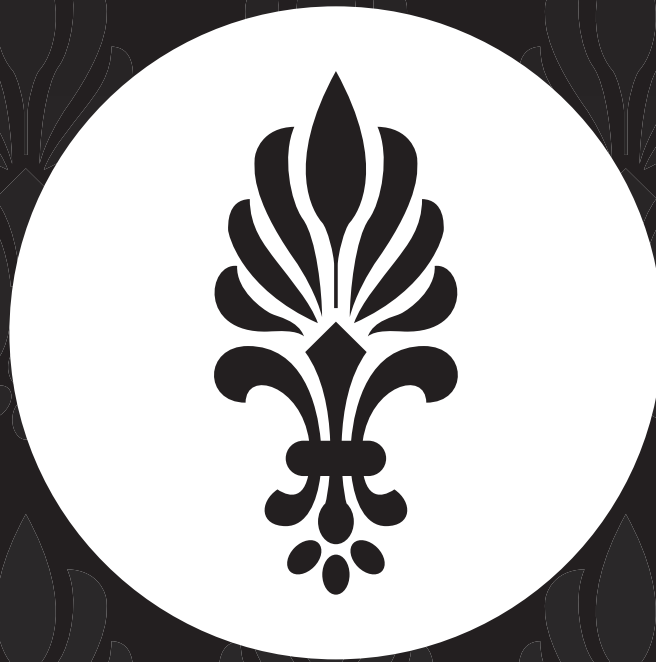


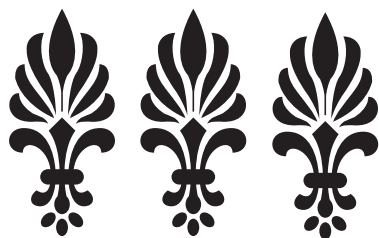
Black in the Baroque

RACISM IN THE SPANISH *VILLANCICO DE NEGRO*

Tyrone Clinton, Jr.



Tyrone Clinton, Jr.
Founder and Director of The Unsung Collective Inc.
New York City, New York
theunsungcollective@gmail.com



As they are known today, *villancicos* are synonymous with Christmas carols that are typically performed in the Spanish and Portuguese languages. They are often a part of the global choral Christmastide repertoire; familiar tunes like “Ríu Ríu Chíu” fill performance venues alongside other festive tunes. The *villancico* dates to the fourteenth century, encompassing a multitude of feast days in the Advent season within the Catholic liturgical calendar. By the Baroque Period, the *villancico* had developed into one of the most elaborately performed musical genres on the Iberian Peninsula. Over time, the dissemination of the *villancico* style led to *villancico* subtypes, some of which are still performed in Spain and its former colonies in Latin America. Of those subgenres, the *villancico de negro* was uniquely designed to serve as a form of comedic relief within the church in Spain and its colonized regions, and remains so in twenty-first-century repertoire. Scholarship on the *villancico* continues to grow; however, content discussing performance of the *villancico de negro* in a contemporary setting is far more rare. Its performance raises several critical concerns.

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Philosophy on Race

Given the racially charged background of the *villancico de negro*, it is necessary to dissect the manifestation and the evolution of race and racial constructs. Most are familiar with the twentieth-century subdivisions of race advocated by anthropologist and Harvard professor Carleton S. Coon. He categorized people by physical characteristics into the following (Blumenbach-influenced) subsets based on region and phenotype: White Race/Caucasoid, Negroid/Congoid, Mongoloid, Australoid, and Capoid.¹ Borrowing heavily from Franz Weidenreich, Coon's theory supported scientific racism by using science/empirical data to justify its claims.² Fortunately, Coon's theory was consistently challenged and was ultimately proven to be pseudoscientific.

The justification of racial bias based on biological factors existed before the twentieth century, as observed with Louis Agassiz, Georges Cuvier, James Cowles Pritchard, and Charles Pickering. These nineteenth-century anthropologists studied skin color, physical appearance, and cranial form, concluding there were racial differences in intelligence and that negroes were designed to be inferior and destined to be enslaved.³ Contrary to these polygenesis theorists was Charles Darwin, who refuted the idea of the human species having many ancestors.⁴ Instead, Darwin was a monogenist, believing physical attributes were the result of natural selection and survival.⁵ These differing opinions are not just found in the recent past; monogenist views preceded Darwin in the eighteenth century in the writings of Immanuel Kant, David Hume, and the father of racial anthropology, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach,⁶ while the seventeenth-century philosopher Francois Bernier supported pseudoscientific theories on race.⁷

