George “Nash” Walker: The Unsung Favorite Son of Lawrence, Kansas

Daniel Atkinson

Daniel Atkinson is an independent scholar who earned a PhD in ethnomusicology from the University of Washington and writes primarily about Afro-American vernacular expression. His publications include, “To Know Your People is to Know Yourself,” “Feets Don’t Fail Me Now: Navigating an Unpaved, Rocky Road to, through, and from the Last Slav Plantation.” The Power of Narrative: Tradition Bearers Share Inconvenient Truths, and “Give Me Your Freedom: I’ll Give You Death: Placelessness for Afro-Americans in the American Narrative,” among other articles. He has also pointed out chamber-jazz recordings that are related to his dissertation work at Angelo State University in San Antonio. However, this is the first time any visual research, photography and recordings are currently on display at the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC. He is currently working on the biography of George W. Walker (1872-1911).

We want our folks, the Negroes to like us. Over and above the money and the prestige is a love for the race. We feel that in a degree we represent the race, and every hair’s breath [sic] of achievement we make is to its credit. For first last and all the time we are Negroes. We know it, the race knows it, the public knows it and we want them to keep knowing it.

This was the last public statement of Afro-American sovereignty from George William “Nash” Walker, two years before his death in 1911. The power behind that proclamation and his personal narrative came from the remarkable people who raised him, as well as the unique place and circumstances in which he was born. Though he only lived thirty-eight years, Walker became one of the first Afro-American superstars to successfully defy the Jim Crow prescription of institutionalized inequity. This was accomplished, in part, because of his choice to wear the [minstrel] mask, as poetically described by his friend and collaborator Paul Lawrence Dunbar (1872-1906).2

Fashioned from a limited palate of options, this choice was designed to draw in crowds and utilize the liminality of the dramatic stage to subversively exploit the contextual difference between the satire of his brand of comedy and the mockery of the minstrel tradition, which was one of the first expressions of popular culture in the United States. Under the cloak of entertainment, Walker’s philosophy provided space to erode White exceptionalism that was (and is) a feedback loop of ignorance informed by the arrogance of unearned privilege. When people paid to see minstrel-style “cooning,” they surely got their money’s worth and much more. The “more” was Walker’s understandably problematic, yet unprecedented insistence that audiences receive a meticulously curated form of entertainment that was full of universal examples of the human condition told from a uniquely Afro-American perspective. What he and his colleagues hoped to reveal underneath the “mask” was the potential of the first and subsequent generations of Afro-Americans who were born after emancipation, free of the caveat and trappings of White exceptionalism. Since then, the minstrel show has fallen into disfavor and become a target for derision. In an environment where quick and easy answers to complex institutional problems abound, nearly free of context, Walker’s legacy has been lost in the proverbial shuffle.

George William Walker was born in Lawrence during the aftermath of the Civil War in what was still known as “Bleeding Kansas,” the launching point of John Brown’s raid on Harpers Ferry, Virginia in fall 1859 and site of Quantrill’s Raid in summer 1863. Though Lawrence was Walker’s place of birth, his narrative began several years prior when his ancestors were held in bondage in Alabama, Kentucky, and Missouri. When incorporated into what is already known about him, his ancestral history gives greater contextual insight into his generation’s burden of holding to their values, while creating something new and unprecedented when such things were unthinkable to most Americans. Since 1854, abolitionists had propagated the narrative that Lawrence was one of very few places in the region that was a safe haven for Afro-Americans. According to Rev. Richard Cordley, “the slaves escaping from the Missouri border made their way to Lawrence as if by instinct. They had heard of Lawrence in her early struggles. They knew how their masters hated her, consequently they loved her. They all felt it would be safe if they could only get to Lawrence.”3 While Cordley’s statement is true and somewhat naive, this idea of Lawrence fails to recognize the ongoing and complex experiment of social equity through which Lawrence and the United States continue to struggle at the expense of the collective potential of the republic. The national discomfort with that complexity has resulted in the selective inclusion of enslaved Africans and their emancipated descendants into a limited and mutated national narrative. This partial inclusion or outright erasure reflects the shifting racial landscape of the United States.

