as Europeans—with all its implications—and thus would be assimilated into colonial society as soon as they succumbed to English social norms and Protestant theology.

legs"—presumably butchered and shoved by the slave. Soon afterward, as the melee reaches its conclusion, Jocko "enters from house with a dead Tory on his shoulder—he pitches him down C[enter]" (58).

¹⁷ Watkins, *Pioneer Patriot*, 39-40.