The Iberian Peninsula was one of the first regions in Europe where people articulated anti-Black attitudes. While capitalizing on the enslavement of Black Africans, the Spanish and the Portuguese borrowed Arab-influenced concepts of slavery. Darker-skinned Africans were supposedly physically and mentally better suited for menial labor, and were therefore given harsher and more laborious tasks than lighter-skinned slaves.⁹ Through this belief and their structural design of slavery, Iberian Christians believed Black Africans were indeed inferior. The Spanish and the Portuguese continued these prac-

tices into the New World with Native American peoples.⁹

W.E.B. Du Bois introduced a new philosophy of race theory in the late nineteenth century when he traveled to Berlin and challenged the theories of German scholars who purported to base their constructs of race on science. Du Bois argued that there are "at least two, perhaps three, great families of human beings—the whites and Negroes, possibly the yellow race," expanding on their differences in his essay, "The Conservation of Race".¹⁰

"What, then, is race? It is a vast family of human beings, generally of common blood and language, always of common history, traditions and impulses, who are both voluntarily and involuntarily striving together for the accomplishment of certain more or less vividly conceived ideals of life."¹¹

Du Bois viewed race as a social construct, rejecting the reduction of spiritual differences to biological differences. In accordance with his philosophy, there are undeniable factors that define a given race of a people, which include a shared history, traditions, impulses, and both voluntary and involuntary strivings.¹² He refuted the faulty connection of race to biological factors such as blood, lineage, and physical attributes. Although theories of race based on white supremacist agendas live on, the philosophy of race constructed by W.E.B. Du Bois is widely accepted today.

Function of the *Villancico*

Liturgically, Spanish churches initially used *villancicos* as replacements for responsories in Matins and other feast day services to offer relief through light-hearted themes. Composers began setting texts for large sets of *villancicos*, averaging eight per set (including a *villancico de negro*), concluding with a setting of the Te Deum.¹³ Some chapel masters were required to supply between sixty and seventy new *villancicos* per year.¹⁴

Maintaining its fanciful nature, the seventeenth-century *villancico* genre grew to incorporate figures of politics, peasant life, and other ethnic groups.¹⁵ *Villancicos* with ethnic characters began to accrue titles such as

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gitanos, *guineos*, *negrillos*, and *negros*. These specific titles imply that the corresponding *villancico* portrayed African or indigenous characters, thus creating the subgenre the *villancico de negro*. These choral pieces explored a multitude of topics and issues concerning race, ethnicity, and gender representation as portrayed by Spaniards, the Spanish Church, and Latin Americans from the late sixteenth century through the subgenre's early nineteenth-century decline.

Music of the *villancico de negro*

The form of the sixteenth-century *villancico* is relatively free but is consistent in having two components: the *estribillo* and the *copla*. Most *villancicos* are in three or four voice parts and are similar in style to other Renaissance genres: homophonic, with the text written in the upper

voice; or contrapuntal, with paired voices set in a low tessitura. Most *villancicos* were performed unaccompanied. Several seventeenth-century *villancicos* included continuo instruments, with some being composed for small chamber ensemble. Examples of such scores can be found in the *Cancionero de Palacio*, which is currently located in the *Biblioteca Nacional de España*. Compiled in the 1470s, this Iberian songbook originally contained 548 works, with an additional eleven added in the following half-century.¹⁶ The surviving manuscript was transcribed and published in 1890 with the title “*Cancionero musical de los siglos XV y XVI*” (Musical Songbook of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries) by Spanish musicologist Francisco Asenjo Barbieri.¹⁷ The songbook has 458 surviving entries; Juan Ponce’s *Allá se me ponga el Sol* (259) is a good example of the homophonic style (Figure 1).

The example also demonstrates prevalent rhythmic

The musical score is for a four-part setting of "Allá se me ponga el Sol". It is written in 3/4 time and features four voices: Tiple (Soprano), Contr. (Alto), Tenor, and Contra. (Bass). The score begins with a repeat sign and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are written below the staves, with the Tiple part having the most text. The score ends with a "Fin" marking and a repeat sign. The bottom right of the score is marked "D. C. §".

Figure 1. Juan Ponce, *Cancionera de Palacio*, “Allá se me ponga el Sol”

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characteristics, described succinctly by Deborah Singer: “There are syncopation, onomatopoeias and different rhythmic combinations that, on the one hand, seek to generate a lively sound and, on the other hand, project the idea that Black men and women have a ‘natural inclination’ toward music and dances.”¹⁸

The seventeenth-century *villancico* took on styles represented in other European countries, specifically Italy. Seventeenth-century Italian music observed an emphasis on melody and focused on solo performance, instruments and instrumental forms, with a more established concept of tonality. Italian forms also built an emphasis on chordal and tertian relationships.

Development of Black Characters in Spanish Literature

The text of the *villancico de negro*, which depicts African slaves from the point of view of the slaveholding class, has a background in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Iberian literature.

