



Imitation Nation: Red, White, and Blackface in Early and Antebellum US Literature

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around for two hundred years in America. Peart's book and its emphasis on the art of lobbying should point historians towards new avenues of inquiry. Since lobbyists exerted so much influence over tariffs, one can only ponder how much influence they had in other areas of nineteenth-century public policy.

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Imitation Nation: Red, White, and Blackface in Early and Antebellum US

Literature, by Jason Richards, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017, Pp. 244, \$45.00 (hbk), \$45.00 (e-book), ISBN 9780813940649, ISBN 9780813940656

In *Imitation Nation*, Jason Richards takes up the well-established topic of blackface performance in early and antebellum American literature, and he makes a valuable contribution to the scholarship in that area by expanding his focus to take in other forms of racial mimesis. These other forms include not only the redface and whiteface mentioned in the volume's title but also the cultural mimesis of "playing British" (p. 57). Registering the forms of multidirectional boundary crossings involved in these practices allows Richards to build on multiple schools of critical theory: understanding whiteface, especially, draws on postcolonial formulations of mimicry as well as the other kinds of imitation and mimesis that Eric Lott influentially formulated as "love and theft."

Richards's book embraces the complexity of these imitations and works through them to achieve an admirable clarity of insight. For example, his argument acknowledges that while "white performances of redface and blackface contain subversive energies [...], these performances also work to consolidate a powerful white nationalism" (p. 9). Richards does not let these contrary tendencies stand in unresolved opposition, however; he demonstrates how the fascination with Indian culture inherent in redface performance becomes part of, rather than qualifying, the white settlers' logic of white American separatism. By imagining themselves to be "Native American and British all at once" and therefore, paradoxically, neither fully Native American nor British, the settlers found a way to think of themselves as American (p. 18).

The power of this logic comes through especially clearly in Richards's reading of Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly*, in which the eponymous Huntly kills a group of Indians and becomes "red" by immersion in the blood of those he exterminated: Richards writes that Huntly "imitates while repressing the Indian, goes native while executing the agenda of white colonial supremacy" (p. 38). That scene of Brown's novel has received a good deal of critical attention, but Richards adds a new layer of interpretation by suggesting that Huntly becomes a metaphorical redcoat because he is "not only playing Indian but the virtual opposite as well: playing British," as his violence "echoes the enforcement of British imperialism not just in the American colonies but in Great Britain's other holdings as well" (p. 57). Richards solidifies this link with an ingenious reading of the bayonet with which Huntly kills the last of these Natives.

In a subsequent chapter on James Fenimore Cooper's work, particularly *The Pioneers*, Richards takes up another element of playing British. As Richards reads it, *The Pioneers* remakes British nostalgia for pre-Norman, Anglo-Saxon Britain in an American context where

settlers can portray Native Americans both as embodying Anglo-Saxon freedoms and natural law, on the one hand, and on the other, as a tool by which those settlers can co-opt those virtues and eliminate the Natives themselves. In this case, Richards sees the rhetoric of white purity, including Natty Bumppo's, undermined by repeated suggestions of questionable ancestry and possible miscegenation. A similar kind of reversal takes place in the reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, where Richards sees Stowe's well-known use of blackface tropes accompanied by instances of whiteface imitation such as Tom's portrait of a blackface George Washington: "Ironically, whereas whites imitated blacks by wearing blackface, Tom is imitating white culture by blackening George Washington" (p. 121). This kind of black resistance to the literal and figurative violence of minstrelsy, in turn, becomes central to the book's final chapter, which takes up a series of nineteenth-century novels by black Americans that counter the exaggerations of blackface caricature "with their own avenging distortions," including Martin Delany's *Blake*, which answers *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by relocating black nationalism from Liberia to the United States (p. 164).

Richards's method sometimes relies on an expansive sense of "performance." He writes, for example, that "by writing the black body [Washington] Irving engages in a blackface performance, replete with the desires, fears, disguises, and racial burlesque that crystallize in minstrelsy" (p. 73). To point out the similarities between blackface performance and such modes of writing is powerful and persuasive; to say that this kind of writing is blackface performance (to move from analogy to identity) is to unnecessarily minimize or even erase the significance of embodiment and audience. At other times, Richards attends to the importance of medium more precisely, as when he contends that for Cooper's character Natty Bumppo "[m]etaphoric reface and blackface allow the hunter to turn Native, turn black, and then back again to white, registering the racial privilege of these performance modes, which served as mediums for white personal and national self-discovery" (p. 105). To an important degree, the metaphor is the message.

And the message of *Imitation Nation* is compelling. Writing at the meeting point of historicist study of cross-racial performance and postcolonial theory, Richards finds ways to use the recent intensity and depth of argumentation about the signification of blackface minstrelsy to his advantage. Synthesizing the existing scholarship in clear and engaging prose, Richards takes up the contradictory impulses of blackface, reface, and whiteface. In *Imitation Nation*, the seeming contradictions resolve into paradoxical but forceful statements of cultural logic. In both historical and literary studies, this book deserves a wide and attentive academic audience.

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Slavery and Freedom in Texas: Stories from the Courtroom, 1821–1871, by Jason A. Gillmer, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017, Pp. 266, \$84.95 (hbk), \$27.95 (pbk), ISBN 9780820351339, ISBN 9780820351636

Slavery and Freedom in Texas is a remarkable study of the ways in which issues of color, race, class, and social customs generated contradictions between the law and ideology of slavery and the lived experience. These contradictions occasionally led whites to react not to buttress