What Cordley and others failed to consider is that the newly minted Afro-Americans knew that most White people, who worked vehemently to enslave and destroy, did not endorse the idea of full citizenship for Blacks. As a whole, the State of Kansas revealed itself to be more anti-Black than antiabolitionist to Black newcomers and Lawrence was its saving grace. Lawrence was not free of problems associated with racism and other manifestations of White supremacy from well-meaning people. To that end, an Afro-American perspective, Lawrence was the lesser evil in a largely demonic world, and any Afro-American who thought differently was little more than a nail to be hammered by someone who was asserting his or her “inalienable right” to do so. This was particularly true when Lawrence began to fill with refugees after the demise of Reconstruction in neighboring southern-leaning states and municipalities. Jobs in Lawrence were scarce as access to liberty, so it wasn’t long before the vender of Kansas as a promised land was eroded to expose the underpinnings of the reality of two Americas: one under the Bill of Rights and the other subject to the Thirteenth, and eventually the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, to the Constitution.4 This atmosphere allowed some denizens of Lawrence to embrace the idea of being on the right side of history, while regularly acting on the wrong side of the moment. Nevertheless, with the help of some charismatic elders, young George Walker grew to understand how to effectively navigate the hypocrisy of the social order, so that he could use the institutionalized and underestimation of Blackness in Jim Crow America as a source of power to subvert it and eventually dismantle its demerit.

George Walker’s maternal grandmother, Sarah Hayden (1834-1907), was born in Boone County, Kentucky, and was emancipated in Harrisonville, Cass County, Missouri. It is unknown how she took the name Hayden. Records indicate that she was probably owned by former Boone County residents John Brady or Isham Majors, whose farms were near the Hayden farm in Harrisonville, Missouri. While in bondage, Sarah gave birth to two children, Sanford (1856-1906) and George’s mother, Alice (1857-1933), likely fathered by a man named Spencer.5 Shortly after the family’s liberation by the 7th Kansas Cavalry in winter 1862-63, Sarah gave birth to her third child, William Hayden (1862-1913), at Blue Mound, south of Lawrence in Wakarusa Township. At the time, she was listed in census records as married, living in a household with a family with the surname of Lewis, along

5. The surviving slave schedules, probate records and research provided by Tom Rafiner in Kansas Historical Society, “Perspectives on the History of Cass County, Mo., 1822-1890” (Mankato, MN: Halvorson, 2006), indicate that an enslaved named Spencer Hayden lived on a farm that was owned by Jerrold Hayden (b. 1812) in Cass County, MO that was very close to the farm where Sarah Hayden worked. Further, the 1875 City of Lawrence Directory (Lawrence Public Library) lists Sara Hayden as the widow of Spencer.

1. Chicago Inter Ocean, January 17, 1899, 28.
with Sanford and Alice, and then listed as a widow about nine months later when the family moved north to Lawrence on New Year’s Day in 1866. Soon after their arrival, both Sarah and Alice took in laundry and worked as domestics (Fig. 1).

George Walker’s father, Jerry Nash Walker, was born on May 25, 1847, in Talladega, Alabama, where his parents had been owned by local physician Dr. James Simmons and were granted their freedom sometime before the Emancipation Proclamation. Walker left Talladega at the age of fourteen and served as a body servant for several commanding officers on both sides of the Civil War. After the war, he drifted to Texas and then to Lawrence, Kansas, in July 1867 where, early on, he acted as a guide for buffalo hunters. Soon after, he became a highly respected porter at the Eldridge House on Massachusetts Street, a position that afforded him high visibility among all socio-economic classes both Black and White. Eventually, he became a very good friend of Charles and Mary Langston, grandparents of Langston Hughes, as well as other prominent Black families in the area. As a testament to his status in the community, a news report cleared his good name from a false accusation: “We are requested to state that Nashville Walker was acquitted yesterday on the charge of creating a disturbance and displaying a pistol in the Methodist (Colored) church, Monday evening, it being proven that he was only acting as mediator, and had no pistol in his possession.”

Details remain unclear as to how Jerry Walker and Alice Hayden met, and there is no indication that they were ever a couple who raised their only child jointly. Regardless, their son George William Walker was born on July 15, 1872, in Lawrence. During George’s childhood, he lived with his grandmother and uncles on Mississippi Street between 4th and 5th in northwest Lawrence and at 1100 Pennsylvania Street in 1888 when he was sixteen. Alice spent much of George’s childhood working as a domestic in Colorado.

According to Walker:
How well I remember, when but a mere boy, my dear, good mother left home and went west to find employment from which she could make money and send home to my grandmother to help her support me. How well I remember grandmother’s delight when messages accompanied, with money, would come from my dear mother. Then when mother would return home to joys and delights there were in our humble little home, when I used to sit and listen to the wholesome conversation between my mother and grandmother, and how they used to teach me to tell the truth, and be honest and make a good man, and be of usefulness in the world."