The African population in sixteenth-century Seville was 7.4 percent, notably higher than any other area of Europe.¹⁹ With the rise of this population, Black characters and their commercialized place in society began appearing in literature (like *villancicos*) and different forms of theater. Though the earliest examples are found in Portugal, Spain soon followed the trend.²⁰ By the 1600s, Golden Era poets and playwrights, such as Lope de Vega (1562-1635) and Miguel Cervantes (1547-1616), formed negative stereotypes of Blacks in literature that would become a mold or an archetype for later reference.²¹ Lope de Vega capitalized on Black characters in his plays, establishing them according to formulaic stereotypes: they were typically from Africa, they spoke a dialect known as *habla de negros*, and they worked in areas of craftsmanship, textile manufacturing, manual labor, and farming.²² Evidence of such characters can be viewed in plays such as *La madre de la mejor*, *La limpieza no manchada*, and *El Santo negro Rosambuco de la ciudad de Palermo*.²³

In contrast, there are examples of Blacks portrayed as “good” characters who possess more complete personalities and character traits than those in the stereotypical satires. For example, in Lope de Vega’s *El Negro del mejor amo*, a Black prince named Antiobo defends the

Sardinians from the Turks. In Andrés de Claramonte’s *El valiente negro de Flandés*, Juan de Mérida is a Black man who serves under the Duke of Alba, becoming a leader in the Dutch Wars as a general who was seen as part of the nobility.^{24, 25} Although born slaves, they adopted Christianity, spoke perfect Castilian Spanish, fought other European countries on behalf of Castile, and generally became examples of noble sacrifice and conduct for viceregal Spain. These Black characters’ lives came to resemble the lives of the Spaniards they served; indeed, they became more white.

Habla de negros in the Villancico de negro

Habla de negros is a transcription by the slaveholding class of the varieties of Spanish spoken by Africans kidnapped into slavery. Like literary versions of slave dialect in the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these linguistic variations are transcribed into the language of the ruling class as a series of errors: apharesis, phoneme modification by accent, and added or shortened syllables are recorded on the page as misspellings, mispronunciations, and gender pronoun errors in a way that strikes the intended audience as lazy or comical.²⁶ *Habla de negros* also incorporates manufactured words to imitate places and instruments born of Africa eschewing authentic African music making. European-derived percussion instruments were used to imitate the sounds of African instruments, as the tambourine and the rebec were both referenced by Tomás and Anton as instruments of praise in the same *villancico de negro* by Padilla.²⁷ Also, the use of the words “casú” and “cucumbé” have no African-derived significance in this context but are used in Gaspar Fernandes’ “*Eso rigor e repente*,” as the characters dance to the Spanish *Sarabanda*.²⁸

Lastly, *habla de negros* encouraged misrepresenting the origin of African people. Africans’ homes were often referred to as Guinea (a country) and Timbuktu (a city). While both of those places exist in Africa, and were obviously known to Europeans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many other African slave ports of North and Central Africa were disregarded.²⁹

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Stereotypes in the *Villancico de negro*

Analyzing the function and articulation of text as observed in the *habla de negros* demonstrates the way Africans were portrayed in Spanish literature from the fifteenth through the nineteenth centuries. As previously mentioned, African characters played specific stereotyped roles in Spanish literature of this era, which in the

villancico de negro included masters of the dance, childlike figures lacking education, and beings that were less than human but capable of overcoming their primitive state through Christianity and devotion to the Virgin Mary. In this excerpt from Juan Gutiérrez de Padilla's "*Ah siolo Flasiquiyo*," the first of these stereotypes is apparent, as the two characters discuss a responsibility and devotion to dance (Table 1).

Table 1. Excerpt from Juan Gutiérrez de Padilla's *Ah siolo Flasiquiyo*. Translation by the author

Habla de negros	Spanish	English translation
"¿A siolo flasiquiyo!"	<i>Ah señor Francisco!</i>	Ah, Mr. Francisco!
"¿Qué manda siol Thome?"	<i>Que manda, señor Tomás?</i>	What's up, Mr. Tomás?
"¿Tenemo tura trumenta templarita cum cunsielta?"	<i>Tenemos todos instrumentos templadito con conciencia?</i>	Do we have all the instruments tuned up together?
"Si siolo ven poté avisa bosa misé que sa lo molemo ya cayendo de pularrisa y muliendo pol baylá"	<i>Si, señor venga podré avisar vuestra Merced que está el Moreno ya cayendo de pur risa y moriendo para bailar</i>	Yes sir, I can tell Your Grace that the dark-skinned one is already falling about with laughter and dying to start dancing."
"llámalo llámalo aplisa que a veniro lo branco ya y lo niño aspelandosa y se aleglalá ha-ha ha-ha con lo zambamba ha-ha ha- ha..."	<i>llámalos llámalos aprisa que a venirlo blanco ya y el niño esperando y se alegrará ha-ha ha-ha con la zambomba ha-ha ha- ha...</i>	"Call them out quickly, for the white one has come now and the resplendent Child is waiting, and he will rejoice, ha ha ha ha!, with the zambomba (drum), ha ha ha ha!...
"Si siñolo Thome repicamo lo rabe ya la panderetiyo Antón baylalemo lo neglo al son."	<i>Si señor Tomás Repicamos el rabe y ya a la pandereta Antón bailaremos los negros al son.</i>	Yes, Mr. Tomás, we'll strum the rebec and Antón jingling the tambourine, all we Black people will dance to their sounds.

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Note the obligation to bring joy through dancing and the playing of instruments. Also note the juxtaposition of white and dark in this text: the “white one” is the character of importance, while the “dark-skinned one” is ready to serve the white person through movement, as it makes everyone happy, including the “Black people.” The responsibility highlighted is servitude through dance and to make haste, as it is disrespectful to keep the white man waiting.

It is not surprising that these *villancicos*, consistent with the subgenre as a whole, affirm the idea of African people as inferior to Europeans. *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*, however, provides a far more rare example of a *villancico* that highlights the actual servitude, work conditions, and laborious experiences endured by most Africans in Spain and New Spain. In the following *villancico*, *Sor Juana* depicts emotions experienced by African characters that depart from the stereotypical happiness-in-servitude found in *villancicos de negro* and mentions a real workplace for slaves: textile mills (Table 2).

It was quite unusual for seventeenth-century (specifically 1676) New Spain literature to depict the harsh reality of Black slaves as well as exploring “sadness” and

“darkness” as mentioned by one of the two characters. The *villancico* also mentions being “left in the textile mills,” a place notorious for terrible working conditions for Africans in Mexico.³¹

African Origin in the *Villancico de negro*

Another feature of the subgenre is the use of African-influenced words to further implement an idea of Africanness. As previously mentioned, often in the *villancico de negro* a reference to the African character’s homeland is made, as in this example, Gaspar Fernandes’ *Eso rigor e’ repente*, referencing Timbuktu, Guinea, and São Tomé, as well as instruments and dances meant to represent Africa (Table 3 on page 41).

Notice the use of whiteness against blackness. The Black Guineans dance on Christmas Eve in celebration of the baby boy (Jesus), who is white. The characters mention, “Tonight we will be white,” signifying that being closer to Christ is akin to being closer to whiteness. This is consistent with the characters in the literature of Lope de Vega and Miguel Cervantes. The use of the

Table 2. Excerpt from *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz villancico*

Habla de negros	Spanish	English translation
<i>Igualé yolale</i>	<i>Igualé lloraré</i>	I will weep
<i>Flacico, de pena</i>	<i>Flacico, de pena</i>	Flacico, with sadness
<i>Que nos deja ascula</i>	<i>Que nos deja oscura</i>	As all us Blacks
<i>A turo las Neglas</i>	<i>A todas las negras</i>	Are left in the dark
...
<i>Déjame yolá</i>	<i>Déjame llorar,</i>	Let me weep,
<i>Flacico, pol Ella,</i>	<i>Flacico, como ella</i>	Flacico, as She
<i>Que se va, y nosotlo</i>	<i>Que se va nosotros</i>	Is leaving, while we
<i>La Oblaje nos dejà.</i>	<i>Las obrajes nos dejà..</i>	Are left in the textile mills ³⁰

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words “zumba,” “casú,” and “cucumbé” have no true significance. The characters move to a European-derived Sarabande (a stately dance form in triple meter), while saying “zumba, casú, and cucumbé” once dancing has commenced.³²

In addition to the pseudo-African texts, this *villancico* uses not one, but two proposed regional birthplaces of

enslaved Africans. Notice how the composer Gaspar Fernandes juxtaposed two African regions against one another, stating that the Africans from Angola are more “ugly” than those from Guinea.