8. Rocky Mountain News (Denver), September 25, 1916, 25. Walker first served in the 10th Regt. Alabama Infantry as an officer’s servant. He also claimed to have served with the Maryland 9th Regt. for three months in 1863, before his mother secured his release “for urgent reasons” probably due to the death of his father. After persuading his father to allow him to rejoin, Walker joined the Massachusetts 17th Regt. Cavalry for nine months under Col. Creverly and opened a dry goods store. He was transferred to the 2nd New York Cavalry and served until the end of the war as body servant to Col. Morgan H. Crandall.

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10. Quoted in Daily Gazette (Lawrence), August 20, 1916, 2.


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collective underestimation of his potential for creating a money-making and, therefore, legitimate occupation on the like. It was reported that he partnered with Cornelius Carter who would shine one shoe while Walker would shine the other. Between them they carried a bottle for moistening their rags with a bold label that read, “Nigger spit rags; we use water.”

While it appears that young Nash Walker took little to no interest in school, as an adult, he fondly recalled Chapel School, located at the corner of 9th and Kentucky Street, a nine-block walk from his home on Massachusetts Street. All the same, it stands to reason that the education Nash gained on Massachusetts Street through his own experiences and by observing his father enabled him a bit of knowledge. He was a “ragged street urchin,” as well as “one of the most worthless gamins or natural boot-blacks to step aside while they take in his nickels, but we would suppose that even the most ignorant would have pride enough to choose ma’s work and permit the little boys to have their privileges.”

Afro-Americans and that their lack of liberty in the United States was simply an opportunity disguised in work clothes. He was expected to age in Carrollton Langston (Hughes Clark) (1823–1938), mother of Langston Hughes. According to Hughes, “My uncle Nat [Turner Langston] (before he died) had taught [Nash] music, long before I was born.” Further, it was said that he “used to lead around music stores when he ought to have been at work.”

As early as 1881, several music stores on Massachusetts Street sold minstrel songs, sometimes on sale for as low as five cents, the cost of a bootblack’s stick.

Young Nash also “sung in the pool halls for a living,” and in Black-owned businesses, operated by Jerry Walker’s Eldridge House colleague Mark Freeman, or Daniel and Curtis Stone’s saloon on north Vermont Street.

When William Allen White worked at the Lawrence Journal office in 1887, he recalled how “Nash was the singidmaniest [sic] colored boy in Lawrence. . . . Nash used to sing that ‘buck dance’ or sang ‘Michael Levan,’ he always received a ‘nick,’ and when he gave for us an entertainment a shower of ‘nicks.’”

During this time, young Nash entertained KU students and other local newsboys: “Many a time he has ‘shined em up’ for the editor of this [Jeffersonian Gazette] paper, and he always earned his ‘nick,’ and when he gave for us an entertainment a ‘buck dance’ or sang ‘Michael Levan,’ he always received a shower of ‘nicks.’”

Walker’s entertaining of students led to increased visibility in Lawrence and to elite Whites at the Eldridge afforded him unprecedented visibility in Lawrence and access to some liberties that were otherwise denied to most Black children. As a result, young Nash took little to no interest in attending school. Instead, he spent most of his days on the streets of Lawrence hustling for money, getting into mischief, and sowing the seeds of his future as one of the premier performers on Broadway. The only surviving likeness of Nash Walker as a child comes from the recollection of fellow Lawrencean Margaret Rohe (Fig. 3). Her older sister Alice recalled seeing him in New York City:

executing fancy dance steps, just around the corner, and the denouement of my tardy return home, so fascinating were the early accomplishments of the embryo half of Williams and Walker, is still painful to memory. . . . ’The last time I saw him,’ I reflected, ’he was shining father’s shoes for the sum of a nickel back in Lawrence.’”

As an adult, he and others recalled this time as essential to his success in learning how to use entertainment as a means to circumvent the low expectations prescribed for him in the United States, in learning how to use humor and the thought of a printer killing us, who was a drunken printer with a long-bladed knife came in. The New York World reported that he partnered with Cornelius Carter who would shine one shoe while Walker would shine the other. Between them they carried a bottle for moistening their rags with a bold label that read, “Nigger spit rags; we use water.”