Another common reference to an African birthplace is Timbuktu, as observed in Padilla’s *Ah siolo Flasiqiyo*. Here, Flasiqiyo (Francisco) and Tomás play instru-

Table 3. Excerpt from Gaspar Fernandes’ *Eso rigor e’ repente*. Translation by the author

Habla de negros	Spanish	English translation
<i>Eso rigor e’ repente:</i>	<i>Eso digo de repente:</i>	I say that suddenly:
<i>juro a qui se niyo siquito,</i>	<i>juro que ese niño chico,</i>	I swear that little boy,
<i>aunque nace poco</i>	<i>aunque nace un poco</i>	although he is born a little white,
<i>branquito turu</i>	<i>blanco,</i>	is our brother.
<i>somo noso parente.</i>	<i>de nosotros es hermano.</i>	We do not fear the great
<i>No tememo branco grande...</i>	<i>No tememos al gran blanco...</i>	white...
<i>-Toca negriyo tamboriyo</i>	<i>Toca negrito el tamborcito</i>	Play the tambourine Black one
<i>Canta, parente:</i>	<i>Canta, hermano:</i>	Sing, brother:
<i>“Sarabanda tenge que tenge,</i>	<i>“Zarabanda baila que baila,</i>	“Zarabanda dances the dance,
<i>sumbacasú cucumbé”.</i>	<i>Zumba casú cucumbé”.</i>	Zumba casú cucumbé”.
<i>Ese noche branco seremo,</i>	<i>Esta noche blancos seremos,</i>	Tonight we will be white,
<i>O Jesu que risa tenemo.</i>	<i>Oh, Jesús, que risa tenemos...</i>	Oh, Jesus, what a laugh we have...
<i>Vamo negro de Guinea...</i>	<i>Vamos negros de Guinea</i>	Let's go Black ones from Guinea
<i>No vamo negro de Angola,</i>	<i>no vayan negros de Angola,</i>	do not go Black ones of Angola,
<i>que sa turu negla fea.</i>	<i>que son todos negros feos.</i>	They are all ugly Blacks.
<i>Queremo que niño vea</i>	<i>Queremos que el niño vea</i>	We want the child to see
<i>negro pulizo y galano,</i>	<i>negros pulidos y hermosos,</i>	polished and beautiful Blacks,
<i>que como sa noso hermano,</i>	<i>que, como es nuestro hermano,</i>	that, as he is our brother,
<i>tenemo ya fantasia.</i>	<i>tenemos un gran deseo.</i>	we have a great desire.

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ments as they welcome baby Jesus. They sing the word “Tumbucutú” to remind them of home (Figure 2).

In the second *copla*, the characters reference Guinea as the place where “All Blacks are/come from” (“Turu

neglo de Guinea”), reinforcing the Euro-centric perspective of Africa as a monolithic land and not the ethnically and culturally diverse continent that it really is (Figure 3 on page 43).

94 **Respensión a 6**

Tum - bu - cu - tú, cu - tú, cu - tú, y to -

Tum - cu - cu - tú, cu - tú, cu - tú, Tum - bu - cu -

Tum - cu - cu - tú, cu - tú, cu - tú, y to - que - mo pa -

Tum - cu - cu - tú, cu - tú, cu - tú, y to - que - mo pa -

Tum - bu - cu - tú, cu - tú, cu - tú, tum - bu - cu -

Tum - bu - cu - tú, cu - tú, cu - tú, y to - que - mo pa -

99

que - mo pa - si - to, que - ri - to, y to - que - mo pa -

tú, y to - que - mo pa - si - to, que -

si - to, que - ri - to, tum - bu - cu - tú, y to - que - mo pa -

si - to, que - ri - to, que - ri - to, y to - que - mo pa -

tú, y to - que - mo pa - si - to, que - ri - to,

si - to, que - ri - to, tum - bu - cu - tú,

Figure 2. Juan Gutiérrez de Padilla, *Ah siolo Flasiquiyo*, mm. 94–103.
Modern transcription by Aurelio Tello

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Africans and African descendants were present on the Iberian Peninsula before sixteenth-century colonialism began, brought there during the Moorish/North African slave rule/slave trade in the Middle Ages.³³ The Black African slave trade on the Iberian Peninsula was primarily dominated by Portuguese traders, who developed networks in regions of North Africa and the sub-Saharan regions that correspond to the modern nation-states of Niger, Senegal, and Sudan.³⁴ By the fifteenth century, Portugal expanded slave trade networks farther south into West Africa, including areas that are roughly equivalent to the modern nation-states of Mali, Guinea, and Nigeria. Again, the regions and places stated in the songs were used to define an idea of Africanness from a European perspective and, as mentioned, Timbuktu and Guinea are often referenced as home for all African *villancico* characters, indeed, as the origin of all African people. This falsely posits the idea that Africa is an ethnically and culturally homogenous land, regardless of region.

Black Character Roles

In addition to the *habla de negros*, *villancicos de negro* feature African people as emotionally limited characters with specific, narrow roles in society. As previously observed, African characters are restricted to masters of dance, childlike figures with very limited education, and laborers at the bottom of society who find solace through Christianity. These character roles can be seen in many other forms of music literature (as observed in opera, art songs, and minstrelsy), extending well beyond the Spanish-speaking world, and reflecting the ubiquity of enslaved Black people.