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As Nash Walker approached adolescence, he and his friends George Hart and Cornelius Carter spent a lot of time exploring all sides of life as typical transient boys in Lawrence. A common theme of lament of his adulthood was his run-ins with Officer John “Brock” Brocklesby, known for his brutal tactics, especially when confronting Black suspects, as well as with Officer Monroe, whom Walker gave “many a hot chase down the alleys” just off Winthrop [7th] Street. Apparently, young Nash Walker’s feet rarely failed him. According to his future partner Bert Williams, “Why, way back in Kansas, when the larder got low, Walker would go out in the wheat fields, start a rabbit, and run him till his ankles caught fire, and, while the rabbit was burning, up, grab him.”

Though it all, there were plenty of periodic reminders of the reality of Blackness in the United States, especially when Pete Vinegar, George Robertson, and Ike King were lynched on the Kaw bridge, where many other children liked to swim, on June 9, 1882, just before Nash’s tenth birthday. Though Walker was most likely not present at the lynching, one can be certain that he heard about it as a customary tale of Black access to liberty, equal protection under the law, and due process.

Nonetheless, as a matter of necessity, he publicly expressed his belief in the people around him in Lawrence by recalling: Having been born in the town of Lawrence in the State of bleeding Kansas, it was my good fortune all of my life to be associated with White children who had never been taught to look at me with suspicion, therefore I can truthfully say, that we have no race or color prejudice, against me. And, as a child I played with White children, and was treated merely as a child and treated other children as children usually treated each other. We played and frolicked about the town of Lawrence together and that was all.

Rather quickly, Walker’s innovative spirit took root in Lawrence, to the point of attracting the ire of the town fathers: Our town is infested with boot-blacks, some of whom would make excellent farm hands. We don’t know as there is any method of preventing these overgrown Ethiopians from stepping in and compelling the little gamins or natural boot-blacks to step aside while they take in his nickels, but we would suppose that even the most ignorant would have pride enough to choose ma’s work and permit the little boys to have their privileges.”

Unlike his father, George remained illiterate through much of his early adulthood. As his colleague-composer Will Marion Cook recalled, “At twenty-eight [Walker] could not read a [musical] note and could hardly read his name, yet day and night he talked Negro music to his people, urged and compelled his writers to give something characteristic. Each year he wanted bigger and better things.”

Indeed, George displayed his burgeoning musical talents and entrepreneurial spirit at age five in 1877 when he established the town’s first bootblack stand, a common occupation for poor children, particularly those who had little access to factories or farms. Most young bootblacks made the most of their entertainment by singing, dancing, selling papers and information along with shining shoes. As part of a growing Black presence in Lawrence (numbering 1,621 in that year), he conveniently located himself outside the Eldridge House, where his father worked and, because Jerry Nashville Walker was well liked, most people referred to George as little or young “Nash.” However, the town’s gentility also referred to him as a “ragged street urchin,” as well as “one of the most worthless and pestiferous little ‘Niggers’ that ever lived in Lawrence,” a moniker that many would later rescind as an example of their
there was to it. Having Left Lawrence at a very early age to seek my fame and fortune in the world—I have gained a little fame of which I am not ashamed, but fortune has not yet come my way, it has been my lot not only to meet but I have had to battle against a prejudice called, Race prejudice. This prejudice I have found not to be aignonception of the truth, for all humanity is one and the same. Lawrence was a city of its time and, likewise, displayed its fair share of problems towards black residents, including Walker. Despite having gained fame during adulthood, he also recalled another experience in Lawrence that reminded him of his time in Jim Crow America, when children made complimentary remarks about Darwin and his theory and even threw bananas and peanuts, at him in South Park, after he served as the Grand Marshal in the Elk’s parade on July 4, 1892.

As in other US towns, Lawrence’s newest residents were compelled to establish their own separate places for worship. In spring 1883, what was to become Warren [Ninth] Street Baptist Church was purchased. The church performed its traditional role of providing a much safer place for the expression of ideas, creativity, spirituality, and humanity that one might even dare to express in the outer world. Nash Walker’s maternal relatives were members, and his mother, Alice, regularly sang solos during services. Along with traditional worship, this church hosted Charles Langston’s Inter-State Literary Society in 1889 where political and social topics were discussed. That kind of atmosphere would nurture the lion’s share of Afro-American performers throughout the twentieth century and beyond.