In the United States, the portrayal of Black people through the twentieth century in vocal repertoire, theatre, film, and other forms of media upheld analogous roles to that of the *villancico de negro*. Minstrelsy, which began in the United States in the early 1800s (not long after the decline of the *villancico*), included white people in blackface acting as caricatures of Black people: dim-witted and uneducated, almost always happy, and very superstitious.³⁵ Minstrelsy was typified by the fictional character Jim Crow: a racist trope, based on a physically disabled African slave who resided in the South that was commercialized in 1832 by performer

124 Copla a Dúo

Tenor

Bajo

1. Tu - ru ne - glio de Gui - ne - a que ve - ni - mo
ha de tla - é su cri - a - ra, mun gla - ve con

130

com - bi - ra - ra, y plu - que lo bran - co ve - a
su li - ble - a,

com - bi - ra - ra, y plu - que lo bran - co ve - a
su li - ble - a,

Figure 3. Juan Gutiérrez de Padilla, *Ah siolo Flasiqúyo*, mm. 124–135.
Modern transcription by Aurelio Tello

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Thomas Dartmouth “Daddy” Rice.³⁶ By the late nineteenth century, state and local laws in the southern United States that sanctioned racial segregation came to be known as Jim Crow laws.³⁷ During minstrelsy’s heyday, Blacks were encouraged to take part in minstrel shows, and the genre is thought to have given Blacks a platform for legitimate entertainment performance in the early twentieth century.

Knowing the *villancico de negro* has a history of liturgical use and was intended to be joyous, one would think, perhaps, that the subgenre would connect to other contemporary sacred choral genres. Instead, it is more reminiscent of the secular genre of minstrelsy. While the *villancico de negro* was most often performed in churches,

and minstrelsy was usually performed in taverns and theatres, the two genres have more in common than not. Emotionally, both genres exhibited adults behaving like children, with the characters presented as buffoonish. Both promoted the idea that Black people are immature and lack the ability to develop emotions and language. And, although the *villancico de negro* was not performed in blackface, the theatrical elements and caricatures it shares with blackface minstrelsy encourage racism (Photos 1 and 2).

Today, minstrelsy remains a part of the choral repertoire. Aaron Copland’s “Ching-A-Ring Chaw,” arranged for both solo voice and chorus and published in 1952 as a part of his *Old American Songs*, is a prime example.³⁸ This song can be heard on many contemporary recordings and in a plethora of concert venues performed by college and professional choirs throughout the United States. In fact, performance of this music is a practice valorized by many educational institutions within the United States, which choose to see the art first and its historically racist context as secondary.³⁹



Photo 1. *The Adoration of the King, Spain 1612*
by Juan Batista Maino



Photo 2. *The character Jim Crow introduced by*
Thomas Dartmouth Rice in the 1830s.

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Challenges of Performance

There are clear challenges and justifiable reservations when performing the *villancicos de negro* in a contemporary environment in which the concepts of race, class, and gender have advanced beyond what they were in the Baroque Period. Yet, *villancicos de negro* have been performed in the United States and, on a much larger scale, are currently performed in Spanish-speaking countries during Advent season.

There is a continuing tradition of singing *villancicos* during the Christmas season in Spain and Latin America, where the genre is not necessarily seen as offensive, but instead is viewed as an old and venerated tradition. In the Spanish-speaking world, attitudes regarding race have developed differently from those of the United States. The words *negro(a)*, *negrito(a)*, *moreno(a)*, *morenito(a)* are modern Spanish terms used to refer to the darker pigmentation of someone's skin, though often without a pejorative tone. For instance, calling someone "the dark/Black one" in Spanish-speaking countries is often used as a term of endearment and not necessarily negative, nor an indication of race.⁴⁰ While the terms may have other connotations, their use in music, literature, and everyday speech make them familiar, not the equivalent of calling someone "the Black/dark one" in the United States, where the terms *nigger*, *nig'ra*, *negroid*, *mulatto*, *sambo*, and *darky*, are clearly slurs or pejoratives.⁴¹ These words reflect a brutal history that is connected exclusively to Black people and Black culture in a manner that is rooted in white supremacy.