Walker’s growing sense of confidence within Jim Crow’s world would be entered and had left two of his clerks to watch. The store would be entered and had left two of his clerks to watch. The store was entered and had left two of his clerks to watch. The store was entered and had left two of his clerks to watch. The store was entered and had left two of his clerks to watch. The store was entered and had left two of his clerks to watch. The store was entered and had left two of his clerks to watch.

The incident left a stain on his reputation, and the two boys were found guilty of petty larceny in Justice Strengthen’s court. As a result, “They were given six months each in the county jail, and will be given some exercise on the rock pile, and ere their time has expired they will be experienced rock-breakers.” When reflecting upon his youth, Walker wrote, “I must admit that I know of only two good things concerning myself. First: I have never been in state prison. Second: I don’t know why I haven’t.”

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Bowersock Opera House in Lawrence. Every winter, Williams and Walker’s performances filled the hall to capacity with The Policy Players in 1900, The Sons of Ham in 1902, In Dahomey in 1903, Abiyan in 1906, and finally Mandanna Land in 1908.

Having engaged the best Afro-American performers in the United States, Williams and Walker’s ensembles, with casts ranging from fifty to over seventy-five members, performed across New York, Boston, and Chicago, as well as London. Between theatrical seasons, Walker returned to Lawrence in the summertime to visit family and friends and to recuperate from his hectic schedule. His love of Lawrence was so profound that he aspired to return permanently when his days in the theatre were over. In one of his love letters to Lawrence, he remarked:

But why, why is there always a fly in the ointment? Why must a thing be almost what you would have it? Is Tantalus never to be blessed with a flood? Don’t you guess what I mean? I am talking about Lawrence’s theatre. I am vexed because, when I talk to my professional friends, I must use much care in boosting my hometown. When I give tongue to my pride in Lawrence, I am usually reminded of its playhouse, and I do not like to feel that my feathers must fall peacock-like. Sarcasm about Lawrence makes me not, temporarily, an ‘undesirable citizen.’ If they only had a theatre at my home, Gee, but ‘twould be a joy to me to come. And bring our troupe to make a show, And tell them, ‘Yes, my home, you know.’ If they only had a theatre at my home. If they only had a theatre at my home. For one, I’ll help to boost a Bowersock boom. More—if it help, I’ll refuse To come and once more shine his shoes If he’ll only build a theatre at my home.

In July 1902, the same as the infamous ‘Dwarf incident,’ Walker brought two lots in the Pinkney neighborhood and eventually built a beautiful house for his mother and grandmother at 401 Indiana Street that still stands. He hoped this home could function as a headquarters for a theatrical empire that he planned to erect through his fraternal organization called The Frogs. In retirement, Walker wanted to help Lawrence fully recognize its problem with Afro-Americans, especially with regard to personal liberty in the town: “Not many people really hate us . . . . It is a matter of money, mostly—an economic question. Downs here at Winterset, Negroes are not served at all. That isn’t because Mr. Windemann hates black people, but because it would hurt his business to serve both races. It’s an economic question with him. So it is almost everywhere—a question of business.”

Alas, Nash Walker took ill in late 1908 and was forced to retire in March 1909. After his voice went hoarse, he lost his trademark coordination, began to forget his lines, and started acting out of character backstage and in hotel lobbies, first in Dayton, Ohio, and then in Louisville, Kentucky. His illness was most likely due to late stage syphilis, an incurable disease at the time that ended the careers of many of his contemporaries, such as Will Acocoo (1874-1904), Bob Cole (1868-1911), and Walker’s wife, Ada Oronon Walker (1880-1914).

During the early days of his illness, when the prospect of recovery was still on everyone’s mind, he stayed with his mother in Lawrence and took long walks in the country (to what is now S. J. Shaw Community Health Park), slept, levelled, and read his mail. In order to keep his name in the public sphere, his wife Ada, dressed in drag and performed his signature hit Ben Ben Buddy to critical acclaim. While Walker was convalescing in Lawrence, Langston Hughes remembered that his mother Carrie had supper at the house on Indiana St., where they ate from plates with gold edging. In the late spring, Walker returned to New York to attend to the business of his theatre company and attempt a comeback. In July, he checked into the St. Joseph Sanitarium in Mount Clemens, Michigan, and returned to Lawrence to rest periodically. In September, he was reported to be almost a physical wreck, being in worse condition than last spring when he was forced to leave the show for a month’s stay there. Again, he returned to Lawrence in December when it became too difficult to travel. In early January of 1910, St. Luke AME church at the corner of 9th and New York in Lawrence hosted a concert of phonograph recordings for the mortgage fund. Langston Hughes’ aunt was a member, and he attended with her. He later claimed that the concert was given by Nash Walker, but not to his knowledge that it was Nash’s mother Alice and private secretary William Moulton. Nash Walker’s last documented public appearance in Lawrence was on January 21, 1910, to attend a performance of S. Dudley’s Smart Set in His Honor, The Barber at the Bowersock Opera House. The Daily World reported:

The choruses in the show were extremely well gotten up, everyone in the show last night did his best to make good, for there in a box in full evening dress sat Nash Walker, the king of them all on the stage, and his mother and secretary. It was to the box where Nash sat, the envy of them all that the whole show played. The rest of the house was incidental. To the members of the Smart Set Company it was evident that Nash was the big part of the audience.

As Walker’s physical and mental health worsened, his mother could not continue to care for him at her home in Lawrence. In June 1910, he was sent to the New York State Hospital in Central Islip, where he eventually succumbed to paresis on January 6, 1911, at 7:00 p.m. Aida was on tour with the Smart Set, and Bert Williams was engaged with the Ziegfeld Follies, so his mother was the only loved one present when he passed. After a large week filled with 30,000 in attendance in New York City that hosted a who’s who of the Afro-American theatrical world, Alice and Green Henri Tapley accompanied Walker’s remains to Chicago for a small ceremony, where his close friend, collaborator, and fellow Frog Jesse A. Ship was overcome at the sight of his emaciated corpse. By the time everyone made it to Lawrence for the burial, there were so many flowers from the New York and Chicago aggregations that a separate train car had to be secured. The spectacle wasn’t lost on young Langston Hughes, who remembered “I got my hand slapped for pointing at the flowers, because it was not polite for a child to point.”

Figure 5. Earliest known photograph of George W. “Nash” Walker from the cover of A Hit Con in Memphis, Coon Gossip. Words by Bob Cole and Music by George W. Walker. Published by F.A. Mills, 1907. Courtesy of Daniel Allmon.
Nash Walker's funeral was held on Sunday, January 15, 1911, at 2 o'clock at the Warren Street Baptist Church, conducted by Rev. Jackson and assisted by Rev. Brown of Lawrence. Rev. Wilson of Topeka, and Rev. Montgomery of Kansas City, Missouri. The chapel was overflowing with people from all over Kansas and Missouri who wanted to pay their respects. As with the previous services in New York and Chicago, a moving poem was read aloud by Walker's hardiest critic and professional acquaintance, Sylvester Russell, theatre critic for the Indianapolis Freeman:

See that his grave's kept green,
As to the west return, and sigh;
We chant farewell, though silently,
And bow with tear-dimmed eye.

Prevent the wind's breath soft and still—
That he in peace may sleep.

See that his grave's kept green;
Rejoice, be glad, and do not weep;
For there, his soul looks from the sky;
The fairest angel ever seen—
Now bids the world goodbye.

The funeral train to Oak Hill Cemetery was one of the longest ever seen in Lawrence at that time, and Walker was laid to rest close to his homeboy Langston Hughes was Poet Laureate. As a result, Walker has been all but forgotten, especially in his hometown. Regardless, with full understanding of the stakes and at his own peril, he worked tirelessly to prove how Afro-Americans might begin to match the personal potential that he and his collaborators demonstrated, as they battled institutionalized inequity subversively with resilience, charisma, and skill—laughing all the way for no other reason than to keep from crying. They showed the way!

75. Hughes, The Big Sea, 21.
78. Quoted in Indianapolis Freeman, September 23, 1909, 2. William was known more for his acting prowess than his social courage, which endured him to the peer pressure of that time, especially when compared to the activism of Walker’s actions. This is, in part, why William was granted “honorary citizenship” and in 1908 became the first and only Black person allowed in the Ziegfeld Follies. Avoiding confrontation, except when privately defending the honor of his former partner among Afro-Americans, made him a model subject for the kind of assimilation, disguised as integration that continues to be the present day, as applied to Jackie Robinson, Sammy Davis Jr., Nat King Cole, Bill Cosby, Wayne Brady, Kevin Hart, and many others.
80. The Play of Bravery, a play written by Jennie W. Morris and directed by Dr. Turner Pritchard, was produced in winter 2017 at the Qwill Theatre in Richmond, Virginia. The play explores the struggles of George Walker and Bert Williams.

Selected Bibliography