It is important to note that some of the most celebrated pieces of vocal music in the Western Canon exoticize non-Western cultures through the composer's perspective. For example, Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, *Turandot*, and Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* all exoticize Asian cultures. Over time, artists of the Western world have developed methods to perform caricaturizing literature of previous time periods. Modernization has become a tool to reinvent plotlines, staging, and landscapes to become stories of the present, as seen in the Metropolitan Opera's 2020 production of Handel's *Agrippina*, and Opera Philadelphia's 2015 production of Verdi's *La Traviata*.^{42, 43, 44}

Program notes can help educate an audience and give pertinent contextual information of the literature being

performed. Notes allow audiences to become familiar with performers, access anecdotal information about historical data, and preview salient features of the music. The absence of such information can leave audiences blind to the context in which the works were created, as well as the composer's or performer's intent. While notes can supply an audience with the tools necessary to help them understand historical material, their effectiveness is called into question in regard to *villancicos de negro*, where notes would need to explain or even justify Black characters and caricatures, in the same way that notes have attempted to explain blackface in minstrelsy. A "Historically Informed Performance" (HIP) of the genre would call for white people to perform the characters of the *villancico de negro*. Casting a Black person is equally as problematic.

Though, blackface was not a part of the performance of *villancicos de negro*, it has been employed for centuries in vocal music of the Western canon that calls for darker pigmented characters.⁴⁵ In both Verdi's and Rossini's operas based on Shakespeare's *Otello*, the title character is traditionally placed in blackface (Photo 3). As recently as 2012, The Metropolitan Opera Verdi's *Otello* featured a tenor in blackface; in 2015 it discontinued this practice.⁴⁶ While this is a step forward for The Met, other



Photo 3. Tenor Plácido Domingo performing the title role in blackface in the Metropolitan Opera's 1994 production of *Otello*.

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notable opera companies around the world have yet to establish the same practice.

Despite cultural differences between the United States and Spain and its colonized regions, access to explanatory and contextualizing program notes, and evolving casting decisions, providing the *villancico de negro* performance platforms presents challenges that cannot be adequately addressed through these avenues.

Conclusion

There are a number of highly regarded early-music specialists who perform *villancicos de negro* in concert today, including Teresa Paz with Ars Longa Cuba, Eloy Cruz and Tembembe Ensamble Continuo in Mexico, and, perhaps the most prominent, Jordi Savall with Hespèrion XX/XXI in Spain. Each offers a well-crafted justification for offering these works in concert settings, as Savall does here:

“That the advantage of being aware of the past enables us to be more responsible and therefore morally obliges us to take a stand against these inhuman practices. The music in this programme represents the true living history of that long and painful past...We also want to draw attention to the fact that, at the beginning of the third millennium, this tragedy is still ongoing for more than 30 million human beings...We need to speak out in indignation and say that humanity is not doing what it should to put an end to slavery and other related forms of exploitation.”⁴⁷

For centuries, the *villancico de negro*'s comedic content has mocked Black people largely through the use of caricatures, *habla de negros*, and a false representation of African culture. The caricatures dehumanize Black people as a group who are content being enslaved, portrayed through *habla de negros* as dull-witted Black characters whose falsely stereotyped faults are comical. In addition to these textual issues, the music of the *villancico de negro* takes on forms of other European genres of the time (madrigal, chanson, cantata), further endorsing a false idea of African music and culture. The

music of the *villancico de negro*, supposedly reflecting Black culture, is European by design, imitating sounds of Africa through the lens of slaveholders.

Villancicos de negro promote racism in a way that is reflective of other racist art forms in the Global North, as observed in minstrelsy, American art songs, and opera; performance of the genre ignores and repudiates the brutal past of white supremacy. Despite Savall's rationalization, the time has come to recognize the protracted damaging effects of such art. This musical history exists on paper for historical reference; it has no place in song. □

NOTES

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- ³ John David Smith and Randall M. Miller, *Dictionary of Afro-American Slavery* (United Kingdom: Praeger, 1997), 31.
- ⁴ Adrian Desmond, James Moore, and Janet Browne, “Darwin, Charles Robert (1809–1882), naturalist, geologist, and originator of the theory of natural selection,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. (Sep. 2004), Accessed 28 July 2020, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-7176>.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Michael James and Adam Burgos, “Race” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2020 Edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/race/>.
- ⁷ Ibid.
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- ¹⁰ Robert Gooding-Williams, “W.E.B. Du Bois,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2020), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/dubois/>.
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- ¹⁵ Tess Knighton, Alvaro Torrente, ed., *Devotional Music in the Iberian World, 1450-1800: The Villancico and Related Genres* (New York: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2007), 407.
- ¹⁶ Francisco A. Barbieri, "Summary," in Cancionero Musical de Palacio: Biblioteca Digital Hispánica, Biblioteca Nacional de España, accessed Nov. 20, 2018, <http://bdh.bne.es/bnearch/Search.do>.
- ¹⁷ Francisco A. Barbieri, "Summary."
- ¹⁸ Deborah Singer, "Inclusion Politics/Subalternization Practices: The Construction of Ethnicity in Villancicos de Negros of the Cathedral of Santiago de Guatemala (16th-18th Centuries)," *Revista de Historia*, 80 (2019), <https://www.revistas.una.ac.cr/index.php/historia/article/view/13113/18215>.
- ¹⁹ K. Meira Goldberg, Walter Aaron Clark, and Antoni Pizà, *Transatlantic Malagueñas and Zapateados in Music, Song and Dance: Spaniards, Natives, Africans, Roma* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019), 9.
- ²⁰ Isabel Pope, Paul R. Laird, "Villancico."
- ²¹ At the time Lope de Vega and Cervantes were born, Spain had a large population of Moriscos, forcibly converted from Islam following the fall of Granada. Starting in the sixteenth century, many of these were exiled to Africa, their (partial) ancestral homeland of eight centuries earlier.
- ²² Frida Weber de Kurlat, "El Tipo del Negro en el Teatro de Lope de Vega: tradición y creación," *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica*, 19, no. 2 (1970): 343-46.
- ²³ Frida Weber de Kurlat, "El Tipo del Negro," 343-46.
- ²⁴ Andrew Sobiesuo, "Images of Blacks and Africa in Spanish Literature," *Journal of Dagaare Studies* 2, (2002), <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.520.5856&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.
- ²⁵ These fictional characters are all inspired by the real life of Juan Latino (1518-1596), a Black professor in sixteenth-century Granada, Spain. Juan Latino was born Juan de Sessa and served as a slave to Spanish warrior Gonzalo de Córdoba for the first several years of his life. Sessa adopted Christianity and learned to read literature from the books of Córdoba's son, eventually becoming the son's tutor. The honorary last name "Latino" acknowledged his exceptional scholarship in Latin. He graduated with honors in 1557 from the University of Granada, where he then assumed a professorship.
- ²⁶ Drew Davies, 7.
- ²⁷ Juan Gutierrez de Padilla, Aurelio Tello rev., "Tres Cuadernos de Navidad: 1653, 1655, 1657," [http://www3.cpdl.org/wiki/index.php/Tres_Cuadernos_de_Navidad:_1653,_1655,_1657_\(Juan_Gutierrez_de_Padilla\)](http://www3.cpdl.org/wiki/index.php/Tres_Cuadernos_de_Navidad:_1653,_1655,_1657_(Juan_Gutierrez_de_Padilla)).
- ²⁸ The word "cucumbé" has no relevance to the South American "cumbe" dance in this context.
- ²⁹ The pseudo idea of *habla de negros* is in no way congruent to the texts of African American spirituals. *Habla de negros* was composed by white people in Spain to mock Black slaves. The texts of spirituals are born of rich oral traditions of enslaved Black people in the United States, and designed to preserve Black culture and religion.
- ³⁰ Tess Knighton, et al., ed., *Devotional Music in the Iberian World*, 404.
- ³¹ Ibid., 404.
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- ³³ Geoff Baker, "Latin American Baroque," 444.
- ³⁴ Carl Skutsch, *Encyclopedia of the World's Minorities* (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2013), 32.
- ³⁵ John Kenrick, "A History of the Musical: Minstrel Shows," *Musicals* 101, Musicals101.com/minstrel.htm.
- ³⁶ Bruce Bartlett, *Wrong on Race: The Democratic Party's Buried Past* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Publishings, 2008), 24.
- ³⁷ Bruce Bartlett, *Wrong on Race*, 24.
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- ⁴⁰ John Betancur, *Cedric Herring Reinventing Race, Reinventing Racism* (BRILL, 2012), 55.
- ⁴¹ Kobi K. Kambo, *African/Black psychology*, 184.
- ⁴² The Metropolitan Opera, *Agrippina*, Accessed May 5,

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2020, <https://www.metopera.org/user-information/new-production-videos/2019-20-season-new-production-videos/>.

⁴³ Grace Mairano, "Classic Opera Reborn with Modern Viewpoints," *The Temple News*, September 29, 2015, <https://temple-news.com/classic-opera-reborn-with-modern-viewpoints/>.

⁴⁴ The Metropolitan Opera's 2020 production of Handel's *Agrippina* directed by David McVicar places the ancient Roman story in an eighteenth-century setting. Opera Philadelphia's 2015 production of *La Traviata* directed by Paul Curran.

⁴⁵ Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 116.

⁴⁶ Aria Umezawa, "Met's Otello casting begs the question: Is Whitewash Better than Blackface?" *The Globe and Mail*, August 7, 2015, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/mets-otello-casting-begs-the-question-is-whitewash-better-than-blackface/article25879634/>.

⁴⁷ Jordi Savall, trans. by Jacqueline Minett, "Les Routes De L'Esclavage," <https://www.alia-vox.com/en/catalogue/les-rutes-de-lesclavatge/>.



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